

University of California grad students overwhelmingly authorize strike against campus crackdowns

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United Auto Workers Local 4811 announced Wednesday night that 48,000 academic workers across the University of California system have voted to strike by 79 percent across all campuses. The UC workers are demanding an end to the police state repression against protests and encampments opposing the genocide in Gaza.

The vote is an important stand that points to the immense potential for a broader struggle linking the fight against war with opposition in the working class to inequality and exploitation.

The struggle by educators is developing across the country. In Detroit and across Michigan, teachers and school workers are facing tens of millions of dollars in budget cuts, including mass layoffs and pay reductions to para-professionals amid the ending of federal COVID-19 funding by the Biden administration.

While the UC vote was being conducted, Jerry White, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for vice president in the 2024 US elections, recently spoke at a school board meeting in Ann Arbor and called for the unity of all these struggles in a fight against capitalism. He said:

Workers are fighting back. I urge you to support the 48,000 University of California academic workers, members of the UAW, who are voting to strike to protect their students and free speech, and to stop the US-backed genocide in Gaza. This is a political strike to halt the police crackdown on campus protests that is being backed by Biden and both corporate parties.

The defense of jobs and public education will not be achieved through backroom deals by the DFT and Michigan Federation of Teachers and other unions, which are allied with the pro-war Democrats.

It will only be achieved through the determined struggle by rank-and-file educators to unite with healthcare, auto and logistics workers and broader sections of the working class to fight for social needs to take priority over corporate profit and war.

The spark for the strike vote came from the rank-and-file membership after a police-abetted fascist and Zionist mob attacked the Palestine Solidarity Encampment at UCLA for five hours the night of April 30, while police stood by. Both students and members of UAW 4811 were attacked, with dozens forced to go to the hospital as a result of injuries sustained during the assault.

The next day, instead of arresting those who carried out the attack, police swooped in to clear the encampment. They did so with the support of UAW officials, who allowed them through the barricades that had been erected.

Since then, the intimidation tactics have only escalated. On Wednesday, protesting students at UC Irvine expanded their tent encampment to include the Physical Sciences building. They renamed the building Alex Odeh Hall, after the Palestinian activist who was assassinated by Zionists who planted a pipe bomb at his Santa Ana, California office in 1985.

In response, the university administration called in a massive police force to attack the protesters, including arresting at least three faculty. Police were sent from the California Highway Patrol, the Orange County Sheriff's Department, and the cities of La Palma, Garden Grove, Irvine, La Habra, Fountain Valley and Costa Mesa. At least five helicopters circled above, one of which was equipped with a loudspeaker that broadcast orders to the protesters to disperse or be arrested.

According to comments from protesters, among those who have been suspended by the university in retaliation for the protests are the entire negotiating team from the encampment.

Early that same day, social media posts showed riot cops at UC Irvine prepared to attack the student population there as well. Later news reports followed up, indicating that the encampment at that university was forcibly dismantled by police and that several arrests had been made.

The next step for grad students is to organize to impose their democratic decision through an immediate, system-wide strike. The UAW bureaucracy, having been forced to call a strike authorization vote, is attempting to either limit an actual strike or prevent it entirely.

It has made clear that it intends to structure any walkouts—called at some point in the future, “if circumstances permit”—after last year's toothless “stand-up strike” in the auto industry. That strike, affecting only a small minority of plants, was followed by a sellout contract that is now being used to carry out mass layoffs.

While graduate students want to use the methods of class struggle to defend free speech, the UAW bureaucracy is joined at the hip with the administration of “Genocide” Joe Biden. It endorsed Biden for reelection and ejected protesters from the hall when Biden accepted its endorsement.

The attacks on students and workers at UCLA, UC San Diego, UC Irvine and elsewhere by Zionists and police are more than sufficient “justified circumstances” to call a strike.

The initiative must be taken by the rank-and-file themselves to organize the strike, which must not be left in the hands of the UAW apparatus.

