

# US-owned auto parts maker fires dozens of workers in Matamoros, Mexico for demanding truth about COVID-19 outbreak

By Andrea Lobo  
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After the deaths of two workers triggered a wildcat strike on Friday at its three plants in Matamoros, Mexico, management of the US-based auto parts corporation Tridonex Cardone fired dozens of workers who protested the company's coverup of an outbreak of COVID-19. The vindictive action followed the company's grudging acknowledgement that workers at one of its plants had contracted the deadly disease.

On Sunday, Cardone wrote in a statement, "Tridonex will voluntarily close Plant 52 tomorrow due to positive cases in the random tests carried out ... it will remain closed until we meet with the state inspectors and agree on the road to follow." Management decided to order workers at the other two plants to continue working and quickly terminated the workers who protested the unsafe conditions.

The closing of plant 52 and acknowledgement of an unspecified number of cases were only carried out after workers took the initiative into their own hands. After learning of the recent deaths of Luciano Romero Contreras and Miguel Ángel, the 3,200 workers at Tridonex revolted and walked out of the three plants, opposing management's criminal policies, including forcing workers with health conditions to work.

Verónica, who was terminated without severance on Friday, told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, "I was fired for striking—so-called 'work abandonment'—and I'm one of those vulnerable. I was fired for telling the manager that we shouldn't be working and asking, 'Where is our protection?'"

"About 40 coworkers were fired on Friday at Plant 2," she said, adding that several more workers in the other plants have reported a similar fate on social media.

The coverup of outbreaks have become routine across Mexico as the corporations and the government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) make every effort to prevent any disruption of production, which would affect the global supply chain and profit flow for the US and other multinationals. Workers, however, are increasingly resisting these policies.

On Monday morning, in the neighboring city of Reynosa, workers at the Erika *maquiladora* carried out a wildcat strike to protest the coverup of a COVID-19 outbreak, which has reportedly claimed the life of at least one worker. The plant is owned by Fresenius Medical Care, a US-German multinational corporation, which manufactures dialysis and other health equipment.

Mexico reported more than 1,000 new COVID-19 deaths on Sunday, reaching a total of 21,825. Meanwhile, the state of Tamaulipas is seeing an exponential increase in cases, with 1,180 new cases last week. Reynosa and Matamoros, the two main manufacturing centers in the state of Tamaulipas, which borders the US state of Texas, have had the largest outbreaks.

In Matamoros, Tridonex workers responded to the company's announcement by reporting positive cases in the other two plants (53 and 60) and denouncing the retaliatory firings. One worker responded to the company on social media, "Well, we are left to wait for someone to die at Plant 60 and more infections." Others reported seeing their coworkers taken to the infirmary with breathing difficulties and even fainting at Plant 60.

Denouncing the coverup, another worker wrote, "At my line, there was already one positive case, and I

don't think that we'll get quarantined. ... You can ask for all the hand sanitizer in the world and disinfections every hour, but if one doesn't detect cases and quarantine people who might carry it, it will never stop spreading."

Cardone's particularly brutal policies are driven by the capitalist competition over the auto parts industry, which has seen a vast increase in debt due to the pandemic shutdowns of the global auto industry. Cardone is owned by the Toronto-based Brookfield financial firm, which manages \$515 billion in assets, almost half of Mexico's yearly production. Its CEO, Bruce Flatt, recently boasted that "the uncertainty and volatility feels manageable."

Workers on both sides of the border face the same basic attacks against their jobs and health. In April and May, Cardone laid off and indefinitely furloughed 680 workers out of the 1,200 workers at a plant in northeast Philadelphia and 183 workers in Brownsville, Texas, across the border from Matamoros. The company cited "negative business circumstances" caused by the COVID-19 crisis.

At Tridonex and across Matamoros, thousands of workers were fired last year for waging a militant struggle to free themselves from the unions controlled by the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), which operates as a bribed police force for the employers. In hopes of improving their conditions, many workers switched to the National Independent Union for Industry and Service Workers (SNITIS), but the so-called "independent union" has also colluded in AMLO's homicidal return-to-work drive.

The SNITIS was set up last year by a faction of the Mexican union bureaucracy tied to the ruling Morena party and the US AFL-CIO labor federation in an effort to contain the anti-CTM rebellion by Mexican workers and prevent it from developing into a unified struggle with American workers against capitalism.

Earlier this month, the Tamaulipas state courts imprisoned the SNITIS founder and lawyer, Susana Prieto Terrazas, on trumped up charges. Despite dozens of appeals to the Mexican president by unions in Mexico, the AFL-CIO and other unions, AMLO has refused to call for her freedom, speciously claiming her arrest was a "local issue." This only underscores the fact that the entire Mexican ruling class is shifting its tactics to contain social opposition by adopting open

repression and authoritarian forms of rule.

While the WSWs has well-known political differences with Prieto and her promotion of AMLO and the AFL-CIO-backed "independent unions," we insist that it is imperative that workers demand her immediate release. The fight against state repression and the defense of workers' democratic rights must be waged independently of all factions of the trade union bureaucracy and political establishment. This means forming rank-and-file factory and workplace committees, controlled by workers themselves, which will fight for workers' rights, including for safe workplaces, in opposition to the profit interests of the capitalist class in Mexico and around the world.

In opposing the back-to-work campaign and increasingly dictatorial methods to enforce it, workers not only face the Mexican oligarchy and its state but also US imperialism. In recent decades, Mexico has become entirely integrated into the supply chains of the major North American industries. The White House and Wall Street consequently demanded the reopening of Mexican factories, along with the US and Canadian plants as the virus continued to spread.

The pandemic has demonstrated that the conditions exist for the unification of workers in Mexico with their class brothers and sisters in the US, Canada and around the world. However, the fight against multinational corporations like Cardone can only be advanced as a struggle against the entire capitalist system and for international socialism.

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