

University of California unions wear down workers with fifth one-day strike

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Yesterday nearly one thousand workers throughout the University of California (UC) higher education and health care system struck in a one-day action across the state.

The action was the third one-day strike called by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME 3299) in less than two months. AFSCME has a total membership throughout the UC system of over 25,000 workers and was joined by members of the University Professional and Technical Employees-Communications Workers of America (UPTE-CWA 9119), which represents over 13,000.

Reporters estimate that only 70-150 workers struck at each of the UC campuses. Despite a total membership of over 48,000, only two percent of the members of the AFSCME and UPTE locals came out for the one-day event.

The minuscule turnout is the expression of a trend, as the number of workers participating in the series of one-day strikes called by AFSCME continues to decline. Nearly 1,000 picketers at each of the 10 campuses rallied on March 20, but the numbers dropped to 200-300 per campus on April 10. Yesterday's numbers were the lowest yet.

UC is the largest public institution of higher learning in the world, comprised of ten campuses, five medical centers, 16 health professional schools, three national laboratories and numerous satellite facilities.

The dwindling turnout does not reflect the lack of fighting spirit in the workers but expresses rather their lack of confidence in the union to wage a serious struggle. Workers are intent on demanding wages that keep up with the rising costs of living, an end to the outsourcing of jobs and the employment of temporary labor, and a stop to the 401(k)-style pension plans that the UC Regents are seeking to impose on them.

Workers at the Los Angeles and San Diego campuses told WSWS reporters that they were tired of the limited one-day strikes. One worker from UCLA who wished to remain anonymous said, "I don't believe in these one day strikes, they are not enough to fight UC."

Ramon, a cafeteria worker who clocked in for work said, "This is actually the first strike I'm not participating in, I can't afford to keep going out, especially when it doesn't do anything."

Despite their vast collective strength, AFSCME and UPTE members have been kept on the job by their unions without a contract since June 30, 2017 and September 30, 2017 respectively.

The days of unpaid work over the course of the three stunt strikes staged by AFSCME and UPTE over the past two months mean that those who participated in these events will see a nearly \$300-450 cut in their wages over that time. This is untenable for most workers, a fact of which the unions and UC are well aware. Most AFSCME workers already make a pittance in the state's high cost of living areas, where the majority of the campuses are located.

AFSCME 3299 members in particular are some of the lowest paid in the system, occupying positions such as admitting clerks, anesthesia technicians, MRI technologists, cooks, gardeners, security guards, and janitorial staff.

The unions claimed that yesterday's strike was called to fight increased outsourcing, and that UC was seeking illegal agreements with private contractors. The unions reported that they had learned of a plan to outsource \$56 million in IT services across all five UC Medical Centers.

The real concern of AFSCME and UPTE, however, is not the impoverishment of its membership, the attacks on healthcare premiums, or increases to retirement, but

rather that dues revenue will be lost if UC employs outsourced nonunion labor. The last contract from 2014, hailed as a “victory” by AFSCME, only maintained and deepened the poverty of its membership.

A dozen people, primarily union officials, were arrested in a PR stunt during yesterday’s strike for disrupting a UC Regents meeting at the San Francisco campus.

The trade unions are attempting to portray themselves as opponents of the UC Regents, but they are in fact the largest contributors to the Democratic Party, which is bound to the Regents at the highest levels of the state.

Eighteen of the 26 Regent board members are selected by the Governor of California, and seven are *ex officio* members, including the current Governor Gavin Newsom, Lieutenant Governor, Speaker of the State Assembly, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, president and vice president of the Alumni Associations of UC, and president of the University of California. No one gets on this board without the endorsement of the Democrats.

The calculated installation by former Gov. Jerry Brown of Janet Napolitano, secretary of homeland security under President Barack Obama, as UC president was part of preparations by the financial oligarchy for upheavals among workers and students. While the Regents prepare to crack down on the strike, the trade unions are tasked with safely dissipating the anger of workers and associating strikes in their minds with unpaid and fruitless action.

For each stunt strike, the unions have provided the UC ten days’ notice, allowing the University system to prepare by spending millions on staffing agencies such as Huffmaster, which organizes flights, hotels, ground travel, and orientation trainings for thousands of strikebreaking staff.

UC workers are a powerful force. They are the largest nongovernmental workforce in the state, the world’s fifth largest economy. UC’s wages set the bar for pay and working conditions throughout the state and beyond its borders.

The workers, however, face a brutal enemy in the UC Regents, who will stonewall and repress them, and in the trade unions, who will attempt to demoralize and sell them out. Workers must be warned that AFSCME, UPTE, and all the other trade unions are working

overtime to wear them down and prepare them to accept a contract that will maintain their poverty wages.

In order to realize their power, workers must organize together with other staff, nurses, administrative employees, graduate and undergraduate students, independent of the unions and big-business parties. They should begin forming rank-and-file workplace committees with their coworkers to expand their struggles, and to break from their unions, which have bound them to the Democratic party and the UC Regents.



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