

48,000 University of California graduate students in the UAW set to strike next week

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The WSWS has endorsed Will Lehman for UAW president. The deadline to mail in ballots in the UAW election to ensure that they are counted is November 18. If you have not received a ballot, go to uawvote.com and request one immediately. For more information on Lehman's campaign, visit WillforUAWPresident.org.

Academic workers in the United Auto Workers, across the expansive 10-campus University of California system, have voted by 98 percent for strike authorization over the past week.

A strike date has been set for the coming Monday, November 14, for 48,000 workers, including: 12,000 postdoctoral and academic researchers in Local 5810, who have been working without a contract since September 30; 19,000 tutors, readers and graduate student instructors and assistants in Local 2865, who have been kept on the job after numerous extensions were allowed since the June 30, 2020 contract expiration; and 17,000 grad students in the Student Researchers United (SRU-UAW), which was recognized in December.

The overwhelming strike authorization is an expression of the desire of workers everywhere to halt decades of attacks on their living and working conditions and crushing 9 percent inflation.

UC workers are part of a powerful global strike wave, which includes 55,000 Ontario education support workers, who are battling the Canadian provincial Ford government. The US strike is also taking place as auto workers, university workers and other workers in the UAW are voting in presidential elections, where Will Lehman, a socialist autoworker running for UAW president, is fighting to give power to the rank and file.

Academic workers—many of whom have families—are spending the majority of their paltry income on

skyrocketing rents, and numerous UC campuses are located in the most expensive cities in California. Many are living hand to mouth, describing horrible living conditions that include health hazards, the inability to afford day care, food insecurity and going without meals. They are demanding an end to their precarious financial situation.

While claiming there is no money to provide living wages for academic workers, the assets of the UC system stand at \$152.3 billion as of the end of the 2021-2022 academic year, according to the UC Office of the President. The largest public institution of higher learning in the world spans the entire state of California, with 10 campuses, five medical centers, one law school, 16 health professional schools, three national laboratories and numerous satellite facilities.

The University of California is the largest non-governmental employer in the state of California, which, if ranked as an independent country, has one of the largest economies in the world.

The reality is that the academic workers are the cheap labor workhorses that run the massive multibillion-dollar UC system. Workers are in a powerful position to win all of their demands and expand the global fight for wages and improvements. Such a victory, however, requires that workers take control of their struggle from the grips of the UAW apparatus, which has forced its membership to accept decade after decade of wage cuts and concessionary contracts.

The November 14 strike will be the first among academic workers in the UC system since the four-month-long wildcat strike of TAs and graduate student workers at UC Santa Cruz (UCSC) in 2020. That wildcat strike was initiated by a group of university workers at UCSC who were demanding cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) and organized strike action

independently of the leadership of UAW Local 2865.

The COLA strike rapidly expanded to other UC campuses and garnered the support of large sections of university workers, as well as broader sections of the working class. UAW officials attempted to direct the action into a toothless Unfair Labor Practices (ULP) lawsuit, which only ended up restricting workers' right to strike and did not resolve the issues for which they had been fighting.

The UAW bureaucracy has similarly defined next week's strike as a ULP action, limiting the struggle to exclude economic demands.

As the 2020 wildcat strike unfolded, the UAW bureaucracy was embroiled in a national corruption scandal that sent nearly two dozen top officials to jail for accepting bribes and gifts from the auto companies in exchange for imposing concessions contracts on workers, while furnishing lavish lifestyles as auto and university workers scraped by near the poverty line.

During the 2008 crash, the UAW apparatus collaborated with the auto companies and the Obama administration to halve the wages of new autoworkers and create punishing tier systems, where newly-hired workers pay union dues but have no rights. That is how the auto industry was "saved."

In the late 1990s, the UAW bureaucracy sought to offset the loss of dues income by "organizing" among more professional layers, including academic student employees in university systems across the country. The past two years have seen strikes by graduate student workers at University of Michigan Ann Arbor, New York University and Columbia University. Student workers at NYU and Columbia are also in the UAW.

As in the previous strikes of grad students, the UAW will do nothing to mobilize or even inform other workers in the UAW of the strike at UC. This is in line with the policy of the UAW apparatus of keeping workers isolated and blocking a united struggle in defense of jobs and living conditions.

The UAW has a strike fund of \$826 million as of March 2022, but academic strikers will only be entitled to a paltry \$400 per week in strike pay. This only benefits the UC system by helping to starve workers into submission. After years of paying dues, workers should demand a living wage to be paid from the union's reserves to ensure that they can stay out until

their demands are met. Total assets for the UAW stand at \$1.6 billion according to their latest LM-2 financial report, if one includes the assets of all locals.

The university workers are in a powerful position to fight for significant improvements, not only for themselves, but for the working class as a whole, as the UC system plays a critical role in setting the bar for wages and working conditions throughout the state and beyond its borders.

Such a fight pits workers against the Democratic Party, which controls the UC Board of Regents and is no less hostile to the interests of workers than the Republicans. The Democrats rely on the apparatus of the UAW and other trade unions to suppress the class struggle and block a united fight of all workers against poverty and exploitation.

In order for the grad student workers to win their struggle, they must take control of their own destiny and build democratically-run rank-and-file committees to coordinate their struggle and make a direct appeal to workers throughout the UAW and beyond. These committees should advanced definite economic and social demands based on what grad students need, not what the UC regents claim they can afford.

We urge graduate student workers to support and vote for Will Lehman, a rank-and-file socialist autoworker from Pennsylvania, who is running for UAW president in the current UAW elections to abolish the UAW apparatus and give power to the rank and file. Read Will Lehman's call for academic workers to vote for him, learn about his campaign and program, and cast your vote for Will for UAW president.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is ready to provide assistance to any students or academic workers who want to build rank-and-file committees. Contact us today. Mail your ballot for socialist Will Lehman for UAW president by November 18! Watch and share his latest campaign statement video!



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wsws.org/contact