

Mexican union apparatus, government scramble to suppress growing strike across Mexico

By Andrea Lobo
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A second wave of wildcat strikes continues to expand in Matamoros, Mexico, and is beginning to spread across the country. Sparked by the tens of thousands of workers at 45 maquiladora plants who rebelled last month against the pro-corporate trade unions, tens of thousands more are launching their own struggles after workers in Matamoros won a 20 percent wage increase and a \$1,700 bonus.

Inspired by the initial wave, 20 additional maquiladora plants in Matamoros that were not initially on strike began their own wildcat strike last Tuesday and were joined by workers at the Coca-Cola bottling plant, three supermarkets, trash collectors and workers from other sectors.

The wildcat wave is spreading throughout the country.

Last Thursday, 680 workers at a General-Mills plant in the city of Irapuato of the central Mexican state of Guanajuato launched a four-day wildcat strike against two unjustified firings and called for the establishment of a new contract with paid vacations and improved conditions. Negotiations are ongoing.

Hundreds of teachers in the southern state of Michoacán continue to strike and block crucial railways to demand a total of \$311 million in owed bonuses. As unsuccessful negotiations extend with the government, the National Coordinator of Education Workers (CNTE) union has publicly “dissociated” itself from workers that continue the blockades, which threaten critical auto exports to Asia.

Meanwhile, workers at the five national campuses of the Autonomous University of Mexico (UAM) are entering their tenth day of a strike to demand a 20 percent wage increase, while opposition is reportedly growing against the union leadership.

As the strike wave grows in Mexico, the ruling class is warning of a “contagion” and carrying out a brutal

counter-attack in Matamoros. The local maquiladora association, Index, announced last week that companies have fired more than 1,500 workers who participated in the strikes and that they plan to layoff 25,000 more within three years.

Among Matamoros workers, the most common subject on workers’ social media groups—aside from getting rid of the unions—is fighting to defend those fired and to protect against the threats of mass layoffs. At Trico Componentes, which already agreed to the demand of a raise and bonus, workers are discussing new strikes against the non-payment of the bonus.

At the same time, the government of president Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) and the ruling Movement for National Regeneration Party (Morena) have dedicated themselves to supporting the trade union apparatus in order to prevent the strikes and contain the growing wave of struggles.

The actions taken by the AMLO administration leave no room for doubt about its pro-corporate role. On January 25, the day the initial wildcat strikes were set to become “legal,” the federal sub-secretary of Labor and the federal representative in Tamaulipas, openly speaking in the name of the president, requested a 10-day deferral of the strike while threatening workers with “unintended consequences.” On January 27, Morena Senate leader Ricardo Monreal made calls to the local union and its backers to end the strike.

This was complemented by the deployment of the state and federal police and navy and army soldiers to harass striking workers. Moreover, the Associated Press reported on February 1 that the AMLO administration “actively discouraged the Matamoros union from seeking the pay increase.”

The trade union apparatus has in turn responded to the growing upsurge of the class struggle by mobilizing across the country seeking to prevent strikes and to rapidly negotiate sellout deals.

For instance, inspired by the Matamoros strikes, about 6,000 auto-parts workers in the city of Ciudad Victoria, near Matamoros, threatened to strike for several weeks demanding a 30 percent raise. Last weekend, however, the trade union canceled the strike and imposed a mere 16 percent increase.

Last night, *Proceso* reported that the trade union confederation CROC in the nearby city of Monterrey was using pamphlets to lure non-unionized workers at Walmart demanding raises like in Matamoros to become affiliated with the union instead of launching wildcat strikes.

Reforma also reported yesterday that maquiladora employers in Ciudad Juárez, across the border from El Paso, Texas, are expressing growing concerns that the strike wave will spread there.

As a result, the same forces dispatched to Matamoros to quell the rebellion are being sent to Juárez. *Omnia* reported last weekend that publications have appeared on social media aimed at workers in Ciudad Juárez calling for those interested in joining the strike wave to communicate with labor lawyer and Morena activist Susana Prieto and the pseudo-left outfit Political Organization of the People and the Workers (OPT).

Prieto and the OPT have worked together during the last week in Matamoros, visiting each plant and promoting the creation of a new, “independent” trade union. The OPT activist accompanying Prieto, Luis Carlos Haro, has presented himself as a representative of an “independent and democratic” trade union from San Quintín, Baja California, that forms part of the National Union of Workers (UNT).

A warning must be made to workers. These forces seek to provide a new façade to the same trade union bureaucracy to subordinate workers’ independent initiatives back under the dictates of the corrupt union structures, the government, and, ultimately, the ruling class and imperialism.

The UNT leader, Francisco Hernández Juárez, told *El Economista* in an article published November 8 that the position of the 200 unions he leads is that “there are no conditions for a new trade-union organization, but there are conditions for a common trade-union agenda” with the established trade-union confederations CT, CROC, among others, which would entail “respecting the purpose

of ” each union.

A former national deputy of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), Hernández recently claimed the presidency of AMLO “is one of the best things that has happened to the country in recent years,” and backed the candidacy of fellow trade-union leader Napoleón Gómez Urrutia as a Morena Senator. While in the senate, Gómez Urrutia continues to lead the Miners Union, affiliated formally with the main Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), the United Steelworkers (USW) in the US, IndustriALL, Unite Here and others.

The strike wave in Mexico is part of a resurgence of militancy among workers internationally, after decades of suppression of the class struggle by the trade unions. Everywhere, the ruling class is seeking to buttress the anti-worker and nationalist trade union organizations to prevent workers from joining their struggles as part of an international movement against capitalism and for social equality.

Yesterday, 5,600 Denver teachers started their first strike in 25 years, continuing a wave of strikes by tens of thousands of teachers across several US states against decades of austerity and privatization.

Similar to the struggle in Matamoros, Mexico, this strike was triggered by wildcat strikes in West Virginia, Arizona and Oklahoma organized through social media and in rebellion against the trade unions.

The only way forward for workers across Mexico, North America and internationally is to fight to build their own rank-and-file organizations and to link their struggles across sectors and borders to build a political movement independently and against all trade unions and other organizations and parties of the ruling class, for socialism.

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