Unite the working class behind University of California workers!

Statement of the Socialist Equality Party (US)

11 February 2014

This statement will be distributed to UC workers throughout California, who will be casting their ballots for a strike vote beginning today.

From Tuesday through Thursday, workers in the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) will participate in a strike vote throughout the 10 University of California (UC) campuses.

More than 21,000 workers in the UC system are in AFSCME. The union has decided to negotiate separately the contracts of its patient care and service workers, even though workers in both units face identical attacks on pensions, wages, and health care costs.

UC management is demanding a contract that involves a sharp decline in real wages, with its last offer including a meager 2 percent raise over four years. The university system is threatening to rescind even this offer if workers vote to authorize a strike.

A vast divide exists between the combativeness of UC workers and AFSCME officials, who purport to represent their interests. Union officials have already agreed to management demands on 75 percent of contract provisions in dispute. AFSCME has criticized management by citing the "fair" contracts agreed to for other sections of workers, including a deal worked out with the California Nurses Association (CNA) that contains increased pension payments and a new two-tier pension plan.

While workers are seeking a way to fight, the union is working with management to impose concessions, calling at most limited actions aimed at letting off steam.

After a 97 percent vote for strike authorization in May 2013, AFSCME limited the strike to two days and provided a meager $70 strike pay for two full days of picketing. Lacking confidence and support in the union, many workers said they could not afford to strike, resulting in a mere 10-15 percent of members participating. This was followed by a one-day strike in November and a toothless "day of action" that largely consisted of a lunch-hour picket.

Unite all sections of the working class!

Workers will now vote on a strike authorization once again. The AFSCME leadership is doing everything in its power to at first prevent and then contain, limit and divide the scope of the strike in order to disarm and demoralize workers and force through a contract on management's terms.

On its web site, AFSCME notes that "99 percent of service workers [are] currently income eligible for some form of public assistance, and some full time UC workers [are] even living in their cars." Under the illusion of a "fight," the union has been complicit in the UC's implementation of poverty wages.

The imposition of concessionary contracts upon UC workers by AFSCME is not an isolated incident. Workers across the country and around the world are confronted with similar conditions. They face an attack on wages, pensions, and health care, while trade union leaderships actively intervene to isolate or prevent a struggle against the dictates of corporations.

In Washington, Boeing workers in the International Association of Machinists (IAM) rejected a contract last year that gutted pensions and health care benefits, froze wages, and prohibited workers from striking until 2024. Acting on behalf of Boeing, the IAM proceeded to hold a second vote in which the contract was forced through by the narrowest of margins.

UK teachers struck three times in 2013 to protest a

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rise in pension contributions, an increase in the retirement age, the abolition of the national pay structure and other concessions. After teachers gained the support of wide layers of the working population, the unions suspended the strike and organized a backroom concessions-laden deal.

For independent organizations!

Workers can secure their rights only through an independent struggle. This first requires a break with the unions—including AFSCME; the United Auto Workers, which represents graduate students; and the CNA.

The unions are dead set against a unified struggle because of their political alliance with the Democratic Party, the Obama administration and Governor Jerry Brown, all of whom are leading the attack on the working class.

Workers must form their own independent rank-and-file organizations to wage a struggle against these agents of capital. Such struggle must be immediately extended to all other layers of the working population across the country and worldwide, in full solidarity for the defense of workers' jobs, living standards and democratic rights.

A political fight!

This struggle is above all a political fight. Since the 2008 economic crash, both the Democrats and Republicans have launched a coordinated effort to force the working class to pay for the crisis, with trillions of dollars handed to the big banks and corporations.

From the city level to the federal, the Democratic Party has sought to balance budgets by taking money from workers' pensions and health care while the stock market soars to record heights and corporations are raking in unprecedented profits.

The number of the world's billionaires has doubled since 2009, with 2,170 individuals owning a combined wealth of $6.5 trillion, while the working class is told that there is supposedly no money for educations, jobs, infrastructure, culture, and social services.

In Detroit, Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr is working with bankruptcy court judge Steven Rhodes, with the support of the Obama administration and the unions, to dismantle pensions, sell off the art at the Detroit Institute of Arts and restructure the city in the interests of the rich.

The answer to unending austerity and corporate dictatorship is socialism. Workers can defend their interests only through a direct attack on the wealth and privileges of the bankers and corporate executives who control the economy. The giant corporations that dominate society must be nationalized under democratic control and trillions of dollars made available for decent jobs, education, and health care.

The Socialist Equality Party is organizing throughout California, across the country and around the world. We urge UC workers seeking to take up a fight to contact us today.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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