

## One-day general strike in Colombia

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

30 April 2019

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On April 25, tens of thousands of Colombian workers carried out a 24-hour national strike. The walkout, organized by the Unitary Workers Central (CUT), the Colombian Teachers Federation and other unions, was in protest against President Ivan Duque's, National Development Plan, which would significantly attack wages, working conditions and pension rights. The strike was supported by farmers, students and civil rights organizations.

Rallies took place in Bogotá and major cities across this South American nation. In Bogotá, gendarmes of the Mobile Anti-Riot Squad (ESMAD) police attacked demonstrators and journalists at the conclusion of the march and rally.

Students were also attacked by ESMAD forces at the entrance of Bogotá's National University.

### Mexico: UAM Strike enters its 13th week

Striking workers at Mexico City's National Autonomous University have been on strike since February 1. The issue in this strike is wages, the demand for a 20 percent wage increase, in opposition to the offer by UAM management of 3.35 percent, plus 4.28 percent in grocery coupons.

As in other strikes across the world, UAM authorities argue that they have no money for wages. SITUAM, the trade union that represents the strikers, is demanding that management redistribute funds, away from the high salaries it pays itself.

Though both the SITUAM bureaucrats and the UAM

administrators have softened their stand since the strike began—SITUAM lowered its wage demand to 10 percent; management increased their offer to 6 percent—no agreement appears to be in sight.

Some sectors of the student body have called on Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador to intervene. They also call for an investigation of UAM's finances.

### Natural gas workers occupy gas plant in Montevideo, Uruguay

On April 25, workers at Montevideo Gas, owned by Brazilian energy giant Petrobras, took over the gas plant in Montevideo to protest an ongoing disinvestment campaign that threatens 25,000 jobs.

The occupation lasted throughout the day. By early evening, isolated by the unions and under the threat of government violence, the workers abandoned the plant.

### Argentine health workers protest

Two-hundred health workers at Buenos Aires' Garrahan Pediatric Hospital rallied on Friday, April 26, to protest a wage agreement accepted by their union, the UPCN, that includes a 3 percent raise, woefully short of the nearly 5 percent monthly price inflation that exists currently in Argentina.

Workers pointed out that their wages have lagged behind inflation for several years. Many also denounced the general conditions at the hospital, with

ever-rising workloads and ever-higher prices for medications. Garrahan is one of the largest pediatric health facilities in Buenos Aires.

### **Massachusetts workers rally over stalled contract talks**

Some 50 workers held a rally April 27 outside the Kennametal plant in Greenfield, Massachusetts, to protest company demands for forced overtime and hikes in health insurance, and the lack of a wage increase that would help offset the rising cost of living. Workers are also upset about a new plant manager, transferred from a Vermont facility, who has been issuing threats to fire workers.

The current contract stalemate could lead to the first strike by Greenfield workers since 1986, when the plant had 500 workers. Today, the Greenfield facility has only 65 members of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers Local 274. In 2016, the plant had 21 workers laid off. Workers are opposed in particular to contract language that will allow management to bring significant numbers of contract workers into the plant for the first time.

Kennametal is a global tool manufacturer with 10,000 workers in more than 60 countries. During fiscal year 2018, the company had sales of nearly \$2.4 billion. Seven of the executive officers have annual total compensation of more than \$1 million, with CEO Christopher Rossi raking in \$5.6 million.

### **Two-day strike at Atlanta warehouse**

Teamster drivers and warehouse workers at Sysco Corporation's College Park distribution center in Atlanta returned to work April 20 after a two-day strike to protest a company ban against the union speaking to newly recruited workers. Some 400 workers, members of Teamsters Local 528 took part in the walkout.

Traditionally, the union had been allowed to speak to new employees at orientation meetings. Warehouse

worker Kip Cortez issued a statement saying, "All of a sudden, there was new local management and we were told that if we mention anything about the union, we'd be escorted from the property."

Currently, the union is in contract talks with Sysco. The old agreement expired back on March 31.

### **New Brunswick smelter locks out workers**

Workers employed by Glencore Canada at its Brunswick Smelter in Belledune, New Brunswick, were locked out last week just hours before a strike deadline announced by their union, the United Steelworkers.

The union says it is fighting against numerous concession demands in a new contract for 280 workers, including cuts to pensions and benefits, and against the elimination of two health and safety representatives. It points out that the Brunswick Smelter is a hazardous workplace that has received numerous health and safety orders from inspectors in recent years.

Although the company has claimed that it is not a lockout because it didn't serve notice, workers were met at the gate last Wednesday with a letter from the employer telling them to go home. The union has voiced suspicions that the company may be planning to continue operations during the work stoppage, which it says will pose even greater safety risks.



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