

Mexican, US workers exchange statements of support as Matamoros strike grows

By our reporters
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More sprawling industrial complexes in Matamoros, Mexico are expected to grind to a halt today in the largest strike on the North American continent in recent years.

By Monday, 70,000 workers had already walked off the job, shutting down 45 factories and repudiating the pro-company union which is still demanding workers return to their jobs. This number is expected to grow—a further sign that one of the most exploited sections of the international working class, Mexican “maquiladora” sweatshop workers, are greeting the new year with a powerful show of working class power.

Workers in the Matamoros maquiladora industry, who make only \$9 a day, are demanding massive raises, bonuses, an end to dangerous and backbreaking working conditions, and the elimination of union dues which pad the pockets of the leading union bureaucrats.

The strike involves tens of thousands of workers at auto parts companies that supply the “Big Three” auto companies, General Motors, Ford, and Fiat-Chrysler. Among the GM suppliers on strike are: Polytech Netting, Inteva, Dura, AFX, Autoliv and Parker.

In Oshawa, Canada, over 200 Canadian Inteva parts workers also walked out on strike Tuesday to protest GM’s decision to close the nearby Oshawa GM assembly plant, a move that threatens thousands of job losses.

But the unions have informed no one of this transnational strike. To the contrary, just as the Mexican unions are trying to isolate and strangle the Matamoros strike, the United Auto Workers and Unifor falsely blame Mexican workers for recent job cuts announced by US companies.

By fighting to rid themselves of their union leadership and by electing their own representatives, Mexican workers are showing their North American allies in the US and Canada how to fight back.

Oscar, a striking auto parts worker with 12 years at Trinodex, told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker*

Newsletter he pays 63 pesos a week (\$3.30, or 4 percent of his weekly salary) in union dues but that the union collaborates with the company.

“Here you work from Monday to Friday and Saturday and Sunday if you have to. As time passes the union leaders have gotten worse,” he said. “There isn’t air [in the plant] and the bathrooms are often dirty because they don’t pay the janitors. We won’t even speak of the cafeteria. Yesterday they fired five people just for talking about this.”

Another striker at GM supplier Autoliv, who asked to remain anonymous, spoke to the WSWS from the picket line at his plant.

“All the plants are on strike. The majority of workers are out. The bosses want to threaten us with mass firings and are recording us and taking photos. They want to intimidate us and they are calling the state police on us.”

The worker denounced the union’s phony effort to agree to raise the workers’ demands with the companies: “The only reason they ever cede to our demands is out of fear of an investigation or an audit into corruption.”

The employers have made clear they will not agree to the workers’ demands and the Tamaulipas state government has declared today’s strikes illegal.

“Any document that promotes any labor strike lacks legal validity,” reads a statement released last night by the Tamaulipas Secretary of Labor. The statement patronizes workers: “Workers in the maquiladora industry are invited to keep working in their workplaces in a normal manner,” it says, demanding that strikers “stay correctly informed of their obligations as workers.”

In a statement yesterday, Juan Carlo González, president of the Employers’ Confederation of the Mexican Republic (COMPARMEX) threatened to close all the plants across the entire city:

“At any time, the businesses can leave if their operating costs are greater than what they can sell from their

product, above all when there are opportunities in other regions of the country and when many plants that operate in Matamoros have operations in other regions and with this salary increase that they are demanding, definitely the business can leave to establish themselves in other places.”

Behind this bluster is terror on the part of the ruling class that the strike wave will spread. The strike has been completely blacked out in the Mexican and US national press in a clear effort to censor the struggle from winning broader support. An article in one local paper, *El Cinco*, spelled out the fear of massive strike action:

“To begin, there is no precedent in either Matamoros or Tamaulipas for a strike of this magnitude. The maquiladora industry in this city is practically paralyzed in its totality ... The conflict makes clear one thing: the workers are beginning to rebel against the exploitation that their union leaders have made them victims of, in evident complicity with the bosses.”

The article demanded intervention of the state government: “It must intervene before workers in other cities, like Reynosa and Nuevo Laredo, imitate their Matamoran counterparts.”

But this is exactly what workers want.

Jaime, an autoworker from the Silao GM plant in Guanajuato told the WSWS: “We have to do something similar here in Silao. This union is not worth anything.”

Workers far beyond Mexico are rallying in support of the stand taken by Matamoros’ maquiladora workers and looking for a way to fight wage cuts and job cuts imposed by the companies.

Nick, an auto parts worker in the US state of Michigan communicated a message to Mexican workers through the WSWS:

“Your example is encouraging. You are a recognizably exploited working class within NAFTA, receiving poverty wages of which a portion goes to the union. Here you are standing up to these thugs and these capitalist exploiters,” he said.

“I take heart that you are reaching across these illusory national borders to your working class brothers and sisters north of you and saying ‘an injury to one is an injury to all.’ We must stand together as a united global force. We will not let US-based companies hurt Mexican workers in the name of capitalism. You are our fellow workers, you just happen to live in a different country.”

Mexican workers returned greetings to their US counterparts.

Oscar, the striking Trinodex worker, said: “I appeal to

workers to rise up and don’t hide yourselves anymore. We are more productive than in other countries but they pay us a miserable salary and the union takes from us what little we had left. No more, it’s enough already.”

The anonymous Autoliv worker also appealed to US and Canadian autoworkers:

“If they are thinking about uniting with us we will support them too, just as we have been receiving support, physically and morally, from our entire city. They must fight for what they deserve. They must unite and make themselves a force. Here we are all helping one another. If the bosses try to fire one of us we will come back and fight to defend our coworkers. We are more unified than ever.”

Striking Mexican workers must not lose the initiative by placing their trust in any politician, the union or in those who falsely claim this corrupt organization can be “reformed.”

Workers must continue to elect their own representatives, independent of the unions, to form a citywide strike committee comprised of the most militant and trusted workers. This rank and file committee must democratically inform and mobilize the strength of Matamoros workers and appeal to all maquiladora workers across the US-Mexico border and to their autoworker counterparts in the US and Canada to join their struggle against the corporations and the capitalist system.

On February 9, at 2 p.m. autoworkers will demonstrate at GM world headquarters in Detroit, Michigan to oppose the job cuts and concessions announced by the auto and parts companies. Workers from across the world can follow and support this demonstration on Facebook here.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>