

Mexican National Guard deployed against Matamoros auto parts workers

By Andrea Lobo
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National Guard troops and Tamaulipas state police have been sent to suppress hundreds of auto parts workers who occupied the local labor court Tuesday in the Mexican city of Matamoros, which sits across the border from Brownsville, Texas.

The deployment of federal soldiers is only the latest evidence that, in response to the worsening global economy, inflationary pressures, and its falling popularity, the government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) and his Morena party are preparing to employ widespread military repression against a rank-and-file rebellion against capitalist exploitation and the corrupt trade union bureaucracy.

That same morning, the National Guard carried out a joint operation with police of the Morena state government in Puebla to dismantle a two-week-old blockade set up by teachers on the major railway to the Port of Veracruz. Teachers, who were demanding democratic trade union elections, decided to leave before being violently attacked.

Nearly all 800 workers at the Tridonex maquiladora plant, which produces auto parts under the Philadelphia-based Cardone brand, are demanding that the company and government allow them to end their affiliation and automatic dues payments to the Industrial Maquiladora and Assembly Workers Union (SITMPE), which belongs to the corrupt Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM).

On social media and in person, workers decided to rally Tuesday to settle matters. By 5:00 am almost the entire Tridonex workforce was rallying outside the industrial complex and, even before there was any morning light, the Tamaulipas state police was already harassing the workers.

News arrived that their lawyer was not being heard by the local labor board, which has still not been folded into the centralized federal labor court system implemented by AMLO. Most workers then decided to begin a wildcat strike, rally *en masse* outside of the labor court in downtown Matamoros and send a committee to accompany the lawyer inside the building.

While some stayed behind at the plant due to the threats of

reprisals, at noon about 500 workers had mobilized at the labor court, where the body's president refused to speak to them. The Tridonex workers were joined by several contingents from other plants also demanding the right to leave the SITPME union. The workers decided to block the entrances and occupy the building until their demands were met.

Some scuffles ensued with the state police, which sought to push workers out of the building, while officials from the labor court reportedly punched workers and thugs from the SITPME grouped outside to intimidate the protesters.

By mid-afternoon, according to a reporter for *MV Noticias*, "A state [police] commander entered the building and pulled out several officials, but an undefined number were left inside and not allowed to leave." Then, "elements of the National Guard joined them." *EnlaceMX* and *Hoy Tamaulipas* also reported that a National Guard patrol arrived accompanied by Red Cross paramedics, undoubtedly preparing for a violent crackdown.

The SITPME leader, Jesús Mendoza Reyes, who has continued to deploy thugs in the streets, lyingly told the local media that the "illegal" action did not involve workers linked to SITPME, without explaining why the protesters were chanting "Mendoza, leave!"

"Much less does it correspond to the wishes of the majority of a well-established union, of a company well-rooted with its trade union through a collective agreement and that is operating without major issues," he added. Far from speaking for workers, his pharaoh-like tastes and escort of thugs for during his 16 years as the enforcer of conditions of intense exploitation for about 12,000 workers have earned him the nickname "the mummy."

Some workers showed hostility toward the presence of the National Guard, but many commenters only have expressed illusions in the federal government under Morena. For instance, one worker wrote: "That sucks. Are they are also sending the National Guard to browbeat workers or to check on the crappy State [Police] officials?"

The lack of political clarity is extremely dangerous amid the ongoing shift to open repression by the AMLO administration and goes hand in hand with the prevailing sentiment among Tridonex workers to switch from SITPME to another trade union, the Independent National Union of Industry and Service Workers (SNITIS) led by the labor lawyer Susana Prieto, who is partnered with the corrupt trade union bureaucracy linked to both Morena and the AFL-CIO in the US.

Recent experiences in Matamoros, and at Tridonex itself, however, provide enough evidence of the anti-worker character of the Morena administration and its trade union partners.

Most importantly, what was their role in subordinating workers to the CTM after the rank-and-file rebelled massively in January-April 2019 against the pro-company unions?

The strikes began when workers realized that the trade unions, the corporations and the Morena authorities, both local and federal, were conspiring to eliminate workers' yearly bonuses under the cover of a minimum wage increase across the border region, which was paired with historic corporate tax cuts. In Matamoros, workers formed incipient rank-and-file committees and called mass democratic assemblies to organize wildcat strikes and demand a raise, their bonuses, a 40-hour week and other changes. Among their first actions was to march massively to the border and appeal to American workers to wage a joint struggle against the transnational corporations.

In that environment, workers were freely and democratically discussing on social media, at assemblies and outside of the plant what to demand and how to fight for it. Hundreds of Tridonex workers joined the strike and released a statement indicating: "All of us workers are in disagreement with the injustices of the trade union and the dues that they take from us weekly. Today we can fight united for a change."

Prieto quickly flew into the city claiming that some workers had invited her to give legal advice and immediately argued that they couldn't leave the CTM and had to continue pressuring the rotten bureaucrats and pleading for AMLO's support. During the first weeks, she avoided Tridonex workers almost entirely given their reluctance to submit to Mendoza.

A key incident exposed clearly Prieto's role in chaining workers to the trade unions and the government to facilitate a sellout. On January 26, Prieto showed up late at night at the Autoliv picket line with the leading Morena Senator Ricardo Monreal on her cellphone's speaker. He said he had called her "on behalf of our friend [president] Andrés Manuel [López Obrador]" to demand that she shut down the

strikes.

Eventually, she succeeded in ending the strikes on the companies' terms. While workers won a 20 percent wage increase and \$1,700 bonus, the maquiladoras fired more than 5,000 workers as a reprisal, including 400 workers at Tridonex, and used the continued control of the CTM to enforce speed-ups, the elimination of other bonuses and other abuses. Prieto's intervention was aimed at undermining the unity achieved among workers across the plants and the entire city. While insisting that workers follow the legal guidelines of the trade unions, she prevented an independent struggle against the illegal reprisals of the corporations.

Throughout the wave of strikes, the *World Socialist Web Site* warned workers to consolidate their rank-and-file committees as genuinely democratic workers organizations independent of the pro-capitalist and nationalist trade unions. It was imperative, the WSWS argued, to expand their struggle to the rest of Mexico and internationally as the only means to prevent reprisals and put an end to capitalist exploitation.

On Tuesday, the labor court officials finally said they would review the request to separate workers from SITPME. Unconvinced by this gesture and wary of the threat of repression and attacks by union goons, hundreds of workers had decided on social media to establish picket lines on Wednesday and Thursday. They were dissuaded at the last minute, however, by "indications" from Prieto's SNITIS that they should wait for the court's response, place hopes in AMLO's Labor Ministry and not risk firings.

When AMLO praised the CTM during its 85th anniversary, workers expressed enormous anger on social media. Now it is time to draw decisive conclusions. The fate of the working class and its defense of its jobs and living standards cannot be left in the hands of the capitalist government and proven enemies of the working class like the AMLO administration and its trade union stooges.

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