

Workers at occupied plant in Matamoros, Mexico denounce being hung out to dry by “independent” union

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Six weeks have passed since First Brands abruptly shut six maquiladora plants in northern Mexico and threw more than 5,000 workers in Matamoros, Ciudad Juárez and Mexicali into the street without salaries or severance pay.

About 1,200 at the Tridonex-Cardone plant in Matamoros continue to occupy the plant, but are being left to starve on the picket line, underscoring the urgent need for an international, rank-and-file fight by autoworkers across North America.

From the beginning, the *World Socialist Web Site* has stressed that this fight can be won only through an international strategy uniting First Brands workers with other autoworkers across North America and beyond, against a transnational jobs massacre. With major North American brake and auto parts suppliers being shut down overnight, this struggle has vast, international implications for workers on both sides of the US-Mexico border.

On January 28, First Brands announced an “orderly, accelerated shutdown” of major North American operations, including Brake Parts Inc., Cardone and AutoLite, after filing for Chapter 11 in September 2025 and warning that up to 13,000 jobs worldwide could be destroyed.

That same night, workers in Matamoros, Ciudad Juárez and Mexicali independently launched plant occupations to stop machinery from being removed, declaring in Matamoros that “no machines will leave the building.”

Today, those initial occupations have been wound down in Ciudad Juárez and Mexicali, thanks above all to the intervention of the “independent” union bureaucracy and local authorities, while Tridonex workers in Matamoros remain alone guarding the plant with dwindling resources.

After repeatedly postponing action, on March 6, the “independent union” SNITIS led by labor lawyer Susana Prieto Terrazas formally announced the “beginning of a strike” at the already occupied plant in Tridonex, where about 1,200 workers remain formally employed. Two hundred supervising staff signed conciliation agreements.

At a meeting last Thursday on the picket line, Prieto reportedly assured them that “the facility, with everything inside, belongs to them,” but workers have not been given any real control over the plant or its assets. The factory produced brake components for automakers including General Motors and Ford—integral parts of the North American supply chain.

Explaining the procedure, she said that a labor court will have to recognize that workers have a justified cause to suspend work while a parallel process known as an “incident to determine responsibility for the strike” takes place, in which the judge decides whether the company or the workers are responsible for the conflict.

While warning that this could take four to five months, Prieto pledged to ask the judge to provisionally accumulate back wages while the case is resolved and, if the company is found responsible, to order severance and other indemnities. She further promised to request that the judge seize all company assets to guarantee payment.

In other words, the “strike” is no genuine offensive to save jobs or expand the struggle, but a tightly controlled legal mechanism subordinating workers to a months-long court process in Mexico and the United States. This is under conditions where First Brands’ crooked executives, indicted in the US on federal fraud and conspiracy charges, are already stripping assets across borders.

Knowing full well that workers had already spent more than a month without pay on the line, she used her latest trip to Matamoros to callously scold them for not showing up for their assigned shifts to guard the gates, especially at night. Her union, however, has done absolutely nothing to guarantee food, transportation or income for those she is keeping on watch.

On Thursday March 12, less than a week after the official strike began, a Tridonex worker told this reporter:

The strike continues, but there are many coworkers who can no longer keep supporting it. I am one of them. My union is great, but I was no longer able to help because I don’t have money for the bus fares.

Workers have thus been left hung out to dry for over a month after the January 28 shutdown, before a strike was even called, under conditions where they are being asked to maintain 24-hour guard duty with no organized support.

Asked what plan the union had communicated, the worker replied with a sad emoji:

To wait, but I don't believe this can be resolved. The only thing I can say is that we are in God's hands. We all filed individual lawsuits, but there is still no answer. I've been here 13 years and I know coworkers with more than 20 years [in the company].

He added that the union has made no effort to appeal for economic support or broader strike action from other workers in Mexico, the US or internationally.

The present impasse is the outcome of a long process in which Prieto and the so-called independent unions were brought forward precisely to demobilize a movement toward rank-and-file control and international unity.

In 2019, the so-called "20/32" wildcat strikes in Matamoros saw 70,000 maquiladora workers across dozens of plants walk out for a 100 percent wage increase and to expel the corrupt CTM unions. They marched to the US border bridges, appealing directly to American workers. It was precisely when the movement began to link up with an international socialist perspective advanced by the WSWs, that Prieto intervened to corral it behind appeals to President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, preserve CTM structures and negotiate a far more limited 20 percent raise and a 32,000-peso bonus.

Companies responded with mass victimizations. Plants like Avant, Componentes Universales and Edemsa were shut down, with the latter two refusing to pay severance. Now, one of the plants directly controlled by the union created by Prieto has been closed and the union stands exposed as wholly incapable of defending workers' livelihoods.

A critical measure of Prieto's treacherous role is the fact that SNITIS only secured the Tridonex contract through an international labor complaint filed by the AFL-CIO and the US government under the USMCA in 2021, with the Biden administration openly intervening to replace the hated CTM with US-vetted "independent" *charros* (corporatist bureaucrats) as part of a broader strategy to channel Mexican workers behind pro-imperialist, nationalist unions and head off the development of genuine rank-and-file, internationalist organizations of struggle.

How the other occupations were shut down

In Ciudad Juárez, roughly 3,000 First Brands workers lost their jobs. Initial protests and occupations were rapidly smothered with the help of the local government, which organized job fairs for a few hundred workers to transfer them into low-wage positions at other plants, stores and workplaces.

In Mexicali, where 405 workers lost their jobs at First Brands' AutoLite plant, the FASIM "independent union" followed SNITIS's model, filing a lawsuit for "preventive retention" of assets to pay severance. Local media now report that these workers are being blacklisted as "troublemakers" by other employers

simply for having worked at AutoLite and taken part in the struggle.

Even if it is entirely clear that the company is responsible for the shutdown, there is no guarantee that judges—who have historically defended corporate interests—will rule in favor of the workers, or that any assets will remain once the legal process ends.

The international road forward

The perspective required by First Brands workers was outlined in a February 19 statement by Will Lehman, a worker at Mack Trucks and socialist candidate for United Auto Workers president in the United States. Lehman wrote:

I salute the courageous factory occupations spreading across northern Mexico, where workers are taking collective action to stop mass layoffs and defend their livelihoods against US-based corporations...

Workers in the United States, Mexico and Canada must build direct unity from below. That means forming rank-and-file committees in every plant, linking them across borders, sharing information in real time and preparing coordinated action so no workforce stands alone...

If we remain divided, we will be driven into a race to the bottom. If we unite across borders and build our own organizations of struggle, we can defend every job and fight for a future based on human need, not corporate profit.

This is the only way forward.

The occupation of Tridonex can and must be transformed into a conscious center of international resistance by electing a rank-and-file committee independent of SNITIS, directly linked to the struggle of autoworkers in the US and beyond through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.



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