

“Independent” union betrays strike in Matamoros, México as it joins ruling party

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After initiating a strike on Monday to demand a bonus of 10,157 pesos (\$514) and a 15 percent wage increase, hundreds of maquiladora factory workers in Matamoros, México, on the border with Brownsville, Texas, have been fired or subjected to other reprisals once their movement fizzled out.

Based on local news and workers’ social media posts, strikes broke out at eleven plants. The strikers constituted small minorities of the workforce in all but one plant, Batory. While some companies agreed to pay the bonus and wage increases from 6 to 12 percent, none achieved the 15 percent.

On Monday and Tuesday, workers were harassed by Tamaulipas state police with antiriot gear, as well as Navy troops with rifles and National Guard patrols. Meanwhile, managers and trade union officials stood outside plants threatening workers with firings.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, as strikers returned to work, hundreds were denied entrance. The strikers at the auto-parts factories Trico Componentes, Dura Automotive Systems, Robertshaw and Novalink (also makes electronics and clothes) have reported being fired.

“Here at Dura, the guards won’t let us in. They have a list of names of each of us who demanded our rights,” wrote one worker on social media.

At the furniture factory Kwalu, about 70 workers were summarily fired after they briefly downed their tools to approach managers and inquire about the 10/15 demand. One worker explained to *MV Noticias*: “Everyone came over approached [the managers] because they were curious as well. The union [said] it would deal with the company to pay us our bonus and raise. The union then left us alone. Today we arrived to work, and they won’t let us in and say we were fired.”

At Konsberg Automotive, management agreed to the bonus, but has reportedly refused to pay it to the 34 strikers.

The strike was called by the Independent Union for Industry and Service Workers (SNITIS) and its founder, labor lawyer Susana Prieto, as an attempt to contain growing unrest among workers, who have been forced to work throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, while facing sweatshop conditions and low wages.

Without any democratic discussion on their demands, the SNITIS called on workers to strike and simply hope for the

corporations and the corrupt unions of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) that still control the contracts to agree to the 10/15 demand.

Now, the SNITIS not only refuses to organize a struggle in defense of the fired strikers but blames strikers for their fate. In a live feed on Wednesday night, Prieto rebuked the strikers for “being few and taking the risk.”

As the strikes petered out, she encouraged workers to remain outside and even approach the CTM union offices to pressure its rotten leaders to fight. Prieto has since quietly erased the Facebook profile that she used to convoke the strike and make these statements.

On Monday evening, SNITIS and Prieto used the strike as a prop to announce that they would form a coalition with the Morena party of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) to run candidates in the state of Tamaulipas, where Matamoros is located.

“Now we go with Morena,” said Prieto to reporters, adding that “the government has made history.” Simultaneously, this government was deploying troops against a strike that she convoked.

Ever since Prieto gained prominence during the 2019 wildcat strikes in Matamoros, she has told workers that she had no ties to any parties and that workers should remain “apolitical,” while feeding illusions that AMLO is their ally and arguing that workers cannot break immediately from the CTM.

Within days of her arrival at Matamoros in January 2019, the *World Socialist Web Site* reported that Prieto had campaigned for a right-wing Morena candidate a few months earlier, writing, “Prieto has close political ties to López Obrador’s National Regeneration Movement (Morena)... All offers of help and aid by pro-capitalist politicians or parties will prove to be traps for the workers.”

On January 26, Morena Senator Ricardo Monreal called Prieto “on behalf of our friend Andrés Manuel” asking her to shut down the strike. He had clearly not understood when she said that he was on speaker in front of strikers. Realizing her mistake, Prieto immediately began crying and yelling, “I believed in López Obrador... but I was naïve!”

The open coalition with Morena is now a desperate attempt to keep the growing unrest among workers from breaking free

from the trade unions and bourgeois politics and acquiring a socialist and international direction.

In her live feed on Wednesday, she repeatedly attacked the “Socialists,” arguing that they “don’t know the 20/32 [Matamoros] movement” and “speak from outside.” This was a cynical attack directed at the *World Socialist Web Site*, which is the only publication that has consistently exposed Prieto’s reactionary role and provided an actual socialist alternative.

Immediately after her live feed, Prieto held an interview with Izquierda Socialista, the Mexican section of the so-called International Marxist Tendency, to provide her alliance with Morena a “left” cover. Prieto denounced any division between “Trotskyists” and “Stalinists” and argued that the entire “left” has to support Morena “or have no place at all.”

In general agreement, the IMT interviewer denounced “sectarianism” and argued, “Who is the enemy that we must defeat? Sí por México [Morena’s rivals], it’s the right... and we’ll support the process of the working-class candidacies in Matamoros and make an international campaign to support the new measures of the 20/32 workers movement.”

It’s worth mentioning that Prieto also claimed that she is joining Morena to protect herself against threats by the right-wing Tamaulipas government, which imprisoned her for three weeks last year until the Trump administration demanded her release fearing further unrest. “Show me another solution?” Prieto said, denouncing the “Socialists” for not coming to her defense.

In fact, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote that it “unequivocally opposes her arrest and detention and demands her immediate release.” As the only solution, the WSWS explained: “Workers in Mexico and around the world must demand Prieto’s release” by forming “rank-and-file factory and workplace committees” independent of the trade unions and the political establishment.

Currently, the most urgent issue facing workers is the deadly threat of the pandemic, which is being ignored by the SNITIS and Prieto. Wildcat strikes broke out in April across Matamoros demanding the shutdown of nonessential production with full compensation. As soon as AMLO bowed to demands by Trump and Wall Street to reopen production at the maquiladoras, especially those supplying US plants, the SNITIS demanded that workers submit to AMLO’s murderous decree.

Matamoros, whose half a million inhabitants are largely composed of the 90,000 maquiladora workers, their families and those working in associated services, has reported 7,259 coronavirus cases, and 590 deaths, but the toll is believed to be much greater.

Since the year began, active cases have more than doubled to 369. The general IMSS public hospital at Matamoros reported Wednesday that its ICU beds with ventilators have reached full capacity, while the local public ISSTE clinic has reached 100 percent general capacity.

The first Mexican case of the deadlier and more transmissible

B.1.1.7 coronavirus variant was found in Matamoros, where the patient arrived on December 29.

At the same time, the criminal response of the ruling class to the pandemic has only highlighted the enormous power of the working class, in whose hands lies the global supply chains upon which the ruling class depends for profits.

Moreover, the 2019, 2020 and 2021 strikes in Matamoros and their remarkable bravery have inspired millions of workers and youth across Mexico and abroad. In response, while it seeks to make an example of the Matamoros workers through mass firings, the ruling class is promoting the SNITIS and Susana Prieto as the public face of the Matamoros workers’ struggles to channel opposition behind Morena, whose main political role is suppressing the class struggle.

However, the capitalist and reactionary character of Morena and the AMLO administration has been thoroughly exposed. Without any opposition within Morena, the AMLO administration let the coronavirus spread through the population, assisted Trump’s efforts to establish a presidential dictatorship in Washington and deployed troops against strikes, immigrant workers and protests by students and farmers.

In its document “Lessons of the Matamoros workers’ rebellion,” the WSWS wrote that the threat of mass firings must be answered with “the nationalization of the factories under workers control, as part of a socialist reorganization of the economy” and added:

“The working class cannot secure its social rights without fusing the growing resistance of workers with the international revolutionary perspective for which only the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement, fights... In Mexico, the fight for this perspective means an irreconcilable struggle against the AMLO government and all the petty-bourgeois and pseudo-left defenders of this capitalist regime.”



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