

Striking University of California graduate students defy firings, expand strike

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

Strikers at the University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC) shut down campus today in response to the firing of what is now over 100 graduate student teaching assistants (TAs). The strike, now entering its fourth week, has spread to UC Davis (UCD) and UC Santa Barbara (UCSB) with solidarity actions, and in some cases, strike votes at most if not all of the 10 UC campuses. As support grows internationally, the UC administration remains intransigent while the trade unions and Democratic Party scramble to contain and dissipate the strike.

Statements of support continue to stream in from universities across the US, such as Northwestern University, University of Chicago, Rutgers University, and internationally, from the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. The strike's GoFundMe fund has raised more than \$230,000 from over 5,100 people.

In defiance of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union, these wildcat strikers are fighting for a cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) of roughly \$1,400-1,800 to ensure that they are able to afford housing in some of the most expensive parts of the country. Some 559 UCSC graduate students have pledged not to fill the TA vacancies left by the firings.

At UC Santa Cruz, several hundred graduate and undergraduate students blockaded the main road

leading to campus with a banner reading, "UC-wide solidarity." At UC Santa Barbara, at least several dozen graduate students rallied under the banner, "You're gonna have to fire us too, Janet!", referring to UC President and Obama-era Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano. Nearly 1,000 attended a demonstration at UC Davis. At UCLA 100-150 rallied, about 200 at UC Irvine, and many at UCSD as well. Medical students at UC San Francisco (UCSF) held a sit-in in solidarity at both of the university's campuses.

At UC Berkeley, graduate students held a general assembly and voted on solidarity statements. While there was no vote to strike at the meeting, the mood among Berkeley graduate students is to join the strike as soon as possible. Black Studies graduate students announced a strike this weekend.

Campaign teams from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with students at UCSC, UCLA, UC San Diego, and UC Irvine. They distributed a statement by Socialist Equality Party Vice Presidential candidate Norissa Santa Cruz calling for "the formation of rank-and-file committees to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the pro-capitalist and nationalist unions ..." to "fight for the broadest mobilization of the working class based on what workers and young people need, not what the big business political parties say is affordable." Students responded warmly to calls to attend SEP election meetings at UC Berkeley, UCLA, and UCSD this week.

Mohammed, a student at UCSD and one of the organizers of the rally, spoke about how the strike was launched without help from the UAW. "This began at UCSC in a strike against the UAW. The UAW, from the international level down to our local, has done a lot to squash rank-and-file movements. You see how all

the hope and energy in the beginning of the movement just gets sapped into supporting some obscure labor law.

“I think a general strike is desperately needed. Workers should see this as an instance where we defied the UC and the union bosses. I don’t put faith in elected officials. The UAW just takes our dues to support Democrats.

“The material conditions, the student debt, the lack of housing is making people realize that the way things have been going is not working. People are fed up, and time is running out. The UC is a big business. There’s this conception that we are an ivory tower, but the work really falls on the most disadvantaged.”

Students must draw the lessons of past struggles. It is no accident that, to wage any struggle against poverty wages, the graduate students had to defy the no-strike pledge imposed by the UAW and UC administration. The corrupt UAW has acted as a labor contractor for decades. Many of its top leaders have been brought down by a massive bribery and corruption scandal, and many have already been convicted for taking millions of dollars in bribes from the auto companies in exchange for concessions. True to form, the grievance filed by the UAW last week against the university is not that it fired the strikers, but that the university proposed negotiating with groups other than the UAW.

Every step forward in the strike is a step further away from the UAW, which is trying its hardest to constrain its members to “good faith negotiations” with the regents. There can be no good faith negotiations with a body whose interests are diametrically opposed to students. Whether it is UC President Janet Napolitano, who brutalized immigrants and coordinated the FBI crackdown on the Occupy protests, or the corrupt war profiteer Richard Blum, husband of Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein, the board of regents has no desire to undermine their business interests by paying grad students, adjuncts, and lecturers a livable wage or providing undergraduates an affordable education.

The graduate students’ fight for COLA and against victimization is fundamentally a political struggle against Napolitano, the UC Regents and the Democratic Newsom administration. To win, this strike must broaden to workers off as well as on the campuses. For example, 14,000 Northern California Safeway workers recently approved strike action after

the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) union kept them on the job for more than a year and a half after their last contract expired.

UC strikers should issue an appeal to workers across California and beyond to form rank-and-file committees to support their struggle. Workers across California must follow the lead of the UC graduate students and take the initiative into their own hands in an irreconcilable struggle against the Democratic Party and their supporters in the trade unions and pseudoleft organizations.

As a starting point, students and workers must reject claims that there is “no money” in a state with 163 billionaires. There must be full funding for public education, including COLA, an end to police repression on campuses, especially of homeless students, and above all, the rehiring of the victimized UCSC strikers.



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