

Matamoros worker denounces killing of relative and fellow participant in historic strike

By Andrea Lobo
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On Sunday, Laura Santillán, a worker at the *maquiladora* sweatshop of the electronics and auto-part company Robertshaw, was found dead after not reporting to work the previous day. A close family member of Laura and fellow worker reached out to the *World Socialist Web Site* to report the incident and extract crucial conclusions for workers in Matamoros, across Mexico and internationally.

The worker asked to remain anonymous given that the murderer has not been found and that there have been three similar incidents in the last three weeks. “I haven’t slept for several nights, it’s not easy recovering from the shock, impotence and outrage that we feel, the fear of walking alone that we are exposed to out of necessity,” she commented.

Both she and Laura had participated in the historic wildcat strike earlier this year. Between January and February, more than 70,000 *maquiladora* workers that produce auto parts and electronics struck and were later joined by workers at supermarkets, Coca-Cola, trash collectors and others. They demanded a 20 percent raise and a bonus. The last strike in the city at the Coca-Cola bottling plant lasted until April 4.

As soon as workers realized that the corporations, the local government led by the ruling MORENA party, and the trade unions had conspired to eliminate their yearly bonuses, workers met on social media, outside of the plants and in mass assemblies to elect rank-and-file strike committees and organize wildcat strikes in opposition to the unions.

The worker declared:

“The police are simply there to serve the employers during strikes, to disperse and beat workers. Us, workers don’t receive any protection from the

authorities. The truth is that justice in Mexico doesn’t exist. Only those with more money are protected. The local president and state government don’t serve the people...

“When the state government sent the state police it was to protect the employers. At the time, there were robberies, break-ins and abuses of power by them. Now, there is no one in the streets to protect the people.”

Navy soldiers and state police were used repeatedly to intimidate and physically assault workers, who were also subjected to physical attacks by union thugs. Thousands of the most militant workers have been fired during the strikes and since.

These attacks led workers to form security patrols to accompany strikers after mass marches and to appeal even more fervently to workers across Mexico and internationally for support, even marching to the border with Brownsville, Texas, and calling on American workers to “wake up!” Since Sunday, a strike began among 49,000 General Motors workers, many who work with auto parts from Matamoros daily, and it’s imperative that workers reignite those appeals and join their brothers and sisters across the border for a joint struggle against social inequality.

Our correspondent spoke passionately about Laura, “who was a hard-working, responsible, caring and social person, a mother of three girls. She would always work overtime during the week since it was mandatory. She was an area leader for her years and experience at the company. She never had any issues with her fellow workers. We’ve only received signs of affection from them.”

“She had worked at Robertshaw for at least ten

years,” her relative added. “Her life was to leave her home at 5:45 a.m. from Monday to Friday to take the transportation to work, walking by the outskirts along the canal with sewage since most routes pass by there. I would meet her sometimes in the transportation on the way back from work.

“Saturdays were overtime for us and, like everyone else, she needed the extra money for her home. Her husband is a car mechanic. The car shop is in their home. He would take their younger daughter to high school, so [Laura] never wanted to ask him for a ride to work. The fact is that such a situation had never happened in our neighborhood, that is why we trusted walking along those routes.

“But, whenever she would go out with her friends to eat after work, she would call and let people know where they would go. She would never just leave without letting others know.

“That day, she passed by at 5:45 a.m., and my [other relative] who also works at the maquila was outside filling the water tank of her truck to go to work, right in front of Laura’s house. She said good morning and they exchanged a greeting and some words, without knowing that this would be their last moments together. She turned around toward the street where the sewage canal is and never reached her workplace.

“Hours passed and the workday ended. My relatives noticed that she was not arriving, or picking up her cellphone. They noticed her [social media] profile was active and it’s still active at the moment, but they didn’t know anything about her. They called her workplace and were told that she had not arrived. They wanted to file a police report about her disappearance but were told that they had to wait 72 hours before initiating any search. That same day, on Saturday, they used their own means to look for her.”

On Facebook and other social media platforms, her daughters and other family members and friends reported her disappearance along with Laura’s picture.

“They continued looking for her on Sunday,” her relative continued, “when I came out to the street and her husband was walking by very disoriented with their younger daughter. But she was crying with so much pain. I asked if her mom had been found. ‘Yes, she was found,’ she said. ‘Where is she,’ I asked. But she didn’t answer. Their older daughter then came out running toward the canal and I followed her, thinking

that perhaps they were having issues like any couple, but that was not the case.

“The result was horrible. Her body had floated out of the bottom from the sewerage with multiple bruises in her stomach and face. She was half naked and her belongings were there, in the bushes, inside of a bag. Only a new cellphone was missing. Everything else was still in there.

“She was murdered in cold blood, sexually abused, hurt and her face was disfigured ... I can’t forget the finding since when they said that ‘she was there’ I thought she would be alive.

“I share this story to show the sad reality of workers in many parts of the country. As another part of that, it’s outrageous to see that unjust firings continue at GM in San Luis Potosí and Silao, where the companies and unions, even after making petitions during the strike [at GM in the US], are not respecting workers’ rights and benefits.”

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