

# Matamoros workers run for office: The political questions

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In the aftermath of the Matamoros strike wave, four maquiladora workers have declared their candidacy for the Tamaulipas state elections. The workers are running for office as independent candidates under the “20/32 Movement,” a reference to the strikers’ demand for a 20 percent wage increase and a 32,000 peso (\$1,700) bonus.

The candidates are Coca-Cola worker Juan Luis Gaytán for District 10; Cepillos worker Gloria Iselda Juárez Núñez for District 12; Tyco worker Mayra Lizeth Cepeda Leal for District 9; and Kongsberg worker Everardo Gómez Aguayo for District 11. The elections will take place on Sunday, June 2.

The WSWs warns that the 20/32 election campaign is a political trap. First, the electoral campaign was not demanded by masses of workers as a next “logical” step to the strikes. Rather, it was deliberately introduced by activist Susana Prieto, whom the WSWs has factually and objectively exposed as an operative for local independent unions and their patrons in the AFL-CIO in Washington.

It is not the case that workers had an earnest desire to run candidates for office, or that this was a major demand that was debated through rank-and-file discussions or by delegations of workers going from plant to plant, as was the case with the workers’ wildcat rebellion in January. The election campaign did not originate with the working class, but with Prieto herself.

The election campaign can be traced to April 14, when Prieto issued a call for a meeting at the city’s plaza to register “independent candidates.” On May 1, the city’s May Day celebration took place just a few months after thousands of workers marched to the US-Mexico border and appealed to their American allies for support. It should be added that this is the direction that workers chose to take without Prieto, as this coincided with her departure from the city. But Prieto, in contrast to the workers’ impetus for broadening and generalizing the struggle, now turned the day of international working-

class solidarity into a rally for four candidates running in a local election whose program in no way advances the interests of the working class.

Bernardo, a worker from Inteva, told the WSWs that “the support that the worker candidates are getting is low, I believe ... because of the character of the lawyer Susana Prieto. This thing about the candidates, I don’t feel that it has an objective and that they are only doing what the lawyer wants them to, and probably they are also looking for their own personal benefit. The lawyer is the voice of the 20/32 movement, and all she does is talk and contradict herself.”

Second, the demands of the workers are entirely different from the platform being presented by the “independent” campaign. The 20/32 election platform proposes describing workers as “technical professionals” in order to get them on a higher pay grade, expanding daycare centers, adding publicity for workers to “know their rights,” and incorporating workers into “monitoring and oversight organisms” for corporate misbehavior.

The low attendance at events for the 20/32 election campaign is understandable given that workers know that these proposals will not fundamentally change their jobs or conditions. In some cases, the proposals are reactionary in character because they demand that workers enforce the decisions of pro-management labor courts and implement the “normal” operations of capitalist exploitation on their coworkers.

Moreover, any serious improvement in the conditions of workers is impossible without a frontal assault on the wealth of the ruling elite. In a town like Matamoros, where the city’s economy is set up to extract as much labor out of workers as possible, why should corporations accept an attack on their profits when they can move their plants to any corner of the world and deploy state troops to crush resistance?

The proposals of the 20/32 election campaign contrast

sharply with workers' own demands—democratic control over hiring and firing at the plants, a shorter work week, a reduction in union dues, independent strike committees, unity with American and Canadian workers, and a nationwide general strike. Why have these critical points, which mobilized tens of thousands of workers, been dropped?

Bernardo from Inteva told the WSWs: “It seems that the strikes in Mexico have dwindled down. On January 12, the strikes were gaining strength since it was proven that workers can do something united, but with the lawyer taking the leadership of the movement that she later named 20/32, she took the power away from the working class.”

Third, the elections are taking place in the context of a mood for more strikes and protests. On May 24, hundreds of taxi drivers responded to the seemingly minor incident of 35 taxis being decommissioned by the government with a wholesale blocking of the city's center as well as the international crossing between Mexico and the Brownsville, Texas. This event shows that the working class and lower middle class were deeply affected and inspired by the strike movement and are looking for a way to fight for their jobs and wages.

Since the events in Matamoros, the financial press has proclaimed the end of “labor peace” and threatened that the mass strikes that shook the country might soon be repeated. “As easy as one two three, the labor stability which we have maintained for decades, with hundreds of thousands of successful contract negotiations, is broken. And it won't stop there,” wrote Mexico's main business paper *El Financiero* in February.

The administration of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador is struggling to keep a lid on the country's social powder keg. The national president of Morena, Yeidckol Polevnsky, traveled to Matamoros in mid-May to speak to two striking workers. When they asked her to help stop the blacklisting of fired workers, Polevnsky expressed hostility to the strikes and claimed that they were a ploy to move maquiladoras to the United States. The national politician has since been widely denounced by workers on social media.

However, at the moment when workers should be appealing outward, taking to social media, building their own organizations and fighting for the political independence of the working class, Prieto is advocating working with unions tied to the AFL-CIO. As for Prieto's claims that the election campaign is “independent” from the ruling Movement for National Regeneration (Morena),

it is a fact that just last year Prieto was campaigning for Morena's candidate, Javier González Mocken, in Ciudad Juárez!

To fight for their interests, workers must indeed launch a political struggle. The question, however, is: on what program and with what perspective?

The fight of Matamoros workers is part of a growing wave of working-class struggle and social protests throughout the world, from teachers in the US and throughout the Americas, to the yellow vest protests in France and industrial strike throughout Europe, to mass protests and demonstrations in the Middle East and Africa.

As demonstrated by the Matamoros rebellion, workers cannot advance their independent class interests—and for that matter solve any of the major social issues like poverty and violence confronting Mexican society—within a national, and much less local framework. The development of rank-and-file committees, independent of the trade unions, is the necessary foundation for uniting and integrating every separate struggle.

In every struggle, the question raised is who will run society—the ruling class, which controls the giant multinational corporations and banks, or the working class, the vast majority of society.

The fight against corporate reprisals and for the right to a decent job, pension, healthcare, high-quality education and freedom from imperialist oppression is the fight for the working class to take political power in its own hands through the establishment of a government of the workers, by the workers and for the workers.

This requires a revolutionary movement to overthrow the capitalist state and reorganize the global economy on a socialist basis. For this, workers need a party of their own, armed with a revolutionary Marxist program—that is, a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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