UC postdoc: “If you're actually serious about stopping the genocide, we have to organize outside the union bureaucracy”

The *World Socialist Web Site* talked to a UC postdoc student about the conduct of the UAW during the past three weeks. The student said:

We got no real communication from the UAW until the UCLA encampment got attacked. Since then, whatever the talk of “union democracy,” they’ve never asked us about doing a worthless “stand-up strike.” I don’t want to keep working if UCLA is on strike and getting attacked.

When I voted was the first time I ever heard them say anything about ending the strike by June 30th. Calling an end to the strike in advance makes it ineffective.

The process has involved no input from the membership and they’re intentionally undermining the strike before it even starts. As a “stand-up strike,” they’re dividing us by campus and even department instead of all fighting together, and they’re making sure there’s almost no impact on the UC system.

My frustration with the UAW approach is they’re trying to make this about “workplace conditions” and not about the situation in Gaza. They’re trying to keep it a legal strike and not about stopping the genocide.

They’re trying to get us pumped up about the strike one moment, but the next the union leadership is emphasizing that there only “might be a strike if necessary.”

[UAW President] Fain is the darling of the Democrats, and yet these bureaucrats are pretending like he’s going to stand up to Biden after endorsing him. It is disgusting that Fain is calling workers the “arsenal of democracy” while the UAW builds weapons for Israel and refuses to divest itself.

If you're actually serious about stopping the genocide, we have to organize outside the union bureaucracy.

UAW shuts down strike at University of Washington after less than 24 hours

On Tuesday evening, the UAW shut down a strike of 6,000 teaching assistants, research assistants and Academic Student Employees (ASEs) at the University of Washington (UW), less than 24 hours after it began.

The local, UAW 4121, announced on Twitter/X that it had reached a tentative agreement (TA) with the university and is calling for its ratification. The vote is ongoing, from May 15 to May 17.

The strike was originally called after a 99 percent vote to authorize a strike for higher wages, lower premiums, better child care and other

demands.

The UW contract does not meet the needs of workers living in Seattle, one of the most expensive cities in the United States. The hourly wage increase is only 8 percent for the first year of the contract, and 5 percent for the second and third years. Inflation in Seattle has gone up nearly 22 percent over the three years of the last contract, which means the deal does not keep pace with inflation.

The UAW has praised the \$0 per year healthcare premiums as a significant victory, while this, in fact, merely maintains what already existed. The union also announced a child care subsidy of \$1,560 a quarter (\$520 a month), but did not advertise the fact that “the University agrees to commit no more than \$70,200 per year for the purpose of ASE childcare expenses.”

The contract language suggests that, if everyone who applied for the child care subsidies received the maximum amount, UW would only cover 11 workers in a year, or the first 45 workers who applied for the subsidy in the first quarter and nothing for anyone for the next nine months. The university maximum was not increased from the previous contract, meaning ASEs are increasingly competing against each other instead of being covered universally.

Comments on social media indicate a great deal of anger among the rank and file. One commenter wrote on UAW 4121’s Instagram, “Correct me if I’m wrong but that amount won’t even cover ‘inflation,’ right? Or the price-gouging happening across all sectors, including rents and groceries?”

Another wrote, “Great that we got other things, still unacceptable about the wages!” Others commented with emphatic calls of “Vote No!”

The decision to call and then immediately call off the strike is an indication of the extreme tensions between rank-and-file workers and the UAW bureaucracy. The apparatus is terrified of the “immense potential for the opposition of workers to exploitation and inequality to link up with the widespread antiwar sentiments in the general population,” as the WSWS explained in a recent statement.

It is also a warning that the bureaucracy will act brazenly to violate the will of graduate students at the University of California and to limit and isolate their struggle.

The call for an immediate strike across the UC system must be combined with the demand for the immediate resumption of the strike at the University of Washington. There must be no return to work until workers actually have ratified a contract that wins their demands, after they have had adequate time to study and discuss it among themselves.

The strike at UC must be expanded to the entire UAW membership, including graduate students on other campuses, the 150,000 autoworkers at Ford, GM and Stellantis, and the thousands more at defense contractors like General Dynamics, Allison Transmission and Lockheed Martin.

For information and assistance setting up rank-and-file committees, contact the *World Socialist Web Site* using the form below.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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