

UAW delays strike vote against campus crackdown to next week for California grad students, sparking rank-and-file anger

Bryan Dyne, Tom Hall
6 May 2024

Graduate students, autoworkers and other workers: Tell us what you think about the strike vote and what has to be done to stop the police assault on protests! All submissions will be kept anonymous.

On Monday, United Auto Workers Local 4811 announced it will hold a vote from May 13 to May 15 on whether to authorize a strike against the police crackdown on college campuses. Local 4811 is made up of 48,000 graduate student workers across the entire 10-campus University of California (UC) system and the Lawrence Berkeley Labs.

That fact that a vote has been called is in response to enormous, uncontrollable rank-and-file anger over the state crackdown over the right to protest against genocide. Campuses have been turned into occupied zones across the country. At UCLA, the arrests of protesters began after last week's police-abetted fascist/Zionist assault on the Palestine Solidarity Encampment. The brutal attack lasted five hours.

A further 44 protesters were arrested on Monday, including journalist William Gude, who has since been released.

The *World Socialist Web Site* fully supports graduate student workers' demands for strike action to force an end to the genocide and the police state measures in defense of it. Last week, the WSWs published a statement by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, calling for an international political strike in defense of the students, mobilizing the strength of the working class as the basic force against war.

In particular, the statement demanded the UAW call immediate walkouts of its entire 400,000 members, including in the auto and defense plants.

Jerry White, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for US vice president, spoke to autoworkers in Detroit about the campus protests. "They're not out there fighting or causing riots, they're just speaking about how they feel," said one Detroit autoworker, defending the anti-genocide protesters. "We're supposed to have the right to freedom of speech, but it's being taken away from them."

Jerry White then noted, "And if they could do it to the students, they are going to do it to the working class too," to

which the worker responded emphatically, "Yes."

UAW bureaucracy stalling for time

However, the IWA-RFC statement warned that the union bureaucracy was moving to block action. "If the bureaucrats refuse, or try to stall for time, workers should throw them out and replace them—not with career officials, but with leaders drawn from the shop floor who are prepared to enforce the democratic will of the working class," the statement continued.

Sabotaging any action is exactly what the UAW bureaucracy, which has endorsed the re-election of "Genocide Joe" and has the closest ties to the Biden White House, is doing. The decision to wait another week before even *beginning* a vote on whether to strike *if* "circumstances [are] justified," in the words of Local 4811, is designed to stall for time and even try to avoid calling a strike at all.

In the intervening seven days, Israel's long-planned assault on Rafah will be well under way, killing thousands. Meanwhile, the police and both parties will continue their rampage against students, and they will have ample time to prepare to respond to any strike that Local 4811 does call.

Other campus unions around the country are also blocking strike action during the police crackdowns. At the University of Michigan, the lecturers' union is attempting to push through a sellout contract without a strike, even as the university has seen some of the most vicious attacks on protests in the country.

That union is part of the American Federation of Teachers, which has the closest ties to the Democrats and the military, expressed above all by union President Randi Weingarten, who slanders the protests as "antisemitic."

Among UC grad student workers, the announcement of the delayed vote produced anger and frustration. "Why the hell are we waiting another full week to vote on a strike?" one grad student posted on Twitter/X. "Do we need another week of police brutality and slaughter of Palestinians to decide if now is

the right time to strike?”

Another Twitter/X user said: “Despite the increased police repression of free speech and intensified police occupations happening across the UCs, last night @uaw_4811 voted down Cops Off Campus as a demand for the upcoming potential strike because, and I quote, ‘now is not the time.’” But “If not now, when?” he demanded.

UAW officials see the strike vote as a means of blowing off steam, not organizing a struggle. In its statement announcing the vote, Local 4811 called on the university administration to work with it to “de-escalate” the situation. It added: “This de-escalation is possible: Brown, Northwestern, Evergreen State, Rutgers, University of Minnesota, and UC Riverside were able to reach agreements with student protesters.”

This amounts to a declaration that the bureaucracy wants to help shut down the protests. The Northwestern University deal, which ended protests in exchange for toothless promises from the university administration, sparked outrage as a betrayal. The UC Riverside deal committed the university to nothing more than bimonthly meetings, the formation of a “task force” and similar measures.

At any rate, the end of the genocide cannot come from talks with university officials but only through mobilizing the working class to force an end to the war. Behind campus officials’ lies, American imperialism’s two main parties are joining hands to ban opposition to war.

Mass arrests at UC San Diego

This is why attacks on protests are only “escalating” without restriction. At UC San Diego, an additional 64 arrests have been made. Videos on social media show students being frog-marched by heavily armed police onto police buses. Afterwards, hundreds gathered at the San Diego central jail demanding that police “let them go.”

Manuel, a UCSD student, told the WSWS, “Early at 5:00 a.m. the police arrived. When I got to campus early, all the parking structures were blockaded, and everything was closed. It was only open to pedestrians. This was a deliberate tactic to choke out the protesters, prevent the arrival of supporters and press, and isolate them.

“Things took a turn for the worst around 10:00 a.m. when they began arresting people and taking them to a prison bus in a cul-de-sac behind Price Center. It was clear they had showed up to make mass arrests. After [police finished] handcuffing and putting protesters on the bus, students tried to physically block the bus from moving and eventually the police intervened to move the blockade.

The university then announced in an email at 6:18 p.m. that “... out of an abundance of caution in light of current

circumstances, all campus instruction will be moved to a remote modality effective immediately.” Photos show that the university enforced this with police blockades on campus.

The working class must respond

Any delay in strike action is unacceptable. Neither students nor workers, and certainly not the Palestinians, can wait another week for a strike vote whose outcome, at any rate, is a foregone conclusion.

Graduate student workers must mobilize to countermand this slow-motion sellout. They should organize their own rank-and-file strike vote and form their own strike committees, uncontrolled by the UAW apparatus, to enforce their democratic will.

Autoworkers also have an obligation to take action to defend the students. The fight against war and police repression is a class issue. The pro-war, pro-corporate parties cracking down on students will not hesitate to use the same methods against striking industrial workers. And it is workers across the world who are being made to pay for imperialist war.

Moreover, the same union bureaucracy and pro-war government joined hands last fall to force through a massive sellout on autoworkers, which Biden hailed as a “historic” victory. Since then, thousands have lost their jobs, and others are now working 70 hours a week without limits.

Biden is using the UAW and the other unions to block or limit strikes and impose wartime discipline on workers. The UAW bureaucracy ignored a strike vote at Allison Transmission, a key defense plant making parts for Israeli fighting vehicles. UAW President Shawn Fain is also appearing in public with a picture of a B-24 bomber, effectively declaring American workers have to build weapons just as they did in World War II.

This, too, requires that workers take the initiative out of the hands of the bureaucrats. The growing network of autoworker rank-and-file committees must also turn to connect the fight against layoffs with the fight against war and police violence.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact