

# Mobilize the working class to defend the grad students at University of California-Santa Cruz

Norissa Santa Cruz—SEP vice presidential candidate  
20 February 2020

*Join the IYSSE and the SEP online on Sunday, February 23, at 4PM PST for an emergency meeting to discuss the political issues involved and the way forward for the UCSC grad student strike. Click here for more information.*

Hundreds of graduate students and teaching assistants at the University of California-Santa Cruz are engaged in a battle that deserves the full support of all workers and young people. Over the last week they conducted a wildcat strike, in defiance of the United Auto Workers, to demand a cost of living increase to be able to afford skyrocketing housing costs.

Demanding this elemental right has pit striking grad students against the entire corporate and political establishment. UC president Janet Napolitano, the former governor of Arizona and director of Homeland Security under the Obama administration, who makes a salary of \$627,000, has threatened to fire hundreds of striking students if they do not go back to work. Napolitano insists that the demands of students will “undercut the very foundation of an agreement negotiated in good faith by the UAW.”

Grad students have already been arrested and brutalized by police for peacefully demonstrating. Now Napolitano is threatening to fire striking students. The dismissal of students will not only strip them of their livelihoods, it will also imperil the immigration status of international students.

As the vice-presidential candidate for the Socialist Equality Party in this year’s US presidential elections, I call on all UC workers and students, and all workers throughout California, the US and internationally to come to the defense of the UC-Santa Cruz grad students. Mass demonstrations, joint strikes and other actions must be prepared to unite UC students with public school teachers, supermarket and warehouse workers, industrial workers and other sections of workers and youth outside of the campuses.

Such a struggle will never be carried out by the UAW or the other unions, which are tied by a million threads to Governor Gavin Newsom and the Democrats. The unions function as junior partners in the exploitation of the working class. That is why I encourage UC grad students and other workers to form rank-and-file workplace and factory committees, independent of the corrupt unions, to fight for what workers and students need, not what Napolitano, Newsom, and the UAW say is affordable.

Everywhere there is growing opposition to social inequality and austerity. The strike at UC-Santa Cruz is part of the biggest US

strike wave in three decades, with teachers and educators taking the lead and General Motors workers conducting the longest national auto strike in four decades. Throughout the world, from France and Chile to Iraq and Lebanon, millions are taking to the streets to oppose the ever-greater looting of society by the super-rich and their political representatives.

When workers are locked in a battle, however, there is no time for wishful thinking or underestimating the powerful enemies they confront. To win this fight, UC grad students must make a realistic assessment of the political forces they are fighting and outline a strategy to mobilize the broad masses of working people whose potential strength is far more powerful than their enemies.

## The capitalist system

The conditions facing the graduate students are the conditions of an entire generation. Their average pay is a mere \$2,400 per month—less than the average monthly rent in Santa Cruz, one of the most expensive cities in America.

The youth of America, the first generation in history expected to be worse-off financially than their parents’ generation, confront a future of poverty wages and part-time and “gig” employment. Millions of young people who entered college to improve their job prospects are now saddled with tens of thousands of dollars in debt which they will be forced to pay off over much of the working lives.

Where is society’s wealth going instead?

**The military.** The United States will spend **\$748 billion** on the military this year, more than at any point, adjusted for inflation, since World War II. This money goes to the conquest of Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq, Iran and Syria and to prepare for war against nuclear-armed rivals such as Russia and China. Imperialist war is a bipartisan policy. The Democrats voted for record military spending even as they were impeaching Trump.

**The stock market.** Global stock markets added roughly **\$17 trillion** in valuation last year alone. The record run-up in the stock market is due to government monetary policies, not actual economic growth, which remains anemic since the 2009 recession.

The Federal Reserve currently has **\$4 trillion** in financial assets on its balance sheet, after a decade of asset purchasing aimed at propping up the profits of the financial industry. US companies also waste roughly **\$1 trillion** in stock buybacks each year—more than half of which is financed by debt.

The starvation wages of grad students and all the other social ills confronting the working class are the product of capitalism. Public universities in the United States spent roughly \$372 billion in 2016-2017, less than two percent of the country's \$19 trillion gross domestic product. But while the ruling class claims that there is “no money” to provide a high-quality education and decent standards of living for educators, the stock market is booming and big corporations are making record profits.

There is no “American Dream” for young people or any other generation of the working class. Instead, it is a nightmare. That is why capitalism has become a dirty word, and socialism the most talked about issue in the US elections. Trump rails that America will never be a socialist country. The Democratic Party establishment, including billionaire Mike Bloomberg, is doing everything to keep Sanders from winning the presidential nomination. Meanwhile, Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez claim that “democratic socialism” can be achieved through the Democratic Party, the party of Wall Street and the Pentagon war machine.

The Socialist Equality Party is fighting for genuine socialism: that is, the seizure of the private fortunes of the millionaires and billionaires, a radical redistribution of wealth to meet human need, the dismantling of the military-industrial complex, and the transformation of the giant banks and industries into public utilities, collectively owned and democratically controlled by the working class. Only in this way can society's resources be used to meet human need, including a decent standard of living and access to high quality education for all—and not private profit.

### **The trade unions, the working class and the fight for socialism**

The grad student strike is a political struggle, being waged against the Democratic Party and the capitalist system itself. In this fight, the trade unions stand on the other side of the barricades. The fact that Napolitano insists that students abide by a UAW contract that condemns them to poverty and strips them of the right to strike shows that the unions are agents of management, not workers' organizations.

The University of California has balkanized the workforce, bargaining with at least 15 different unions to keep the students and workers from organizing and linking their struggles for a living wage, health and retirement benefits, and safe staffing levels for both patients and workers. Each union has negotiated “no strike” clauses where the administration must be given a 10-day notice of any planned strike to allow it to find scab labor and minimize the impact of any strikes.

The role of the UAW in the grad student strike is a repeat of the teachers unions' betrayal of strikes in Los Angeles, Oakland,

Chicago and elsewhere, allowing those school districts to carry out austerity measures afterward, as well as the sellout of last year's General Motors strike by the UAW itself, which paves the way for auto companies to run their plants with temps.

The UAW, having spent decades collaborating with auto companies to destroy hundreds of thousands of jobs, was revealed by federal investigators to have taken millions in bribes in exchange for concessions. But the Democratic Socialists of America and Bernie Sanders continue to defend the UAW from calls from workers to break with this criminal syndicate.

Those organizations who argue that the unions can be reformed are promoting groups which function to divide and intimidate workers, not unite them.

The fight by students puts them in direct conflict with the highest levels of the Democratic Party in the state. Eighteen of the 26 members of the university's board of regents are hand selected by the Governor of California, and seven are ex officio members, comprised of the current Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Speaker of the State Assembly, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the president and vice president of the Alumni Associations of UC, and the president of the University of California.

The Democratic Party, no less than the Republicans, is hostile to the interests of the working class.

The working class is the most powerful social force on the planet. But to marshal this power, the working class must be mobilized as an independent political force, on the basis of a socialist program. This is what the Socialist Equality Party is fighting for. If you agree with this, contact our campaign today and take up the fight for genuine socialism.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**