Large turnout for WSWS online meeting for working class to support University of California anti-genocide strike

Joseph Hillmeyer
26 May 2024

Join the rank-and-file movement against war! Fill out the form at the bottom of this article for help setting up a rank-and-file committee at your workplace.

On Saturday, May 25, the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) hosted a meeting titled "Mobilize the working class to defend the University of California (UC) strike against genocide!"

More than 200 people registered for the meeting, including UC workers and other workers from the railroads, the auto industry, public schools and healthcare. The wide-ranging discussion connected the struggle against the genocide in Gaza and the attack on peaceful protests with workers' struggles against mass layoffs and other cuts.

WSWS writer Tom Hall began the meeting with a report that stressed the importance of the protests and the strike by academic workers, who are members of United Auto Workers Local 4811. "What makes the strike which began this week at the University of California so important is that it poses the entry of the working class into the struggle as the basic political force" against war and attacks on free speech.

He continued: "As horrible as it is, the genocide in Gaza is only one front in the emerging Third World War." This also includes the US proxy war in Ukraine and advanced plans for war against China. Hall also connected the attack on campus protests with the arrest of anti-war socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk by the Ukrainian state security services and urged attendees to join the campaign for his release .

On top of expanding the strike immediately to all 10 UC campuses, Hall called on workers to build rank-and-file committees to establish lines of communication and prepare nationwide and globally coordinated actions. The decision of the union bureaucracy to limit the strike to a single campus—now set to expand Tuesday to UCLA and UC Davis—"expresses the class function of the union bureaucracy, which works on behalf of management and the government to suppress the working class."

He ended the report by urging, "Once you leave this meeting, you have to take action yourself. Speak to your co-workers about what you've learned here. Start building committees at your own workplaces. Don't wait for the leadership to be provided by others. It can only be provided by you, by the workers themselves."

Following the opening report, Tamino, a member of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Germany, reported on the government crackdown on anti-genocide protests by university students in Berlin.

Tamino explained that the government responded to a protest at the Free University by mobilizing hundreds of police. At Humboldt University, the police responded to the occupation of a campus building by "brutally dissolving the peaceful blockade, whereby one person even became unconscious and had to be medically treated," he said.

The global crackdown, he explained, is "about suppressing every opposition to the genocide in Gaza and the German government's war policy."

> If today critical students are being beaten down, tomorrow it will be striking workers and other opponents of war. We are therefore calling on all workers to defend the students at the universities.
>
> Like in the US, the German trade unions fully support the genocide in Gaza and do everything to suppress any opposition. The German metal workers union (IG Metall) even has a cooperation agreement with the German arms industry. Workers must therefore organize themselves independently of the trade unions in rank-and-file committees and unite internationally to beat back the attacks on democratic rights and stop this insane war policy.

Early on in the meeting, one worker asked how the UAW leadership justified the so-called "stand-up" strike tactic of only calling out a fraction of the membership and how workers could counter it.

In response, Will Lehman, a socialist autoworker who ran for president of the UAW in 2022, explained that the "stand-up" strike is designed to isolate workers and impose a defeat, as was the case in the auto strike last year.

Lehman noted, "The UAW is not informing any other members, including autoworkers, of the strike that's going on [at UC]." He added, "The idea that any one of us is fighting alone, when we're paying dues to this organization, and when there is an overwhelming strike authorization … by 79 percent [to strike] … the idea that the UAW is conducting any sort of struggle is ridiculous."

Following up on Lehman's report, Hall reviewed numerous meetings between UAW President Shawn Fain and President Biden, including public appearances where the union threw out anti-genocide protesters or worked with riot cops to shield "Genocide Joe" from protests.

He also explained how Fain himself came to power as the result of a federal intervention into the UAW. A federal monitor oversaw a rigged election in which the turnout was reduced to 9 percent, and hundreds of thousands never even got ballots. Voter suppression was particularly intense against UC and California State University academic workers. "Actually, one of the main reasons for this was that another person who was on the ballot … was Will Lehman," who ran on a campaign of "rank-and-file committees and abolishing the bureaucracy.

