

As Mexican president calls Mussolini a “great leader”

Companies and police violently attack remaining strikes in Matamoros

Andrea Lobo
2 April 2019

Anti-riot police violently broke through the picket lines at three factories on strike in Matamoros, Mexico on Sunday, leaving four workers injured from the beatings, including two who had to be hospitalized.

These are the last three “maquiladora” plants on strike in the city, following a wave of wildcat strikes began on January 12 in defiance of the trade unions. More than 89 factories have agreed to the demands of a 20 percent raise and a bonus of 32,000 pesos (US\$1,670), popularized as the “20/32.”

While the strikes at these plants were branded as “illegal” by local authorities, nearly 600 workers at a Coca-Cola bottling plant in the city—the second largest in Latin America—have been on a wildcat strike for the same demands since January 30.

Before a federal labor board could rule on the legality of the strike, Coca Cola sent a group of thugs on Friday to attack the picket line and even tried to enter the occupied facilities with heavy equipment. Fistfights broke out and several workers were injured, but the assault was repelled with the support of dozens of workers from nearby maquiladoras.

Companies across the city have retaliated against the strikes, with as many as 6,500 firings so far, according to the Mexican Employer Confederation (Coparmex). Seeking to claw back these concessions and make an example out of Matamoros workers to contain the strike wave, employers have threatened 50,000 layoffs. The most militant workers are reportedly being placed on blacklists used by maquiladoras along the border.

The Maquiladora Association Index said this weekend that the strikes have cost companies up to \$600 million and that “severance money is being saved” for firing thousands at a time. The escalation of repressive measures against the remaining strikes marks a new stage in the

response by the ruling class that will involve even greater reprisals and state violence against any resistance.

The three maquiladoras launched their strike on February 5 when workers at dozens of plants affiliated to the Industrial Union of Workers at the Maquiladora and Assembly Plants (SITPME), which has dismissed their demands and sent thugs against strikers, decided at a mass assembly to carry out a “general strike” against the trade union and the companies. The police returned on Monday to clear the entrances again and the companies are planning on resuming operations on Thursday.

After the assault, Tamaulipas governor Francisco Javier García Cabeza de Vaca declared, “The labor conflict that erupted near the beginning of the year and kept some maquiladoras on strike in the Matamoros municipality took a decisive step toward resolution in the early morning of Sunday, when Tamaulipas State Police intervened to recover the companies Avances Científicos de México, Mecalux Racks Metálicos and Flux Metals, at the request of the companies themselves.”

Mecalux is a Barcelona-based metallurgic company; Flux Metals describes itself as a “US fabrication and machining company”; and Avances Científicos is owned by the US-based ThermoFisher Scientific. They employ about 700 workers in Matamoros.

In contrast to workers’ willingness to fight, Susana Prieto, a labor lawyer who has claimed to be the leader of the strike movement, has responded by directing workers to simply place their hopes in a lawsuit to seize the severance pay that companies are denying them. More generally, Prieto, who is tied to the ruling Movement for National Regeneration (Morena) and “independent” unions backed by the US AFL-CIO federation, is working to channel any resistance against city-wide reprisals behind dead ends such as joining these alternative unions

and presenting workers as local candidates. In 2016, she carried out the same trap against thousands of workers in Ciudad Juárez who had rebelled against the existing unions.

On Monday, an auto-parts worker at the Inteva maquiladora spoke to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* to denounce Prieto's betrayal of the remaining strikes. "She lies, she only lies. The workers struck for the 20/32 and now she acts as if the strike was because of the layoffs and the refusal of the employer to pay severance. These men are going to be left with nothing and Susana is exposing them as martyrs in her favor."

He added: "I had noticed that she had an authoritarian behavior in which no one voices opinions. She was taking people to the SME [Mexican Electricians Unions] without asking. Now I see that it's just another CTM [the pro-company Confederation of Mexican Workers]. I'm worried that she has used us in such a miserable way. I want to make a warning of the danger that we face, but I'm fearful about being attacked as a traitor." He commented that his wife was fired from Autoliv: "She was a leader of the strike at Autoliv and formed a rank-and-file committee, and on Wednesday January 16, when the committees met with the union and the local labor board, the lawyer slandered all the committees created by the strikers."

These committees were appealing to workers across Mexico and internationally to support and join their struggle. As the *WSWS* has warned since the first week of the strike, Prieto was sent by the political establishment to sideline the independent rank-and-file committees formed by workers and to subordinate them to the trade union apparatus and create illusions in the Morena administration, whether the CTM or so-called "independent" unions, in order to isolate the strike and facilitate suppression and reprisals.

This occurs in the context of efforts by US imperialism to incentivize the shifting of key industries toward North America as it prepares to intensify its economic and military confrontations against global rivals. Bloomberg reported last week that "America's imports from Mexico surge the most in seven years as Trump's policies shift supply chains," citing the US trade war against China and the new regional trade agreement.

Representing a Mexican bourgeoisie salivating over the prospect of these investments, the administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (known as AMLO) is moving against what Bloomberg called the main obstacle to added Mexican investments: a "more

aggressive labor movement." Prieto herself has recognized that the deployment of the state police has been part of efforts by the federal government to crush the strikes.

On Thursday, the *Financial Times* warned that the Matamoros rebellion risks the attraction of Mexico "as a cheap location for US and Canadian factories." In other words, any new investments are conditional on wage stagnation or new attacks on living standards. Real wages in Mexico have fallen 80 percent in the last 30 years.

The danger for workers was summed up by AMLO on March 21, the birthday of ex-president Benito Juárez, when he stated: "His fame was so great, the glory of President Juárez, that he was admired abroad. Mussolini was named Benito because his father admired Juárez—that is why his name was Benito Mussolini, a leader of world dimensions, a great leader. Let his [Mussolini's] critics do their job. Why should I?"

The Mexican ruling class and its imperialist patrons in the US and Europe are responding to the largest strike in North America in the last three decades by turning sharply toward authoritarian forms of rule. Capitalists are again compelled to politically disarm workers by chaining their struggles behind nationalist and pro-capitalist politics and the trade unions, including through pseudo-left politicians such as Susana Prieto.

This cannot be allowed to happen. Workers in Matamoros want to fight, but for this they need to re-form or consolidate their rank-and-file committees in opposition to all trade unions, to organize a struggle in defense of strikers at Coca-Cola, Mecalux, Flux Metals and Avances Científicos, as well as to fight against the ongoing mass layoffs. All plants that violate their agreements with workers and carry out reprisals must be placed under the democratic control of the workers' committees.

This struggle against transnational corporations with the backing of the Mexican and US states can only be waged internationally. Workers in Matamoros need to join the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank-and-File Committees in the United States in organizing an international fight against mass layoffs and concessions across North America and beyond.



To contact the *WSWS* and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact