

# AFSCME members to hold strike vote at University of California campuses

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The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) has called for a strike vote February 11-13 if it is unable to reach an agreement with the University of California (UC) in the upcoming weeks.

The union represents a total of over 21,000 workers in the UC system, but has decided to negotiate separately the contracts of its patient care and service workers. AFSCME Local 3299 is calling for a strike of its 8,300 service unit members and a sympathy strike vote by its 13,000 patient care workers, though workers in both units face identical attacks on pensions, wages, and health care costs.

In an interview with the *Sacramento Bee* Kathryn Lybarger, Local 3299 president, acknowledged the union's inability and unwillingness to conduct a serious struggle on behalf of workers. Lybarger stated, "All told, there were more than 40 contract articles up for negotiation between AFSCME and UC. AFSCME has already conceded to UC's position on more than 30. That means UC has already gotten more than 75 percent of what it wants."

Though AFSCME officials have already conceded most of management's demands, the union claims that UC is not bargaining fairly over issues of staffing and wage increases. The union cited reports by the Occupational Safety and Health Association (OSHA) that workplace injuries of UC service workers have increased by more than 20 percent in the last five years.

The union's bankrupt conduct combines capitulation before the demands of management with an attempt to pit bargaining units against each other. The latter effort, in addition to the typical strategy of isolating various sections of the working class and restricting the struggles as much as possible, also takes the form of appeals to race.

*Daily byng California* told that the secret that AFSCME 3299 is not only the UC system's largest collection of organized UC employees but also composed largely of people of color...On wages and benefits, the university has refused to offer our members anything comparable to what it has granted to other bargaining units—nurses, researchers, librarians, lecturers and even non-represented staff members."

AFSCME paints a dishonest picture in which the university has negotiated "fairly" with the other bargaining units. In fact workers across the board have faced similar relentless attacks on their wages, pensions and out-of-pocket health care costs while their workloads remain at unmanageable levels. Largynger's invocation of race is all of a piece with unions' consistent efforts to isolate and divide the UC workforce.

Workers in the UC system are covered under contracts negotiated by several different unions. The contract for members of the United Auto Workers, the bargaining agent for graduate student lecturers, expired in November of 2013. UC continues to avoid the main concerns of graduate students who serve as readers and teachers assistants. This includes increasing class sizes and high student-to-faculty ratios. Despite this, UC's promise to provide gender-neutral bathrooms and a minor wage increase of 2.5 percent, after cost of living adjustments, has been celebrated by the UAW as a victory.

The contract with the California Nurses Association (CNA) expired in September of 2013, but UC and union officials worked quickly to offer a tentative agreement in an effort to prevent a sympathy strike by nurses with AFSCME members. The new CNA contract includes increases in the amount workers must contribute to their pensions as well as the

implementation of a two-tier pension plan that further lowers benefits for new employees. The agreement led to the union reneging on a sympathy strike with AFSCME workers planned in November of 2013.

In October of 2013 University Professional and Technical Employees (UPTE) President Jelger Kalmijn signed a no-strike pledge after a tentative contract was reached in an effort to contain and prevent backlash from research workers who opposed the contract because it raised their pension contributions.

In addition to facilitating the attack against the living standards of their own membership, the unions, including AFSCME, are backing the Democratic Party's phony campaign on social inequality. Lybarger echoed the lies of the administration on this score, stating, "President Barack Obama is asking the rest of America to help close the income gap—UC is trying to widen it." In fact, the Democrats are resolute defenders of inequality, and it was their policies over the past several years that have created an unprecedented transfer of wealth to the financial aristocracy.

Lybarger is also echoing the empty rhetoric employed by the Obama administration in reference to increasing the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour. This amounts to a poverty wage of \$20,000 a year, and in any case has no chance in passing the millionaire-controlled House and Senate.

While UC workers are expected to shoulder the burden of the economic crisis in the form of increasing austerity measures, the UC Regents held their first meeting of the year on January 22 and 23 at UC San Francisco, approving two new hires, Jagdeep S. Bachher, chief investment officer and vice president of investments, and Claude Steele as UC Berkeley's provost. The regents approved a \$615,000 base salary for Bachher and a \$450,000 annual salary for Steele.

The president of the UC Regents is the ex-Secretary of Homeland security, Janet Napolitano, a close friend of President Obama.



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