

UAW local covering 11,000 University of California postdoc and academic researchers announces sellout agreements, as union seeks to shut down strike

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United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 5810, which covers 11,000 postdoc and academic researchers (ARs) on strike in the University of California (UC) system, announced that it reached agreements on Tuesday. The announcement of the agreements is an attempt by the UAW bureaucracy to divide, isolate and shut down the powerful strike of 48,000 academic workers just as it is making its largest impact.

The tentative agreements (TAs) separately cover 6,500 postdoctoral scholars and 4,500 academic researchers. Following the announcement of the agreements, Local 5810's leadership attempted to portray the TAs in the most favorable light, claiming that postdocs would receive a "20-23% salary increase" by October 2023 and that ARs would receive a 29 percent salary increase over the life of the 5-year contract.

The actual wage increases for postdocs outlined in the TA are 7.5 percent in the first year and 3.5 percent in subsequent years. For ARs, the TA has an increase of 4.5 percent in the first year and 3.5 percent in subsequent years, except the last year when they would receive a 4 percent increase. The wage increases in the TAs are largely in line with the UC administration's earlier proposals.

Most significantly, the agreements do not include a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) protection, which has been a central demand of the strikers.

The UAW International apparatus wants to end the strike as soon as possible, just as it is beginning to have its biggest impact with end of the semester grading coming up. This is motivated by two factors: First, the

strike is pitting academic workers directly in opposition to the Democratic Party, with which the UAW is closely aligned and which controls California politics and the UC Board of Regents.

Second, the demands of the UC strikers, particularly for COLA, resonate with hundreds of thousands of workers in the US confronting soaring inflation and seeking to fight against UAW-imposed contracts.

The wage proposal has already been denounced on social media. One worker on Reddit stated, "A complete slap in the face for ARs. A 0.5% bump over the last 3% offer, not even in the first year of the contract."

Another UAW member wrote, "'Most Postdocs will receive a 20-23% salary increase (up to \$12,000) by October 2023' What does this even mean? It seems a far cry from the 'strike for 70'. What are the base salaries by which these percentages are being calculated?"

Striking academic workers have been particularly outraged over the dropping of COLA by all the UAW locals. Cole, a UC Berkeley worker, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "I worry that too many people don't understand that COLA goes beyond just a number. It's not a matter of an extra percent in the contract but reworking the concepts we come to the table with, no longer accepting a yearly pay cut from inflation.

"I worry about what effect these TAs will have on the other contracts. If the postdocs and academic researchers ratify them, that leaves us isolated.

"The UAW presents this contract as just a stepping stone for the future, but a five-year contract is a long

time for a single step. If all this effort doesn't get a big win, if agreements for raises below inflation are passed, I worry that it will be demoralizing. A lot of us have poured time into preparing and running this strike, and it might be years before we can rally university workers again.

"We can tell that we need a lot of organizing outside of just contract negotiations. Whether intentionally or not, it feels like the bargaining team is keeping those of us on the picket line tired. People need to rest. They want us to put up a big show on the picket, but they don't seem as interested to hear about what we want in the contract."

The postdoc TA also includes child care reimbursements of up to \$2,500—which will be raised to \$2,800 by the end of the contract—*annually*. In 2021, the UAW local noted that average *monthly* child care costs on the UC campuses was \$2,380.

The local has announced that postdocs and ARs will remain on the picket line until the contracts are ratified, and that it will provide information on dates for the ratification votes and "town halls" to discuss the contract.

The announcement of the TAs for postdocs and ARs is aimed at dividing the striking workers, the better to force through sellout agreements.

UAW Local 2865—which is composed of teaching assistants, graduate student instructors, tutors and readers—and Student Researchers United-UAW (SRU-UAW) have not announced agreements. However, 27 members of Local 2865 and SRU-UAW's bargaining teams released a public statement earlier this week openly abandoning the demand for COLA.

Rank-and-file strikers attended a bargaining session between the UAW and UC administration—which is broadcast over Zoom—on Tuesday. At the meeting, strikers flooded the chat with "No COLA, No contract" messages, which has become a regular occurrence at bargaining sessions. When strikers later confronted the bargaining team during a caucusing meeting, Michael Dean, a member of the UAW 2865 bargaining team, opted to discreetly leave the call.

The move to shut down the strike and impose concessions contracts underscores the urgent necessity for the establishment of a rank-and-file strike committee, to take control of the strike out of the hands of the UAW apparatus, formulate the demands of

striking workers, establish unity among all job classifications, and reach out to the broadest layers of the working class.



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