

Vote NO on sellout tentative agreements!

36,000 UC academic workers to vote on concessions contract agreed to by UAW

Hong Jian
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Reject the sellout contract and fight for rank-and-file control! Join the UC Rank-and-File Strike Committee by emailing ucstrikerfc@gmail.com. Alternatively, fill out the form below and the WSWS will forward your information to the committee.

On December 16, bargaining teams for United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 2865 and Student Researchers United (SRU-UAW) announced they had reached tentative agreements to shut down a strike by 36,000 graduate student workers in the University of California system. A snap vote will begin this next Monday, December 19, and will last until Friday, December 23.

Midway through the fifth week the United Auto Workers (UAW) bargaining teams sent out messages announcing that progress had been made which “resulted in significant movement that is worth serious consideration.”

This “significant movement” supposedly came only days after the appointment of mediator Darrell Steinberg, the current mayor of Sacramento. He sits on the Advisory Board of the UC Davis Chancellor’s Office, a flagrant conflict of interest. Bargaining teams held a caucus Thursday morning to discuss a settlement proposed by Steinberg which was formally accepted by the UAW Friday.

The “significant progress” has resulted in sellouts that will do nothing to raise graduate students out of poverty or meet skyrocketing inflation. The base starting salary is only \$34,000—\$20,000 less than the original demand of a base starting salary of \$54,000. Even then, it does not actually kick in until October 1, 2024, at the end of the life of the current contract. The lowest paid academic workers will see a tiny increase in their pay from \$23,247 to \$25,000 within 90 days of

ratification. Then on October 1, 2023, it will rise to \$29,125 a year.

The offer is in fact a \$9,000 climb-down from their unilateral cave-in last week, from \$54,000 to \$43,000 a year, which they claimed at the time would spur the UC to acquiesce to their wage demands. As can be seen, this was sheer fantasy.

The BTs and their hangers-on have been touting that this new proposal was a win for international students with the incorporation of language which allows doctoral students to forego the Non-Resident Supplemental Tuition (NRST) program charges for the first three years of their doctoral studies.

But considering that international students almost uniformly find the current financial burdens intolerable, codifying the current UC policy in regard to NRST is a stab in the back to every international student, most of whom are struggling financially but are expected to pay more for the same opportunities simply because of where they were born.

The only thing in the proposal which is actually an improvement over past proposals is the increase in the child care reimbursement program by up to \$1,000 for those on the quarter system. Yet this is only a reimbursement program, meaning students will still have to pay all costs up front, which can amount to around \$2,000 a month. Students will still be on the hook for over \$6,000 in child care costs each year.

During Thursday’s caucuses, the BTs were accused of lining up their supporters and friends to speak first, who kept to a script of set talking points, while spamming the chat in the online conferencing software so that criticisms were drowned out.

The BTs were not able to censor all dissent, however,

as one speaker after another denounced the paltry wage increases, while also denouncing the creation of a tier system wherein academic workers at three universities, UC Berkeley, UCLA and UC San Francisco, would receive higher compensation than academic workers doing the same job at the other schools. They pointed out as well that the BTs were abandoning international and disabled academic workers.

After the caucus, the BTs released the full written proposals. As one academic worker tweeted, “I have stayed generally quiet about the strike at the UC, but the current amount that our union and the university are negotiating on, is enough to kick everyone in our department off of public assistance eligibility, yet nowhere near enough to cover those new costs.”

Within hours of the announcement of the TA Friday, UAW International President Ray Curry released a statement praising the contract. “These tentative agreements include major pay increases and expanded benefits which will improve the quality of life for all members of the bargaining unit,” he claimed.

Graduate students have been striking because ultra-low wages have left most of them rent-insecure, with many even homeless. Many more are forced to visit food pantries on a regular basis as their wages are simply too low, with most making under \$26,000 a year. This, in one of the most expensive places in the world to live. Across California, rent for a one-bedroom apartment averages \$1,854 a month, which comes to \$22,248 a year. Rents in the areas in and around the cities where the UC campuses are located are significantly higher.

The fact that the BTs posted the written proposals from the UC with the words, “These proposals reflect the priorities that the bargaining teams articulated to the mediator to UC over the last two days,” should be taken as yet another warning.

The BTs have renounced one demand of academic workers after another. From the initial abandonment of Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLA), to the continuous climb-down over wages in the past two weeks, the UAW bureaucracy has done everything in its power to stifle the demands of academic workers for a decent contract that provides a decent standard of living.

With tens of thousands of workers across California currently working without a contract, the last thing the UAW and the Democratic Party want is for the historic

strike of UC academic workers to become a catalyst for a much wider struggle of the working class as whole. This is the reason the BTs appealed to Newsom to intervene. This is exactly what Newsom did with the appointment of the trusted operative Steinberg.

Graduate students must reject this contract by the widest possible margin. But this must be connected with a fight to take the struggle out of the hands of the UAW bureaucracy. These bureaucrats have proven by their own actions that there is no line which they will not cross. The BTs must be thrown out and replaced with ones consisting of rank-and-file graduate students who will fight for their interests.

This is what the UC Rank-and-File Strike Committee (UCRFSC), organized by graduate students to oppose the betrayals of the union bureaucracy and fight for democratic control of the struggle, called for in its December 9 statement.

To contact the UC-RFSC and take up the fight for rank-and-file control, contact them by emailing ucstrikerfc@gmail.com. Alternatively, fill out the form below and the WSWS will forward your information to the committee.



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