"That was totally out of bounds, as far as the ruling class was concerned. They need this bureaucracy, with some semblance of

© World Socialist Web Site

credibility, in order to play the role that it's seeking to play."

He concluded:

> The question of the transfer of power from the bureaucracy to the rank and file is not just a tactical question. It's a strategic and a political question, because it's bound up also with a fight against … the two pro-war parties which this bureaucracy serves. Connected with that is also the fight of the working class against capitalist exploitation and against capitalism.

Workers from other industries connected their own experiences with those of students and academic workers, especially the role of the government and the pro-corporate union bureaucrats.

William, a member of the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee, spoke about the contract fight by 120,000 railroad workers in 2022. Despite the vote by 95 percent to authorize the strike, the railway union bureaucrats kept workers on the job even after legal anti-strike restrictions expired. This bought the Biden administration and Congress crucial time to pass legislation to pre-emptively ban a national rail strike.

> When it came time to put the screws to the working class, there was no opposition. They held hands, and they enacted legislation to ban our strike. Joe Biden, despite all of his big talk about being the most union-friendly president ever, signed that legislation into effect.
>
> So-called "socialists," such as AOC [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez] and the Democratic Socialists of America, were in support of this legislation. The capitalist state could not allow railroad workers to strike. That would severely hamper their war production.

He finished by calling on the working class to build organizations independent of the unions. "There is no independence with these bureaucracies. They are attached to the state 100 percent."

Clare, an educator who used to teach in Alabama, also tied the struggle against war with the fight by teachers to close schools in the opening months of the pandemic.

She said:

> They literally let teachers die. In my own city, we had eight teachers die, four within the span of about 48 hours. It wasn't until the eighth teacher died that they let us go home. Not only are teachers dying, students are getting sick. I had one student, at the beginning of the month, his mother died. And by the end of the month, his father died. So he went from being a student with two parents to an orphan in a matter of a month. They didn't care. So the fact that as the working class, we need to understand that they don't care about our lives, they really don't even care about the law.

One academic worker reiterated that their union was not working in their interests or representing rank-and-file workers and asked how to organize rank-and-file committees on their campuses.

In response, WSWS writer Norisa Diaz said that the first concrete step is to begin having discussions with coworkers about the union bureaucracies and who they fundamentally serve, which is the Democratic Party and the ruling class.

"Workers need to begin having discussions, organizing, building, having democratic discussions amongst yourselves about the conditions and what needs to be done to actually organize a joint action." Hall added that a committee can be started by just a few people and stressed that the "power of the committee" was that it articulated and gave organized expression to the strivings of the rank and file.

The meeting closed after a contribution from the Socialist Equality Party's vice presidential candidate, Jerry White. The strike, he said, is "an expression of the growing radicalization of the working class and youth in the United States and, in fact, internationally. And this is leading to a direct political conflict with the capitalist parties and governments around the world, including the Biden administration."

He continued:

> The emphasis of this meeting very much has been the development of rank-and-file committees to give a conscious, organized expression to the immense opposition, which can find no expression through the old union bureaucracies. It can only be expressed through the independent organization and the independent initiative of rank-and-file workers in the United States and around the world.
>
> Joseph Kishore is running for US president and myself as vice president in order to raise the political consciousness of the working class and to make the connection between Gaza and the broader wars of US imperialism. None of the problems that workers confront—whether it's social inequality, war or the danger of fascism—can be resolved outside of the independent political mobilization of the working class to take political power into our own hands, abolish the capitalist system and reorganize economic life in the US and internationally on the basis of socialism, on the basis of social equality.

Join the rank-and-file movement against war! Fill out the form below for help setting up a rank-and-file committee at your workplace.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site