

Death of two workers sparks wildcat strike by 3,200 workers at auto parts plant in Matamoros, Mexico

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Thirty-two hundred auto parts workers in Matamoros, Mexico, employed by Tridonex Cardone, carried out a wildcat strike on Friday morning in response to the deaths of two co-workers, suspected of being caused by COVID-19. The strikers demanded more information and the closing of the facilities until conditions are safe.

As soon as news broke that Luciano Romero Contreras, a 48-year-old janitor at Plant 52, had passed away the previous day, workers there downed their tools and began discussions at the facility and on social media. Amid deep sadness and indignation, with workers taking to social media to describe Romero as “a beautiful person,” a “great friend” and a “comrade,” suspicions grew that he might have died from COVID-19.

Some who knew him confirmed the death and explained that he had preexisting kidney issues, but the death seemed too “sudden.” One co-worker noted that Romero had worked during the brief shutdown of the plant in April.

Workers at plant 52 then made calls to those at the other two Tridonex plants, 53 and 60, to join their strike. As of this writing, reports by workers indicate that all three plants stopped entirely for a few hours and that workers at plant 53 had walked out and gone home.

At plant 53, a co-worker named Miguel Ángel also died in recent days. According to social media posts, Ángel was in his thirties. Workers at all three plants denounced numerous suspected cases of COVID-19 infection of workers, some of whom are being forced to work with symptoms and without getting tested.

One former Tridonex worker explained to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* that Miguel Ángel, who was nicknamed Troll, “was my co-worker for more than 13 years and he did die from COVID. Many people in that area have gotten sick of COVID. On Monday, many got

tested, but, as of today, Friday, most have not received any results.

“[Miguel Ángel] spent more than two weeks with symptoms and would only get a pill and get sent back to work. What is bad is that many of the workers dealt with him without knowing. This morning, they struck because only the bosses were sent home to rest and they were forgotten about.”

“Yes, the three plants [stopped], because they are seeing how things are,” confirmed Miguel, a parts worker, on social media. “They [management] don’t care about us, even though they claim to be concerned for our families. Those are lies. They only care enough to treat us like animals. They don’t think that we can infect our families, take the virus to other places. Do they really think that checking our temperature once in the morning and the little bit of hand sanitizer [they provide] will protect us?”

Several workers at plant 53 report that management has offered money to those infected to keep quiet. “We are the ones risking our lives, but at the plant we are just a number,” said one worker. Another commented, “The company will never care about your life. They only care about money and a good standing with their boss, but we care about our families.”

Tridonex was one of the many corporations that exploited the vague language used in the March 31 federal order closing nonessential production to continue production throughout the pandemic. On April 1, it issued a notice claiming, “The published agreement does not obligate suspending operations.”

On April 2, however, a wildcat strike compelled the corporation to shut down and pay 100 percent of workers’ wages. But management reopened the plants on April 13, less than two weeks later, offering “volunteer” workers a 20 percent bonus. The federal government gave

unequivocal permission for the sector and company to restart operations on June 1, defining it as “essential.”

Then, on June 15, the company began a gradual return of workers belonging to vulnerable populations, and now workers report that the plants have been operating above full capacity.

A worker wrote during the strike Friday: “I was feeling sick yesterday in relation to my diabetes. I went to the infirmary and she gave me an aspirin. She didn’t even check me and I simply kept feeling equally sick.” Another comment reads: “You force us vulnerable people to work here as if there was nothing going on.”

Tridonex, which belongs to the auto parts multinational Cardone Industries based in Philadelphia, has ruthlessly sought to crush all signs of opposition, working in coordination with the trade unions and local, state and federal authorities. After workers joined a wave of wildcat strikes involving tens of thousands across Matamoros between January and April of last year, Tridonex carried out reprisals, firing over 250 of the most militant workers. Workers were constantly harassed and even physically assaulted by union thugs and the Tamaulipas state police.

In these struggles, workers demanded the right to leave the corrupt trade union associated with the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), and a large share has already switched to the National Independent Union for Industry and Service Workers (SNITIS), which claims to be democratic.

Last week, in an effort to terrorize workers, the Tamaulipas state authorities arrested the lawyer and founder of SNITIS, Susana Prieto Terrazas. Prosecutors charged her with inciting riots, citing a protest led by Tridonex workers outside the local labor court in March. During the strike Friday, many workers advanced the demand for Prieto’s release.

The WSWS has insisted, despite its differences with Prieto, that workers must fight for her release in opposition to the ruling class’s attacks on democratic rights, which are ultimately aimed against the working class itself.

However, workers must draw urgent conclusions about the role played by those claiming to be their friends and representatives. Far from organizing a struggle across plants in Matamoros and across maquiladoras in the border region, the SNITIS has insisted that workers place their hopes in the capitalist government of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, which has unconditionally defended the profit interests of the corporations.

In the days prior to the reopening on June 1, Prieto insisted that the reopening “is the law.” She wrote on March 28: “Tridonex has become essential. It returns on June 1!”

When a worker wrote to her, “I don’t think Tridonex is essential,” Prieto washed her hands of the matter, declaring, “It is not. It was declared as such on May 15. Complain to the president.” As recently as Thursday, SNITIS released a statement directed to Tridonex workers indicating that nothing more can be done than “pressuring the Labor Ministry to do its job.”

At the same time, Prieto and her supporters have based their struggle for her liberation on appeals to López Obrador and the Labor Ministry, appeals that have fallen on deaf ears.

With cases growing unabated across Mexico, which saw a record 5,662 new cases on Thursday, President López Obrador has called on the population this week to “abandon their fears and go out” to “enjoy the sky, the sun and fresh air.”

Such statements demonstrate that his administration has abandoned all efforts to contain the pandemic, while the entire trade union bureaucracy—from the openly right-wing CTM and the “independent” trade unions—are working to cover up this basic reality.

On the other hand, over the last year workers at Tridonex and across Matamoros have demonstrated enormous bravery and initiative in the struggle to defend their social and democratic rights. This included the formation of incipient rank-and-file committees to organize the strikes in 2019, as well as appeals to US and Canadian workers for an international struggle against the transnational corporations.

Today, workers must reestablish and consolidate such committees—independently of all the pro-capitalist trade unions and politicians—and expand their efforts to unite their struggles across borders.



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