

# Auto parts workers occupy plants across northern Mexico after 4,000 jobs cut

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The shutdown of six First Brands *maquiladora* plants in northern Mexico and the firing of over 4,000 workers has thrown auto parts workers across the border region into limbo and triggered a wave of militant plant occupations organized initially independently of the trade union apparatus.

On January 28, workers received a notice from Interim CEO and Chief Restructuring Officer Chuck Moore, announcing an “orderly, accelerated shutdown” of major North American operations, including the wind-down of the Brake Parts Inc., Cardone and AutoLite business units.

First Brands, which filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in September 2025, warned that if it cannot secure additional funding from US bankruptcy courts, job losses could eventually engulf its approximately 13,000 employees worldwide. The collapse, driven by years of opaque off-balance sheet financing and an alleged multibillion-dollar fraud overseen by founder Patrick James, now under federal indictment, is a stark example of how speculative parasitism in the financial system is being paid for through a jobs massacre.

The same evening following the shutdown announcement, workers at several plants began on their own initiative occupying the factories and blocking the removal of machinery in freezing temperatures. At the Tridonex-Cardone plant in the border city of Matamoros, where around 1,400 workers are threatened with losing their jobs, rank-and-file workers organized a permanent guard at the entrance, declaring that “no machines will leave the building.”

In Ciudad Juárez, across from El Paso, some 3,000 workers at plants belonging to BPI Brake Manufacturing, Hopkins Manufacturing, and Centric Parts were laid off and immediately launched protests, plant occupations and demonstrations at state offices. In Mexicali, Baja California, more than 450 Autolite workers occupied their

factory to prevent equipment being spirited away.

Only after these occupations were underway did labor lawyer Susana Prieto Terrazas—founder of the so-called “independent” union SNITIS in Matamoros and a former legislator—move to insert herself into the conflict. SNITIS filed a lawsuit seeking “to preemptively freeze the assets” of the company, framing the issue exclusively as one of securing severance pay and instructing workers to extend their guards in order to protect corporate property until it could be valued and sold.

After a New York bankruptcy judge extended First Brands’ restructuring process on February 9, Prieto told workers they might have to wait up to three months for severance and that “the company might not even have enough to pay everyone,” seeking to prepare them to accept concessions and defeats.

In Matamoros, according to Adrian, an autoworker with friends at Tridonex, Prieto described herself as the plant’s “permanent legal representative” and boasted that she had secured a token 1,800 pesos payment, while the Morena mayor provided food handouts to polish his image amid rumors of corrupt ties with the employer. At another First Brands-owned plant, Trico, operated under the gangster-ridden Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), management insisted that “work is safe” and operations continue, despite belonging to the same First Brands consortium.

It is vital that workers draw the necessary warning from Prieto’s long record. During the 2019 “20/32” wildcat strikes in Matamoros, when 70,000 *maquiladora* workers across dozens of plants walked out for a 100 percent wage increase and to expel the corrupt CTM unions, the *World Socialist Web Site* intervened to fight for the building of rank-and-file committees and expansion of the struggle across the US-Mexico border. Workers marched to the border bridges, calling on US workers to “wake up” and join their fight against the transnationals.

It was precisely when this movement began to link up with an international socialist perspective that Prieto stepped in to corral it back behind appeals to President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, to preserve CTM structures in many plants and to negotiate a far more limited settlement of a 20 percent raise and a 32,000 peso bonus. The companies responded with a wave of victimizations and layoffs, and the current mass terminations are part of the long-term blowback whose consequences continue to reverberate in today's mass layoffs.

Prieto has a documented history of collaboration with the US AFL-CIO bureaucracy and with the CTM "charros" she claims to oppose, using a veneer of "independence" to secure contracts, dues and a political career in Morena's orbit. Rather than building genuine workers' power, she founded SNITIS as an "independent union" to replace CTM contracts while keeping intact the corporatist model and subordinating workers to the government and the courts.

Today, Prieto is repeating the same tactics: praising workers' initiative while insisting the only realistic goal is severance. SNITIS legally called a strike at Tridonex for February 19—legally defined as a plant occupation in Mexico—explicitly to make sure severance is paid in a court-controlled liquidation process, not to save jobs.

When it became clear that neither a buyer nor a state-backed payout was forthcoming, SNITIS agreed to postpone the strike to February 24. At a mass assembly outside Tridonex, Prieto sought to placate workers, explaining the postponement of the strike as necessary to give the fraudster First Brand executive time to find a buyer and continue operations.

There is no question that workers have both the right and the urgent need to occupy plants and prevent asset-stripping. But subordinating the occupations to the bankruptcy courts and limiting their horizon to the sale of machinery for severance—while SNITIS explicitly refuses to call out workers at other plants in coordinated strike action—means channeling their energy into a dead end.

No court-directed auction in the midst of a global jobs massacre will secure workers' living standards, much less improve conditions for autoworkers in Mexico or beyond. Meanwhile, local authorities have aligned themselves with this strategy of passivity. In Matamoros, the Morena-run municipal government has "expressed solidarity" with workers only by delivering food to the Tridonex guards.

The First Brands collapse is an international question.

The company is a global auto parts conglomerate whose portfolio includes Anco and Trico wiper blades, Fram filters, Carter pumps, Hopkins towing brands and Philips-licensed lighting. In addition to the Mexican layoffs, First Brands has filed WARN notices to close two Texas plants in Arlington and Harlingen, eliminating 129 jobs, and it shut manufacturing at a Hopkins Canada facility in Blenheim, Ontario in 2025.

This is part of a far broader wave of sackings. More than 1.1 million jobs were eliminated in the US last year, while new AI-driven technologies are being used as a pretext to destroy entire categories of white- and blue-collar work.

In Mexico, the situation is sharply worsening: January 2026 was the first month in 17 years when registered formal jobs declined and jobs forecasts are worsening. Rosalinda, a former worker at car-battery maker Schumex Schumacher in Matamoros, who was fired last year, told the WWS: "There is a lack of work, and the union SNITIS continues to disregard the individuals who enable them to sustain their livelihoods. There are numerous layoffs, and when hiring, they no longer offer permanent positions; some are dismissed within a month."

The WWS calls on First Brands workers to form rank-and-file committees independent of the union bureaucracies, linked across borders through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). These committees must demand that all layoffs be rescinded and that shuttered plants be placed under workers' democratic control, integrated into a rationally planned, workers-run auto industry organized to meet human needs, not the private profit of speculators and corporate executives.

Leading IWA-RFC member Will Lehman is running for United Auto Workers president on a socialist and internationalist platform to abolish the union bureaucracy in the United States, building a genuinely independent movement of workers to defend jobs and defeat the threat of fascism, dictatorship and world war. "What we need is an international strategy based on the unified struggle of American, Canadian and Mexican workers against transnational corporations," Lehman stated in his campaign launch.



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