

Grad student strike spreads to two more University of California campuses

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*The University of California (UC) strike is a political struggle. UC strikers and supporters can hear Socialist Equality Party presidential and vice-presidential candidates Joseph Kishore and Norissa Santa Cruz **speak next week** at townhall meetings at UC Berkeley (March 3), UC Los Angeles (March 4), and San Diego (March 5). Read Santa Cruz's statement on the UC struggle [here](#).*

On Thursday, hundreds of graduate students at the University of California (UC) in the cities of Santa Barbara and Davis officially began their strikes, joining the wildcat strike launched by graduate students at UC Santa Cruz (UCSC) three weeks ago on February 10. The decision to spread the strike to two more campuses was in direct defiance of the UC administration, which set Thursday midnight as the deadline to submit grades or be fired, and the United Auto Workers (UAW), which negotiated a no-strike pledge in the poverty-wage contract students are working under.

Strikers at UCSC defied the previous deadline of Friday, February 21 by UCSC Executive Vice Chancellor Lori Kletzer and UC President Janet Napolitano. These university executives have threatened to fire striking grad students, opening up international students to deportation, and have refused to grant any improvements in the contract because that would “undercut the very foundation of an agreement negotiated in good faith by the UAW.” Instead, the university proposed a one-time \$2,500 housing supplement for this year only if students ended the strike.

The UCSC graduate students have held by their demand of a \$1,412 monthly COLA to adequately meet skyrocketing housing costs since they first began their grading strike last semester that expanded into a full teaching and research strike this month. The strikes on

other campuses have begun with demands for monthly stipends of \$1,553 at UC Davis and \$1,807 at UC Santa Barbara.

Yesterday's rallies and picket lines attracted large crowds of up to a thousand at their peak. Over 200 faculty members at UC Davis have signed a non-retaliation agreement, promising to support the striking grad students while they refrain from teaching classes, taking part in their own classes, and submitting grades.

As the support increases, the financial and Democratic Party establishment that backs the UAW and UC administration will work even harder to end, isolate and sabotage their struggle. The strike is approaching a crossroads, and graduate students must consider what strategy is required to defend the strike and win their demands.

The fight for the basic right to livable pay, benefits, and high-quality public education is not just a fight of UC graduate students, but a fight of the whole working class. Further, this fight immediately places workers against the political establishment, particularly the Democratic Party, which has controlled the UC system through appointments to the board of regents.

Workers across the globe would easily recognize the poor conditions that graduate students face as a result of this decades-long process—marked by low pay and high costs of living, heavier workloads, less job security and fewer full-time positions, and year-after-year budget cuts that place strains on valuable academic departments.

Graduate students in the UC system, who carry out vital tasks associated with teaching and research for the largest university system in the United States while also completing their own degrees, earn salaries ranging between \$22,000 and \$43,000 depending on the funding in their department. Most students' earnings,

especially outside of science and technology, are on the lower end.

To place this in perspective, the average two-bedroom apartment in California is around \$1,700 per month or \$20,400 per year. Even under the assumption that a graduate student splits rent with a roommate or family member, \$10,200 per year is nearly 50 percent of the common student's earnings. The National Low Income Housing Coalition calculated that a salary of \$72,155 is needed to comfortably afford the average rent in California, based on a 40-hour work week and median rent.

It is essential to know that the UAW will not issue calls for the expansion of the strike or the active support of other sections of the working class, no matter how militant its members are. In fact, the UAW has come out openly against the "unauthorized" strikes of graduate students at other UC campuses, telling its UC Berkeley members that strikes not called by the union are unprotected activity and they would not call a strike even in the event that UCSC students are fired.

Instead, the union bureaucrats are directing appeals to the corporate-backed UC administration to reopen negotiations with the bargaining committee for a legal contract.

In order to continue the fight, grad students cannot trust in negotiations between the same administration and union that arranged their poverty in the first place. The most urgent task is to broaden the strike through direct appeals to other sections of students and workers to join forces in a common struggle. This means seeking active support from workers across the United States and internationally.

Within education alone, there exists a great number of working-class allies to whom UC students must turn their attention. Statewide wildcat strikes of public school employees shook West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona in 2018, followed by strikes in Los Angeles and Oakland at the beginning of 2019. None of the dire conditions driving these teachers to strike have been resolved.

In the United Kingdom, tens of thousands of academic workers started a four-week strike last week at 60 universities across the country, focused on the defense of pension benefits, wage increases, job security, and reduced workloads. Directly north of the United States, over 200,000 public school teachers

participated in large demonstrations in Ontario, Canada causing the unions to crack down and end the workplace actions out of fear of a broader expansion of the struggle. Teachers in St. Paul, Minnesota, in the United States are set to strike on March 10 for appropriate staff levels and pay.

In California, approximately 12,000 Santa Clara County workers covered by the Service Employees International Union, Local 521 are set to strike today (Friday) if an agreement is not reached, after workers have already been on the job without a renewed contract since June. On the other side of the United States, thousands of workers at more than one hundred Safeway grocery stores near Washington, D.C. will soon vote to strike over issues of low pay, lack of full-time positions, pensions and healthcare benefits.

These immediate examples of other points of the class struggle currently underway indicate the way forward, that is, relying upon the strength of the working class, united in struggle for their common class interests against their common ruling-class enemies.



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