

Strikes in Matamoros, Mexico spread in face of threats by union, police and National Guard

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On Monday, about 400 workers at nine maquiladora factories in Matamoros, Mexico, a major industrial city on the border with Brownsville, Texas, joined a strike to demand a 15 percent wage increase and a bonus of 10,157 pesos (\$514).

The strikers gathered outside of most of the plants before daybreak and called on their co-workers to join them. Some chanted, “Join us! Join us!” At the furniture maker Kwalu and the car seat maker GDI International, the strikers decided to down their tools inside the plants.

Except for Batory, a sugar-processing plant where all workers struck in opposition to a 6 percent wage increase offer, the strikers at the rest of the plants reportedly represent a small percentage of the workforce.

Many others arrived at the plants ready to strike only to find lines of anti-riot police, union goons and even National Guard troops at the entrances of the industrial parks. Management and union officials were waiting outside to threaten workers that they would be fired if they didn’t report to their stations. This was combined with offers to pay the bonus and wage increases of between 6 and 10 percent.

The participation of federal forces in the repression is significant, as the government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) continues to shift toward open repression and authoritarianism. In recent months, the National Guard, which was created by the AMLO administration itself, has been deployed against earlier protests of Matamoros maquiladora workers, demonstrations by health care workers demanding protective equipment during the pandemic, farmers in Chihuahua (where one woman was shot dead by the

soldiers) and Michoacán educators.

Under the banner of the “10/15 movement,” the strike was organized by the Independent Union for Industry and Service Workers (SNITIS) of labor lawyer Susana Prieto. It was launched without any mass assembly or democratic discussion about what workers need after decades of attacks against their real wages and amid a homicidal response by the ruling class to the deadly COVID-19 pandemic.

From her hometown of Ciudad Juárez, Prieto simply called on workers to strike and hope for the best; that is, for the brutal corporations and the gangster-ridden Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) unions that control the contracts at the plants to agree to their “10/15” demand.

Such an approach confirms the warnings of the *World Socialist Web Site*, which has consistently argued that the so-called “independent” trade unions like the SNITIS are working to contain the growing unrest among workers within channels acceptable to the corporations.

Above all, they seek to isolate their fight from the broader international resurgence of the class struggle and prevent it from acquiring an anti-capitalist and socialist direction.

This has increasingly been understood by workers. The strike organized by SNITIS has mobilized a small fraction of the 70,000 workers that joined the historic strike wave across Matamoros in 2019, when workers formed independent strike committees, carried out mass assemblies in rebellion against the CTM unions and appealed to workers in the United States to join their struggle. The intervention of Prieto and the “independent” unions sought to keep their struggle

chained to the CTM unions and bolster illusions in AMLO.

Yet again, the SNITIS has channeled the growing opposition behind the corrupt CTM as the brave strikers face threats of mass reprisals and police-state repression.

Meanwhile, Juan Villafuerte, whose CTM-affiliated trade union controls a majority of the contracts in Matamoros, called on strikers to desist on Monday, claiming that any picket lines are an “aggression” and “deserve an intervention by the authorities to be removed from those places.”

In fact, last Wednesday, metalworkers at the Concurrent maquiladora in Matamoros carried out their own wildcat strike, attempting to take the control of the struggle out of the hands of the SNITIS and CTM unions.

A striker at Robertshaw, an Illinois-based company that produces auto parts, thermostats and electronics, explained to the website *Rosy Conexión JM*, “I’ve worked here for 13 years and they have increased my salary three or four pesos, here or there, but then I have to give that to the union. I’m fighting because I don’t like injustices. I’ve seen many being humiliated and I tell them not to allow it. Don’t put your head down. One must fight. Since the managers came out to intimidate us, many remain inside.”

At the Michigan-based Fisher Dynamics auto parts plant, where strikers in 2019 sent a video to US and Canadian workers through the WSWS in support of their struggle against plant closings by General Motors, workers did not join the current strike. A worker recently fired by Fisher Dynamics after leading the strike in 2019 and making powerful appeals to workers internationally, said to the *World Socialist Web Site*: “They developed an independent union inside of the plant and it agreed to an 11 percent wage increase and a 3,500 [pesos] bonus in vouchers or cash.”

She added that the new union has not fought against her dismissal and explained: “I was a key part of the strike during the previous year and they [management] decided not to take chances this year. And I was invited to join their union and I did not accept. Workers who led the movement last year had created it, but they sold out to the company in order to get a [daily] wage of 410 [pesos or \$20] only for themselves. Besides, the lawyers that supposedly would defend us through the

union worked for the Fisher corporation.”

The rapid transformation of this new “independent” union into an arm of management is an important experience that exposes the claims of the pseudo-left that trade unions can be “recovered” or “reformed” to defend the interests of the working class.

Asked about the role of the new union during the pandemic, the worker responded, “No, regarding the pandemic, they have done nothing besides following the safety recommendations. It’s really dire to lose your job now, so many have submitted and stayed.”

Similarly, the SNITIS has abandoned any pretense of protecting workers from the pandemic and taken a leading role in calling on workers to comply with the homicidal return-to-work orders of the AMLO administration. It has also refused to organize any fight against thousands of layoffs carried out as reprisals for strikes during 2019 and 2020.

At the gates of the factories owned by the Michigan-based Inteva and the Swedish-American Autoliv, both major transnational corporations that supply the main global automakers, the state authorities deployed five trucks packed with anti-riot police to threaten any workers thinking of joining the strike. So far, workers there have not struck.

At Tridonex Cardone, another major US-based auto parts supplier that has seen frequent strikes in the last two years, workers have not struck. They reported a deployment of police vehicles outside of the plant, while the company had offered a 10 percent increase and bonus of 12,000 pesos (which became 9,500 pesos after taxes).

Facing the growing danger of repression and dictatorship, workers in Matamoros need new forms of working class organization, rank-and-file factory and workplace committees, independent of every faction of the trade union bureaucracy and the political establishment. These bodies must coordinate their struggle with workers internationally in order to place safety, living wages and working conditions above capitalist profits.



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