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Mexico: Update On Union Struggle At Maquiladora Plants

by John Neagle

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On July 25 in Reynosa (Tamaulipas state), Rafael Morales de la Cruz, a maquiladora union leader affiliated with the umbrella Mexican Workers’ Confederation (CTM) put up strike flags at several plants holding contracts with union leader Abel Hernandez. Since Hernandez had recently been ousted or had withdrawn from the CTM, Morales argued that legally he had the right to declare himself in charge. Maquiladora managers say they hold legally binding contracts with Hernandez's union, and that he has the right to operate independently. The state labor arbitration board has ruled in favor of Morales. Plant managers took the case to federal court asking that Hernandez be declared the official representative. The federal court has not yet issued a ruling in the case. The precise number of maquiladora plants affected by the shutdown imposed by Morales has apparently varied from 10 to 15 (see Chronicle 08/15/89 and summary below), a conclusion drawn from somewhat contradictory reports by Notimex, AP, and Copley News Service. Aug. 15: According to AP, about 900 of some 2,000 workers affected by the strike in 15 plants removed CTM strike flags, locked themselves in their plants and returned to work. Aug. 16: Early Wednesday, the strike flags were replaced by the local labor arbitration board and Reynosa Mayor Ernesto Gomez Lira. Groups of about a dozen of Morales' men reportedly stood outside the plants with orders to prevent workers from going in and out. Notimex cited Othal Brandt, mayor of McAllen, Texas, as saying that Mexico and US must intervene in the conflict affecting 14 maquiladora plants. Brandt spoke briefly with reporters following a meeting with Reynosa mayor Gomez Lira, and secretary general of the local CTM, Reynaldo Garza Cantu. The McAllen mayor asserted that the future of foreign investment in the border area depends on labor peace. Brandt said he was not aware of threats by Invamex and Philling de Mexico to leave Mexico if they are required to sign labor contracts with Morales. Gomez Lira said that the current conflict would permit ending certain "old habits" practiced by both management and labor organizations. He added that a meeting called by the government of Tamaulipas state was scheduled for Aug. 17 in Victoria to resolve the conflict. Copley News Service reported that US companies with maquiladora plants in Reynosa appealed to President Carlos Salinas de Gortari to intervene. A spokesperson for Salinas said only that the president was studying the situation. (Basic data from AP, 08/15/89, 08/15/89; Notimex, 08/15/89, 08/16/89; Copley News Service, 08/16/89)

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