

Police and military crack down on spontaneous taxi strike in Matamoros, Mexico

By Eric London
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A spontaneous strike involving hundreds of taxi drivers broke out in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, yesterday after the local government decommissioned roughly 35 taxis early Friday morning, claiming they were operating without permits. In response, taxi drivers who fear losing their jobs fanned out across the city center and blocked major streets as well as the international crossing between Mexico and the US city of Brownsville, Texas.

At midday the taxi drivers came to the central square, some with homemade signs reading “Corrupt government, get out,” and were met by a heavy presence of state police armed with assault rifles and wearing helmets. Security forces harassed the drivers and attacked protesters as scuffles broke out when police attempted to bring tow trucks into the city center to tow the parked taxis.

Videos show police firing rubber bullets into a crowd of protesters. When crowds began pushing police back, police backup arrived with sniper rifles pointed at the crowds. A caravan of armored military vehicles descended on the central plaza.

At least one taxi driver was injured and several were arrested. A driver told *El Debate*, “This was a unilateral action on the part of the police.”

“We have the right to keep working,” another taxi driver told TV Noticias Tamaulipas. “We have been working for eight, ten years without violating any laws...this is a peaceful protest. We have already told the authorities, we are not going to hurt anyone.”

The bold decision by taxi drivers to block major thoroughfares and the international border crossing is a sign that the strike wave by *maquiladora* workers that broke out in January has had an impact on broader sections of the working class and middle class, strengthening their resolve and encouraging them to

take action to defend jobs and wages.

Even though many taxi drivers are independent contractors, when the police and military began pushing crowds of taxi drivers yesterday, the drivers began chanting, “don’t mess with the working class.”

At the strike wave’s zenith earlier this year, some 70,000 workers were engaged in strike activity, electing their own independent factory committees in rebellion against both the companies and the pro-corporate unions. Workers demanded major pay increases and the abolition of union dues.

Large demonstrations of taxi drivers and other contract drivers have taken place across the world in recent weeks, including an international protest of Uber and Lyft drivers that took place across every inhabited continent earlier in May.

The local corporate media is attacking the Matamoros taxi drivers for their “selfish” behavior, pointing out that many workers were not able to travel to or from work as a result of the blockades.

But the comments sections of social media news sites show workers responded with overwhelming support for the drivers’ protest, with many commenting that if the government spent money to provide Matamoros with a functioning public transportation system, they would not have to walk to work or school through dangerous neighborhoods.

The local government is scrambling to meet with representatives of the taxi drivers to calm tensions, which remain high throughout the city. Video of the police and military violence against demonstrators was viewed tens of thousands of times within hours of the clashes yesterday afternoon. Comments on social media read, “The state police rob us and beat us and take our money.” Another wrote, “The repression against the people of Matamoros continues! Who will

help us now???"

By early evening, the international port of entry had been reopened but dozens of taxis remained parked outside the city government building, blocking traffic through downtown. Drivers say they will not leave until all the decommissioned cars are returned to their drivers.

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