

Vote “No” on UAW-backed sellout deal! Build rank-and-file committees to expand and win the UC strike!

UC Rank-and-File Strike Committee
19 December 2022

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 end a strike of 36,000 academic workers in the University of California system. The agreement was mediated by a Democratic Party mediator, Darrell Steinberg, the mayor of Sacramento. Teaching assistants, student researchers and other academic workers are voting on the deal this week. The following is a statement from the University of California Rank-and-File Strike Committee (UCRFSC) calling for a rejection of the five-year agreements and the rallying of workers behind a new strategy to win their struggle. To contact the committee, email ucstrikerfc@gmail.com.

Over the “last” month we have been engaged in the largest higher education strike in US history. We have fought this battle to guarantee the right of all academic workers to live decently and earn enough not to be homeless or reliant on food pantries.

But the mediator’s proposal, which the bargaining teams for UAW Local 2864 and the UAW-SRU agreed to, would leave us in poverty. Over the last several years, rents have doubled. If we accept this miserable contract, we will be stuck in a life of debt and under-employment over the next five years, even as we struggle to obtain our Ph.D. and Master’s degrees.

The University of California Rank-and-File Strike Committee urges all workers to reject the contract by the widest margin possible. This will send a signal to the UC administrators, the powerful corporate and financial forces behind them and the UAW bureaucracy that we will not accept a contract that ignores our basic demands.

It will also send a powerful message to dockworkers, nurses, railroaders and other sections of the working class that we must stand up together against the relentless attack on living standards, public education and other social rights.

We demanded a base-annual pay of \$54,000 a year, an entirely modest amount for the most expensive state in America. But the mediator and UAW officials say we must accept a base salary of \$25,000, which would rise to \$29,125 by October 1, 2023 and \$34,000 by October 1, 2024. These salaries are before taxes and will only be paid if we teach 12 months out of the year.

The average one-bedroom in Los Angeles went for \$2,460 a month this November or \$29,520 a year. This is roughly equivalent to what we will be making, again before taxes, by the end of next year. Where are we supposed to get the money for food, child care, transportation and other basic necessities?

We also demanded Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLA), something that UAW members first won in 1948! But the University and the mediator have flatly refused to give us COLA, and the UAW bargaining teams dropped this key demand early on in the strike. Without COLA, however, inflation, which remains above 7 percent nationally and is even higher in California, will continue to eat up our insufficient paychecks.

Many of our other demands—sufficient child care reimbursement, high quality, affordable medical coverage for dependents, waving international student fees, significantly improving disability access, and COVID-19 protection—all remain unmet. The UC has also flatly refused our demand to defund police departments.

In short, the UAW bargaining teams have endorsed an agreement that maintains our role as poverty-laborers and a cheap labor force for the University. The contract will hurt the most vulnerable among us, condemning them to inadequate care and compensation.

The UAW bureaucracy is trying to ram this contract down our throats with a snap vote. Most of us are not on campus. Some of us are abroad in other countries, and this is the peak of the holiday season.

Within hours of the announcement of the TA Friday, UAW International President Ray Curry released a statement hailing the sellout deal for including “major pay increases and expanded benefits which will improve the quality of life for all members of the bargaining unit.” This is a patent lie from a bureaucrat who pocketed \$272,000 last year and whose predecessors landed in jail for taking corporate bribes and embezzling union dues.

The UAW and the corporate media treat the TA as a done deal. But now we will have our say. The first step is for striking workers to mobilize on social media and in other venues to get out the largest “No” vote possible. This means opposing the efforts of the UAW bureaucracy to use lies and intimidation to sell this rotten deal.

The resounding defeat of this sellout, however, is only the beginning. We need an entirely different strategy to win this struggle. This must be based on a clear understanding that we are engaged in an irreconcilable class struggle.

On the one side are the administrators, backed up by powerful corporate and political forces, including Governor Gavin Newsom, Mediator Darrell Steinberg and the corrupt UAW bureaucracy. The phony concern for workers’ rights by Biden and the Democrats was on full display earlier this month when Congress voted to block a strike and impose a contract on 110,000 railroad workers which they had previously rejected. This strikebreaking was backed by the Democrats’ supposed progressive wing, including Democratic Socialists of America member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

On the opposite side of the barricades are the academic workers and tens of millions of workers like us throughout the US and internationally who are fighting to defend their jobs and livelihoods.

The existing bargaining teams have proven that they are loyal to the UAW bureaucracy and the Democratic Party, not to academic workers. They must be removed and replaced by a committee, elected and controlled by the rank and file and committed to the demands we set out at the beginning of our strike.

Second, our struggle will not survive if it remains isolated. To break the isolation, we must turn outward. We should send delegations of academic workers to dockworkers, health care workers, railway workers, K-12 educators, and other critical sections of the working class who are fighting the corporations, the government and the union bureaucracies too.

We call on all those who agree with us, who wish to fight, all those who will not budge from demanding COLA, from a \$54,000 base pay, from unequivocal accessibility for disabled students to contact us and join this committee.

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.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact