

Mexico: Metalworkers, universities join strike wave as 90,000 Walmart workers threaten to walk out

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Dozens of *maquiladora* plants that agreed to the “20-32”—a 20 percent raise and a bonus of 32,000 pesos (US\$1,700)—demanded by workers in Matamoros, Mexico, are escalating their reprisals against the historic wave of strikes that began in the city on January 12. This has included thousands of firings.

Rosalinda, a worker at Kearfott who has made public appeals for support from the international working class through the *World Socialist Web Site*, reported that she was fired this weekend along with 30 of the most militant workers. “We are still organizing to help those on strike and to keep battling those union leaders that have supported the companies, allowing them to step on the agreement,” she said, referring to a no-reprisal clause.

“Since the salary increased significantly, they don’t want to pay that. Moreover, they have ended the 40-hour week to continue with 48 hours for all fellow workers,” she added.

An Inteva worker told the WSWs that, after agreeing to the “20-32,” the company carried out a series of layoffs as *maquiladoras* “attempt to fire everyone, pay full severance, and force those who want to continue working to agree to 176 weekly pesos and not the [post-raise] 211 pesos. Some will change their business name to bring down salaries again. Of course, they’ll do this with the help of the trade union.”

The largest business umbrella organization in Mexico, the Business Coordinating Council (CCE) threatened up to 50,000 layoffs in Matamoros in response to “the invitations to carry out work stoppages in other cities.” Meanwhile, the *maquiladora* owners’ association, Index, which includes companies that produce 68 percent of Mexican exports, continue to appeal for the intervention of the administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (also known as AMLO) of the ruling Movement

for National Regeneration (MORENA) party and the union bureaucracy to stop the greater independent initiative by and militancy of rank-and-file workers across the country.

In the same state of Tamaulipas, about 200 metalworkers struck at a yard in the town of Altamira owned by the Spain-headquartered Dragados Offshore. Amid demands of up to 100 percent wage increases, this was followed Tuesday by a strike of 2,000 workers of the same company in a yard in the state of Veracruz about 20 miles south and, on Wednesday, by a blockade of the gates in Altamira, turning it into a total strike among the 2,900 workers.

The trade union, which belongs to the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), has feigned support for the actions while working to negotiate down the demands.

Today, after rejecting a 1 percent raise proposal and demanding 12 percent instead, workers at the Autonomous University of Mexico City (UACM) plan to join a wave of strikes across public universities that began 28 days ago with demands for a 20 percent raise at the Autonomous Metropolitan University. Workers there were inspired by the Matamoros rebellion. The Universities of Oaxaca, Coahuila and Chapingo are also on strike.

Hundreds of elementary and high-school teachers have also been on strike since January in the southern states of Oaxaca and Michoacán demanding unpaid allowances. For several weeks, they blocked crucial railways that severely affected trade through the largest Mexican seaport at Lázaro Cárdenas. About 1,000 striking teachers demonstrated in front of the Public Education Secretariat in Mexico City on Wednesday.

On Monday about 400 workers at three plants in Matamoros—Sigosa steelworks, Seyco Joits and Sistemas

Estructurales y de Construcción— struck demanding the “20-32.” The associated local union, led by Javier Zuñiga García, has claimed to support the wildcat strikes while arguing that workers in these plants already make more than others in the city.

After partial stoppages since January 29, the 700 Coca-Cola workers in Matamoros at one of the largest bottling plants in Latin America have been on a full-fledged strike for two weeks in defiance of court rulings branding their action “illegal.”

Since Tuesday, about 500 workers at the Spring Window Fashions maquiladora in Ciudad Victoria, 200 miles southwest of Matamoros, have been striking, demanding to leave the trade union since it rejected their demands for a 16 percent raise. Claiming to be “independent” but belonging to the same right-wing CTM, the Industrial Maquiladora Union led by María Dolores Zúñiga convinced workers to transfer to her union.

Zúñiga canceled a planned strike earlier this month among 6,000 workers, agreeing to a 16 percent raise compared to the 30 percent demanded by workers. In response, one of these companies, Kemet, announced this week that it would eliminate two of its four shifts and fire 700 workers, with Zúñiga discarding any fight and simply advocating workers demand full severance pay.

After workers at Walmart in Matamoros and many other cities were planning to join the wave of wildcat strikes to demand the “20-32,” the Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Peasants (CROC), affiliated with the right-wing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), quickly mobilized to enroll workers and take over negotiations to prevent the wildcat strikes. Instead, the CROC issued a strike announcement for March 20 involving about 90,000 of the 200,000 workers at Mexico’s biggest retailer. A Walmart spokeswoman told Reuters on Monday after speaking to the union that “the dialogue was positive.”

In Matamoros, 15 auto parts suppliers are still on strike. The Mexican Association of the Auto Industry (AMIA) noted to *El Financiero* on Monday that 80 percent of parts produced in the city go to the US and Canada, seriously crippling production at major plants there, and that within Mexico the strike has shut down production at three assembly plants and seven others have been affected.

The president of the Mexican Association of Cars Distributors (AMDA) summed up to the financial daily that companies in Matamoros have two options: appeal for police intervention or leave the city. “There is a sentiment of a lack of rule of law given how this situation

was triggered and there is fear that the same could happen in other border cities like Ciudad Juárez,” he added.

On Tuesday, the president of the Mexican Confederation of Industrial Chambers (CONCAMIN), Francisco Cervantes Díaz, said they are working closely with the AMLO administration and MORENA senator and union leader, Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, to address the wave of “illegal” strikes. “The problem could extend to the Bajío region and the south of the country,” he warned.

Facing the growing challenge from below and the deepening of the crisis of global capitalism, the Mexican ruling class and its US imperialist bosses will act with increasing ruthlessness. As López Obrador accelerates the creation of a new National Guard for domestic military operations, the Central Bank and Goldman Sachs dramatically cut down their 2019 growth forecasts for Mexico this week—with the latter warning of “idiosyncratic factors like strikes.”

Meanwhile, the trade-union bureaucracy is working everywhere to co-opt, isolate and shut down each rank-and-file struggle, while strengthening its corrupt and corporatist collaboration with management and the state.

On the other hand, workers across North America and globally are going on the offensive after decades of a one-sided war by major corporations against their living standards. This year has seen 71,000 teachers from several states participate in a wave of strikes, while almost 2,000 workers at the Wabtec locomotive plant in Pennsylvania initiated Tuesday the first major strike in the manufacturing sector in three years, according to the *Huffington Post*. Resistance is also growing against General Motors’ plant closures in the US and Canada and mass layoffs by the largest automakers partly being used extort concessions out of the 140,000 US autoworkers facing contract negotiations later this year.

Workers entering the class struggle need to break decisively from the nationalist and pro-capitalist trade unions and parties to coordinate their struggles internationally against the same corporate and financial elite in a political and revolutionary movement for socialism.



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