

University of California doctors hold one-day strike

Our reporters
30 January 2015

One hundred fifty doctors who staff the University of California Student Health and Counseling Centers engaged in a one-day strike on January 27. The doctors are part of the Union of American Physicians and Dentists (UAPD), an affiliate of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

The staging of the one-day strike by comparatively well-paid professionals underscores the depth of the social crisis in the US, even as the political establishment and the media claim that a “recovery” has been underway for the past year.

This was the first strike by fully licensed doctors in 25 years and the first strike in the 43-year history of the UAPD, representing about 4,000 doctors.

The doctors, who were unionized in 2013, have been unable to secure their first contract and staged their one-day walkout alongside filing multiple charges of unfair labor practices against the university for what UAPD describes as illegal behavior at the bargaining table over a series of 42 bargaining sessions.

Despite a multitude of issues raised by the doctors in their bargaining, including staffing, wages, autonomy, professionalism and funding, the UAPD, under the leadership of AFSCME, limited Tuesday’s strike to the issue of unfair labor practices.

Wholly committed to Governor Jerry Brown and the Democratic Party, who are overseeing the assault on living standards and social conditions in California, the unions, incapable of organizing any real struggle, deliberately staged a one-day strike as a tactic, allowing workers who are frustrated over a shortage of resources and a lack of funding to the UC health services to let off steam.

AFSCME has a history of issuing fake threats that are quickly rescinded amid claims of victory. Last March,

AFSCME cancelled two impending strikes while claiming “victory” in a contract settlement that gave UC administration its top priority, forcing workers to pay 2.5 percent more out of pocket into their pensions.

Last year it was reported that 75 percent of AFSCME’s members in the UC system live in poverty, while 99 percent of its service workers are eligible for public assistance. The union has given no explanation for its members living in such conditions.

The gutting of services to health care workers is not solely limited to the UC system. Just two weeks ago, Kaiser Permanente faced a series of partial strikes by some 2,600 mental health workers across California over staffing levels. The insurer made a record profit of over \$3 billion last year and is sitting on a reserve of \$30 billion—revenues driven primarily by new members enrolled under Obamacare—but there has been no significant increase in staffing levels.

The WSWs spoke to workers and students at UC San Diego, UC Berkeley and UCLA:

UC San Diego

Dr. Amol Doshi, one of the four doctors at the bargaining table in Sacramento, spoke of the lack of resources at UCSD: “Right now we have two-part time psychiatrists serving 25,000 students. We have an increasing number of mental health problems among the student population—eating disorders, anxiety, and substance abuse. And yet, we don’t feel we have the necessary resources, particularly in terms mental health. Indeed, all of this ends up being shouldered by the primary care providers.”

When asked where proper funding should come from, Dr. Doshi replied, “We don’t want increases in funding put on the students through hikes—that’s part of why we have student support. Why should they be funding healthcare when there is more than adequate funding at

the top? They seem to be flush with funding. Why should top administrators get such increases in salary?" He was referring to the 20 percent raise that the UC chancellors just received.

UCLA

Dr. Charles McDaniel, a psychiatrist at the Counseling Center, emphasized the unfair labor practices of the UC: "We have asked for information concerning the Chancellor's raises that have been 20 percent, the Chancellor's discretionary fund, student fees, where they come from, how they are allocated. Information we have been continually denied. We agree with the students that these funds could be better allocated directly toward student services as opposed to bloating the administration."

Priscilla Silva, an undergraduate student majoring in political science, was one of the few students who joined in picketing with the doctors. She said, "Last year some of the UC workers went on strike, such as the maintenance and health care workers, and I was very involved because the treatment and wages they were receiving was not fair.

"It was also felt that the money could have been allocated more efficiently. The salaries of the administrators were increasing and so was tuition. The administrators then claimed they had to raise tuition to pay the workers, but at the same time the wages of UC workers were decreasing, so it obviously made no sense."

Despite taking an active role last year in UC workers struggles, Priscilla knew nothing about this strike until she walked by today and saw the pickets and joined in. She was unaware of any union leafleting, announcements, or other attempts by the union to call upon UCLA students to join with the doctors in supporting their struggle.

UC Berkeley

Dr. Jeff Gill, a doctor at the UC Tang Center for 15 years, expressed his concern over long wait time: "Last year, there were times where 85 percent of the people couldn't get seen the day of if they wanted to get acute care through the appointment system. You can always go to urgent care, but this burdens urgent care and creates huge waits, sometimes a hour or couple of hours just to see someone."

Dr. Gill also noted the contradiction between the recent increased state budget and continued cuts to

health services, saying, "The student health services was asked to cut their budget once again last year even though there is more money. We are not providing adequate care, we need better wait time, we need less wait time. Why are they not funding us better?"



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact