

The way forward after strike vote by 48,000 California academic workers against police crackdowns

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The vote by academic workers to authorize strike action at the ten-campus University of California system is a major step forward in the fight against the genocide in Gaza and the crackdown on anti-war protesters. It poses the entry of the working class into the struggle as the basic political force against war.

The impulse for this strike vote came from the 48,000 rank-and-file members of United Auto Workers Local 4811, not the UAW bureaucracy, which has endorsed “Genocide Joe” Biden and delayed the vote itself as long as it could. The vote occurred as more than 3,000 students nationwide have been arrested and many more beaten, while the media and political establishment slander them as “antisemites” and call for bringing in the National Guard.

The vote is a call for a political strike—that is, for the working class to intervene to halt the state repression and the US-backed genocide. The working class is being drawn into open political conflict with the Biden administration and the two corporate parties.

The attacks have only grown during the vote. On Tuesday, police attacked an encampment at UC Irvine. Administrators responded to attempts by protesting students to negotiate by suspending the entire negotiating team.

On Thursday, administrators sent out a memo to all Local 4811 members threatening “corrective action” in the event of a strike. This includes not just mass firing, but potential legal action over supposed misuse of public funds. “Failing to accurately report leave,” the letter warned, “is a serious violation.”

This escalation only underscores that the entire working class must mobilize to defend the students. Not only must all 48,000 Local 4811 members at the UC campuses begin their strike without delay, but the entire UAW

membership, including 150,000 autoworkers, must organize industrial action in support.

This should also involve healthcare workers, including those working in the UC medical system, and other key sections of the working class, including weapon plants where many are also UAW members.

The university administration claims that the strike is impermissible because of its political character and that it is supposedly not connected with “any employment issues whatsoever.” What cynicism! The university has been facilitating and collaborating in a political offensive against students, waged on behalf of the ruling class.

Behind university administrators stand both parties in the highest levels of government, including the Biden White House. Democrats joined with Republicans, including actual fascists, to organize the police assaults.

On Thursday, Chicago police attacked and tore down an encampment at DePaul University. The mayor of Chicago is Brandon Johnson, a figure, backed by the Democratic Socialists of America, who emerged out of the Chicago Teachers Union. This demonstrates how the pseudo-left, who are also in control of the UAW and many other unions, are full partners in the crackdown.

The genocide itself is only one front in an emerging Third World War. Another major front is in Ukraine, where the US is allied with the corrupt Ukrainian government, stuffed with neo-Nazis, which has suspended elections and rules by martial law.

The defense of the rights of students to protest must be connected with demands for the immediate release of Bogdan Syrotiuk, a Ukrainian Trotskyist arrested by the Ukrainian proxy regime for his principled opposition to both the Ukrainian and Russian regimes on the basis of socialist internationalism.

The campuses themselves have become totally

integrated with the military-industrial complex. Earlier this week, UC reported that it has more than \$32 billion in investments in defense contractors, Israeli companies and others targeted by protesters for divestment.

But even this pales in comparison with the massive financial and institutional control of the corporate oligarchy over the campuses and society as a whole. A *Washington Post* article Thursday reported the police attack at Columbia University was spearheaded by a private WhatsApp chat composed of a “group of billionaires and business titans.”

The fate of the whole working class is at stake. It is the workers of the world who are being killed in the wars and who are being made to pay for them through massive cuts to jobs, wages and public services, such as education and Social Security.

The methods of police state rule are being built up against opposition in the working class, which terrifies the ruling class. Above all, they are frightened that enormous pent-up anger over inequality and poverty could coalesce with widespread opposition to war into a political movement against capitalism. They remember well how opposition to World War I was a chief factor in the Russian Revolution of 1917.

This is what accounts for the hysterical response to peaceful campus protests. The response in the working class must be to leverage its immense social power into the very political movement which the ruling class so fears.

An offensive by the working class is completely connected with the fight by the rank and file against sabotage by the union bureaucracy. The bureaucracy’s deep ties to the capitalist state and its social function as an industrial police force mean it has more in common with the riot cops attacking protesters than the workers they claim to represent. Its function is to disrupt, isolate and prevent any form of working class opposition which is capable of challenging the corporate oligarchy.

The decision by the UAW, made without any input from the rank and file, to shut down an “economic” strike at the University of Washington after less than a day is a serious warning. It was done deliberately to isolate the UC grad students.

It is also highly significant that UC administrators cite a “no-strike” clause in the contract as giving them the authority to retaliate against strikers. That anti-worker language was part of a deal used by the UAW to betray the 2022 strike by UC graduate students, against widespread rank-and-file opposition.

The UAW, having delayed the strike vote for two crucial weeks, is now waiting another two days before the local executive board even meets on Friday to discuss a strike, “if circumstances justify.” As if “circumstances” have not “justified” action for weeks!

If it calls a strike, it has made clear that it will try to limit it to a so-called “standup strike” involving only a fraction of the membership.

The model for this, last fall’s strike in the auto industry, was controlled from beginning to end by the White House. It began with only a small fraction of plants being called out and ended with a rally where Biden appeared on the stage alongside UAW President Shawn Fain, opposite thousands of Gaza counter-protesters. The supposed contract “victory” is now being used to lay off thousands, while Fain and the UAW bureaucracy move into even closer alliance with the White House.

But while the ruling class is trying to use the bureaucracy to rein in workers, the objective growth of the class struggle undermines its ability to play this role. That, however, depends upon the level of independent organization, initiative and, above all, political consciousness in the working class.

Academic workers must now impose their democratic will through the formation of rank-and-file strike committees to mobilize for immediate, system-wide work stoppages. Against the attempts by the bureaucracy to limit their struggle, they must turn out to the autoworkers and the entire working class for support, establishing lines of communication to prepare for joint actions.

The working class as a whole must come to the defense of the students. Workers must take action to defend democratic rights and organize industrial actions to stop the genocide and spiraling of imperialist wars all over the world whose cause is the bankrupt capitalist system.



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