

For a UAW-wide strike against the police attack on campuses! Autoworkers must defend the right to protest!

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I'm Will Lehman, and I'm a Mack Trucks worker in Macungie, Pennsylvania with a message for autoworkers across the United States and the world.

Next week, California graduate students, who are also UAW members, are voting on strike action to stop the police crackdown on the student protests. This is an important step that deserves the support of the whole working class.

At issue is the basic First Amendment right to free speech. Both the Democrats and Republicans are sending in riot cops against students conducting peaceful protests against the genocide in Gaza. UCLA was one of many schools where protest encampments were attacked by police. The cops also stood by while right-wing Zionists attacked protesters during the night.

If they can get away with banning protests against genocide, next they will send riot cops against the picket lines. Nobody should forget that Biden joined arms with Republicans to ban a railroad strike in 2022, just as they're joining arms against students now.

Urgent action is needed because the situation in Gaza is horrific. Tens of thousands are already dead, and the 2 million left alive are at risk of starvation. Israel is beginning its assault on the city of Rafah, where more than 1 million have taken refuge with nowhere to go. Without action to force a stop to the war, tens of thousands or more will die.

We, as the working class, have to support the students. Corporate politicians won't listen to reason. The only way to stop the war and defend our rights is by taking matters into our own hands as the working class, who create all of society's wealth.

That is why I'm calling on my fellow UAW members to demand immediate strike action by the entire 400,000-strong membership.

We must begin fighting for this now. Hold mass meetings at your workplace to discuss actions.

In the face of inevitable opposition from the UAW bureaucracy, organize rank-and-file strike committees to enforce your democratic will.

The union's endorsement of "Genocide Joe" Biden and its ties with the Democrats and the White House, financed with our dues money, must be ended.

This should be the beginning of a broader movement involving the whole working class in the US and internationally.

The US government is backing this genocide because they see it as part of a single world war stretching from Ukraine to China. They are risking nuclear war in order to defend the profits of Wall Street by controlling natural resources and supply chains and destroying its main rivals.

But the other important front in this war is at home against the working class. The same corporate interests behind the war in Gaza are carrying out mass layoffs to smash our resistance to exploitation. So far this year, thousands of autoworkers have already lost their jobs, often with no notice.

We have to combine the fight against war and attacks on our rights with the fight to defend jobs. The trillions of dollars being spent on killing are being pumped out of our labor, and it is the workers of the world who are being killed. Instead, that money has to be used to guarantee good paying jobs and a high standard of living for all.

The campuses are not ivory towers but centers of exploitation just like the auto factories. The graduate student workers voting to strike are treated as a bottom-tier workforce, just like the supplemental workers in the plants.

Many can't afford rent and have to rely on food banks.

After they graduate, they face a lifetime as lecturers or adjunct professors where they are paid by the course, with no hope of moving up to full-time faculty positions, much less reaching tenure. This is no different than the situation facing young autoworkers, who have little hope of ever being hired in as full-timers and reaching the top rate.

Defending the students means a fight against the UAW bureaucrats. They are the lackeys of pro-war politicians such as “Genocide Joe” Biden and the corporations they serve. It’s notable that they’ve done nothing to publicize this strike vote. Many autoworkers are even unaware that UC grad students are UAW members, much less that 48,000 of them are.

Last November, the UAW shut down a limited auto strike and rammed through a new contract that is being used to carry out layoffs. To promote it, UAW President Shawn Fain appeared on stage with Biden, while outside the hall, thousands protested against the genocide.

The UAW later passed a toothless resolution in favor of a ceasefire in Gaza. But in January they endorsed “Genocide Joe” and threw out anti-war protesters. Biden gave a warmongering acceptance speech calling on workers to build aircraft carriers and tanks. Now Fain goes around wearing a shirt with a bomber on it, implying that workers have to make weapons like they did in World War II.

The bureaucracy is struggling to keep the California grad students isolated. They delayed their strike vote an extra week and have not called for strikes anywhere else. They’ve made clear that they want to reach a deal like at Northwestern University to shut down protests in exchange for worthless pledges for the school to divest from Israel.

But even the UAW bureaucracy itself refuses to divest. Last week, Fain even vetoed a motion to rid the union of its investments in Israel, making them a financial partner in the war.

Workers are furious at the UAW’s treachery. There are growing demands in particular for them to rescind the endorsement of Biden. Grad students are also angry over the role of Local 4811 officials in allowing police into the UCLA encampment. The bureaucrats play the same role on every picket line, enforcing whatever the police and the courts tell us we’re not allowed to do.

There is enormous potential for a fight uniting autoworkers with the students. This week, workers at Warren Stamping voted to strike over health and safety. Workers there and at plants across the country have told the *World Socialist Web Site* they oppose the campus

crackdowns and want to defend the students.

But to do this requires we take the initiative and not wait for the bureaucrats to act for us. They only ever act against us. We have to develop the rank-and-file structures that give us real power to enforce our will and countermand the bureaucracy’s betrayals.

Above all, we have to recognize that this is a class struggle. The ruling elite is putting the whole society on a war footing. The role of the bureaucracy is to impose labor discipline. But we as workers are more powerful, so long as we’re organized and have the right political perspective.

As I said in my recent speech at the WSWWS Online May Day Rally:

We, the workers of the world, have the power in our hands to put an end to imperialist war once and for all. It is we who produce all the wealth of society. It is we who run the factories, the plants, logistics and transportation. But we workers have to learn the lessons of history. And we have to recognize our own class interests and how to understand who is lying to us and who is telling us the truth.

If you agree with this, contact the *World Socialist Web Site* below for help getting started. Distribute this statement among your coworkers and set up local meetings to discuss actions that you can take. Form rank-and-file committees at your workplace and affiliate them to the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which includes autoworkers, postal and logistics workers and others all over the world.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact