

As court denies injunction to ban strike

UAW forced by growing anger to expand University of California anti-genocide strike to UCLA, UC Davis

Norisa Diaz, Kimie Saito, Tom Hall
24 May 2024

On Saturday at 4:00 p.m. US Eastern Time, the World Socialist Web Site and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) are holding an online public meeting, "Mobilize the working class to defend the University of California strike against genocide!" Register for the event here.

On Thursday, United Auto Workers Local 4811 declared it would expand a strike by academic workers against the police crackdown on campuses at the University of California to UCLA (Los Angeles) and UC Davis. Around 2,000 workers have been on strike at UC Santa Cruz since Monday. Action at the two additional campuses is scheduled for next Tuesday.

The UAW announcement is in reaction to massive rank-and-file anger over the bureaucracy's deliberate isolation of the strike to only one out of the 10 campuses, even as the police crackdown continues to build.

On Tuesday, the UC administration filed for an injunction against the strike, claiming it was illegal because its "goal is to pressure the University to concede to a list of politically motivated demands." However, a court rejected the application on Thursday.

On Thursday morning, students launched a second encampment at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). Three weeks ago, the previous one was shut down by a combined assault of police and right-wing Zionists.

Protesters barricaded themselves around UCLA's Kerckhoff Hall, which was quickly surrounded by police. In a short time, the number of police arrayed against the protest grew to the hundreds, with cops from the Santa Monica Police Department (SMPD) arriving in riot gear, as well as third-party security services, including Covered Six, Apex and CSC.

Officers with zip ties surrounded the area, and the campus newspaper, the *Daily Bruin*, reported the presence of a Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department prisoner transport bus.

The encampment was then abandoned by students and turned into a march and a series of temporary occupations of buildings around campus. At the time of this writing, no arrests had been made.

As today's protest took place, UCLA Chancellor Gene Block was testifying before Congress, with Democrats and Republicans alike slandering the protests on campus as being motivated by "antisemitism."

UC Los Angeles Professor Marco Velli told the WSW:

I teach astrophysics, space science. And I'm also Jewish. I mean, clearly the way they handled the whole issue here in UCLA was wrong. It was obviously wrong. And what was done as a remedial was too little, way too little, way too late. They should not have had the encampment thrown out the day after they allowed it to be attacked essentially.

Rank-and-file opposition

It became increasingly clear in the hours before the UAW's announcement that workers at the two campuses were prepared to walk out with or without the official sanction of the union. The group "UC Davis Popular University for the Liberation of Palestine" called for a strike starting Tuesday, with or without sanction from the UAW.

A group at UCLA called "Rank-and-File for a Democratic Union" has also called for mass sickouts and demanded that UAW officials "Stop using the violence we endured at UCLA as a prop and call on us to go on strike already!"

This follows similar statements earlier in the week by the UC chapter of the Students for Justice in Palestine and a group of dissidents at UC Santa Cruz who called for the strike to be expanded to all 48,000 UAW members across the UC system.

Will Lehman, a socialist Mack Trucks worker who ran for UAW president in 2022, issued a statement during the UC strike vote calling for all 400,000 members of the UAW to strike in defense of the right to protest, including members in the auto industry and defense plants.

A protester at UCLA told the WSW that he "did not like" the so-called "standup strike" tactic of limiting walkouts to a small fraction of the membership. The protester said:

I think the leadership is very out of sync. The UAW is basically an apparatus of the Democratic party, which is why they are doing this, and I'm 100 percent against it.

Another worker said that without the UAW controlling the process,

“UCLA would already be striking.”

One graduate student in Humanities at Thursday’s UCLA rally told the WSWS:

It’s the nature of the union under imperialism that the union leadership draws close to the state, and they do everything in their power to basically put a lid on union militancy... under imperialism, unions go from representing particular enterprises to representing national interests.

Union ‘leaders’ try to demonstrate to the nation, to the state, that they are not a threat, that actually they are an asset to the state. It can’t be replaced by just voting for more “honest” people.

The struggle “has to be international,” he concluded:

You can’t pit one national proletariat against another national proletariat. It has to be every industry across the borders--Mexican, American, Central American--all of them fighting for socialism.

A tactical retreat

The decision to sanction strike action at UCLA and UC Davis is a tactical retreat on the part of the UAW bureaucracy, which does not alter its aim of limiting and ultimately shutting down the protests. The basic task for workers remains to organize alternative rank-and-file structures to take control of the strike out of the hands of the bureaucrats and enforce the overwhelming mandate to strike at all 10 campuses.

The court’s denial of the UC’s request for an injunction is a political, not a legal decision. First of all, it is far from clear whether an injunction could even be enforced at this point or whether it would have the opposite effect of galvanizing workers into taking action in defiance of attempts to limit the strike.

The decision effectively grants the UAW bureaucracy additional time to try and reassert its control and wind down the struggle. The union bureaucrats will use the time between now and Tuesday, and beyond if necessary, to attempt to reach a toothless deal with the administration to shut down the strike.

The UAW has already made clear a deal would not include the removal of cops from the campuses, and, of course, ending the protests would only enable the continuation of the genocide. In other words, it would be a de facto injunction, but imposed by the bureaucracy rather than the courts.

Next steps

As the WSWS has written, the strike is a turning point because it “poses the entry of the working class into the struggle as the basic

political force against war.” But this “is completely connected with the fight by the rank and file against sabotage by the union bureaucracy.”

There is significant potential for the fight against war to link up with the fight by workers against capitalist exploitation. Autoworker members of the UAW are fighting against mass layoffs allowed by a new contract following a toothless “standup strike” last fall, which the union is using as the model for the UC strike.

The campuses themselves are centers of exploitation in their own right. Some 6,500 librarians and non-tenured faculty are pushing for strike action in the University Council-American Federation of Teachers (UC-AFT), which filed an Unfair Labor Practice charge against UC last week.

On November 1, contracts expire for tens of thousands of ultra-low-paid UC workers in the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). These workers, including dining hall and kitchen workers, housekeeping dorm staff, janitors and laboratory technicians, are paid as little as \$19 an hour. On Wednesday, AFSCME informational pickets were held side by side with a pro-Palestine rally at UC Irvine.

Elsewhere on the West Coast, graduate workers at Stanford University, who are members of the Stanford Graduate Workers Union, voted this week by 98 percent to approve a new slate of economic demands. A strike also began of UAW members at Western Washington University (WWU).

But the bureaucrats in each of these unions are working desperately to keep the struggles separate. The UAW suddenly called off the WWU strike on Thursday, just as it called off another strike at the University of Washington last week after only a few hours.

The UC-AFT issued a letter earlier this week purporting to explain members’ rights during a strike. In reality, it was focused on telling them they cannot take any action.

A no-strike clause in the AFT contract “prevents us from joining” the UAW strike, the letter claims. The AFT itself has not called a strike, it lamely declared, because “a strike takes time and commitment.” If the faculty Senate on a campus calls a strike, workers “likely” cannot join that strike either, the AFT claims.

This amounts to a declaration that the AFT, which like the UAW has close ties to the Biden White House, will do nothing to organize a serious fight.

A genuine fight requires that the rank and file take control out of the hands of the pro-capitalist bureaucrats through the development of a network of committees that are controlled by neither the apparatus nor either pro-war political party.

On Saturday at 4:00 p.m. US Eastern Time, the World Socialist Web Site and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) are holding an online public meeting, “Mobilize the working class to defend the University of California strike against genocide!” Register for the event here.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact