# UAW tries to silence opposition as University of California strikers press their demand for higher wages, COLA

**Our reporters**
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*A group of striking UC academic workers has formed an independent rank-and-file strike committee and issued the following statement. The struggle continues across the expansive University of California system, the largest institution of higher learning in the world. To join the committee, email ucstrikerfc@gmail.com.*

Opposition continues to grow against efforts by the United Auto Workers bureaucracy to sabotage the powerful strike by 48,000 academic workers at the University of California (UC) and push through an austerity contract dictated by Governor Gavin Newsom and the corporate and finanical interests behind him.

UC student workers, now in the fourth week of their walkout, are demanding significant raises, cost-of-living protection, expanded health and childcare benefits, and job security.

One of the UAW bargaining units, Local 5810, has agreed to a concessionary agreement, which Postdocs and academic researchers are voting on this week. The UAW bureaucracy is pushing a separate deal to split and weaken the striking workers and force them to submit to the university's demands. There is widespread opposition to the agreement reached by the local, which would push them back to work without COLA and with insulting wage increases that are well below the rate of inflation.

But UAW and the UC officials have miscalculated the determination of academic workers who are in no mood to accept another concessionary contract, and are deeply committed to the unity of striking workers. At a town hall meeting hosted by UAW 5810 Monday night, many workers denounced the deal and the fact that it is for five years. This means the contract for postdocs and academic researchers would expire two-and-a-half years later than Academic Student Employees (UAW 2865) and Student Researchers (SRU-UAW). This is, of course, by design, but Local 5810 officials justified this by claiming they were only able to gain "concessions" from UC by agreeing to the five-year length.

The hostility of the UAW bureaucracy to rank-and-file workers was on display Monday during a rally for a "fair contract" in the state capital in Sacramento. A striking worker reported that she was verbally and physically assaulted by members of the UAW Local 2865 bargaining team for bringing a sign that challenged the union's claims that its contract was a "historic" victory for strikers.

According to her testimony, which was posted online, the worker was holding her sign as UAW speakers were addressing the rally in front of the University of California Office of the President (UCOP) headquarters. Several UAW bureaucrats tried to block anyone from seeing the sign, denoucing the striker for being "selfish" and "sabotaging the union." When the worker refused to be intimidated, they tried to tear the sign out of her hands before shoving her to the ground and trying to trample the sign. "After they did this level of violence, they backed off from physically interacting with me. They continued blocking signs though indefinitely," the worker wrote.

Just prior to the Thanksgiving holiday, the Bargaining Teams of the Student Researchers United (SRU) initiated a vote in closed door sessions for members of the bargaining team from all three UAW locals to conceal their names from the membership during their votes on contract terms. They said this was necessary to protect them from threats and harassment from the rank and file. Now these same people are organizing thuggish attacks on striking workers.

In response, one striker told the WSWS, "I am horrified that this student had to go through this. This shows how

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much they are trying to squash any dissenting voices!”

While the UAW bureaucracy carried out this attack outside, local officials staged a publicity stunt “sit-in” at the university president’s office, leading to the arrest of 17 people for trespassing. The stage-managed antic was nothing but a cover for the UAW bureaucracy, which is seeking to crush opposition to its sellout of the strike.

Even as Local 5810, seeks to push through its rotten deal, bargainers from UAW Local 2865 and Student Researchers United-UAW have also removed or lowered their demands. This includes lowering the demand for starting base pay from $54,000, dropping dependent health care, and removing all language supporting workers with disabilities. This is on top of dropping the demand for cost-of-living protection (COLA).

Striking workers are increasingly realizing they are not only in a struggle against the UC Regents, but the UAW bureaucracy itself, which is attached at the hip to Governor Newsom and the Democratic Party establishment.

The most significant achievement over the past week has been the founding of a UC Rank-and-File Strike Committee, which has called on strikers to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the UAW apparatus, and into their own. The UCRFSC is circulating a powerful statement calling for a NO vote by the Postdocs and Academic Researchers and the mobilization of broader sections of the working class to win the strike.

The current bargaining team has demonstrated that it is completely on the other side. It must be removed and replaced with a new negotiating body, controlled democratically by the rank-and-file, to advance and fight for the demands that workers need. This includes inflation-busting raises, COLA, fully paid health and childcare and secure jobs.

Striking workers are expressing support for the UC Rank-and-File Strike Committee and joining its ranks.

Tracy, a teaching assistant in the Political Science Department at UC Irvine told the WSWS, “We were almost starting to consider that maybe we were reaching a contract that we think is ready to vote on. Then we heard that they were going to pull out COLA, and that really was like a gut punch to us. So we’re sitting here being hit by inflation, which is at an all-time high. The fact that they don’t want to include that is really frustrating because we’re feeling like they’re not listening to us, and this is a big thing.

“A lot of the smaller, more minor agreements that we wanted, like green transportation and anti-bullying language in our contracts, we got those very quickly. But on the big economic proposals, the university is still very stingy. The fact that they can’t adjust for cost of living in one of the most expensive places to live in America, it frustrates us. We feel like they’re not receiving our message.

“We have people paying 40, 50, 60 percent of their income towards rent, and they’re saying that they’re not going to adjust that. And what’s more frustrating is we're seeing tuition being adjusted for inflation and we're seeing salaries of you know, the upper level people, like the Regents, being adjusted for inflation. But you’re telling us that our salaries can’t be adjusted? Yeah, it’s very frustrating.

“They’re trying to pick off the postdocs. That’s absolutely what they’re trying to do.” She said postdocs had made some improvements in their contract proposals on wages and paid time off. “But then we look at the TAs and academic student employees, we can’t keep living on $22,000 a year.

“So, yeah, there’s a lot of strategy that we have to think through and solidarity because, you know, it can’t be just one-quarter of us winning. We all have to win. This is a collective effort. Last night I was talking with my political science peers. We want to keep pushing for as long as possible.”

In response to the dictatorial moves by Congress and the Biden administration to impose a concessions contract on 120,000 railroad workers, Tracy noted, “Something we have to always keep in mind is that whenever you’re striking, you’re never just striking for yourself or your area of employment because what you do has ripple effects that inspire others in the labor movement all across the country.”

*To join the* UC Rank-and-File Strike Committee, *email ucstrikerfc@gmail.com.*

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