

At WSWS online meeting, workers and students discuss the way forward for anti-genocide strike at University of California

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On Tuesday night, the *World Socialist Web Site*, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) hosted an online meeting, “From Wayne State to University of California—industrial workers must oppose protest crackdowns.”

Over 180 people registered for the meeting and attended, including postal workers from both the US and Canada, autoworkers, healthcare and academic workers.

The meeting was held the day after the strike by University of California academic workers against attacks on student protests expanded to UC San Diego and UC Santa Barbara. The following day UC Irvine joined the strike. As of Wednesday some 30,000 academic workers are currently striking across six out of 10 campuses at what is also the third largest employer in California.

The meeting began with a political report by WSWS writer Tom Hall, who laid out the desperate humanitarian crisis facing the population in Gaza.

Gaza is only one front and an expanding global conflict. ... On Friday, Biden gave the green light to Ukraine to use US-made weapons to strike deep within Russian territory. ... This goes far beyond anything which was ever seriously contemplated during the Cold War because it was understood, it could trigger an all-out nuclear war.

The threat of nuclear war and the attacks on campus protests, he said, “poses more than ever, the need for the industrial working class and all autoworkers, in particular, to enter the struggle. Employing the methods of class struggle, the working class must prepare industrial action and force an end to the crackdown and to the genocide.

He continued:

The mobilization of the working class as a political force requires a rebellion against the union apparatus. The [United Auto Workers] has tried to limit the UC strike because the bureaucracy supports war. It has not only endorsed genocide, Joe Biden for reelection, but Biden himself sees the bureaucracy as key to the mobilization of American society. World War.

Hall added: “The UAW bureaucracy is trying to isolate the strike by promoting the limited perspective of campus politics and of divestment by individual universities,” but the deep integration of militarism on the campuses is only “one expression of the advanced preparation of American society for global war.”

He ended by calling on workers across industries to build rank-and-file defense committees “in order to organize, educate and prepare action. This must be connected with the fight against capitalist exploitation.”

David Rye, a member of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), spoke next:

What distinguishes the IYSSE from other student organizations is that for our movement the working class is the principal and central agency for historical and societal change. The working class is not merely important for the protest movement, it’s the objective interest of workers that are directly aligned against war.

Numerous questions and contributions were made to the meeting, including by postal workers from both the US and Canada, a nurse and autoworkers.

A fired Stellantis autoworker raised warnings to the academic workers about the role of the union bureaucracy, in particular, how it used a limited “stand-up strike” last year to force through a sellout contract, which has cost thousands of autoworkers their jobs.

It wasn’t even a strike, because three weeks into this supposed strike I was still working. And we helped give Stellantis 25,000 transmissions. We had three shifts running approximately 500 transmissions a shift. And I asked the union, “Why are we doing this?” Because it was to my understanding that they had 11 weeks of funding for strike pay, but we never really got to draw the strike fund. They said they were going to shut down certain ones, but the plant I worked at was the biggest moneymaker. At no time did they ever consider shutting that one down.

The way I feel at this point, now, is that the only thing the union ever did was take my money. And they didn’t have any intention to help us. ... I just want all of us to get together, and

fight back and make this work for us for the future of our children, and our grandchildren. I'm just appalled at the way we're all being treated. I don't want to put up with it anymore. I want to fight back and let them know that we're gonna stand up and do what's right for us.

Much of the discussion centered around the limitations of the perspective of pressuring universities to divest from their holdings in Israel and in the military.

Joseph Kishore, the Socialist Equality Party's presidential candidate, spoke from the floor to this issue. "There are political tendencies involved which very deliberately seek to limit the opposition of young people to this horrific war crime ... to a framework, which is acceptable to the Democratic Party and the trade union apparatus," he said.

I think, first of all, it should be said that in terms of some of the agreements that have been reached to end the encampments, they are certainly toothless—an agreement to discuss at some point this or that, to form some committee, no actual concrete measures, and then they've shut [the protests] down. But the question of divestment itself, is, in fact acceptable to the Democratic Party and the trade union apparatus, because it doesn't raise what are the fundamental questions.

Kishore continued:

Many of those organizing the protests often do not allow socialists to speak because they know that we will raise issues, which they do not want to be raised, in particular, the Democratic Party, which is thoroughly involved in all of this. ... The Democratic Party has had the support of the DSA and other groups which present what is now developing into potentially a nuclear war against Russia as somehow a war for democracy and freedom carried out by the same forces that are backing a genocide in Gaza.

So, there are politics involved in this, and they have to be exposed and countered. And that is very much connected to the fight to develop an understanding among young people of the role of the working class and develop a fight in the working class itself.

In reference to the events of May-June 1968 in France, when the students appealed to workers to defend them from police crackdowns and led to a general strike, Kishore said:

It has to be understood that ... the ability to make that appeal to action depended upon the existence within the working class of a broader political consciousness that they had to fight to defend democratic rights, that their interests were at stake. ... And the question really, therefore, is the necessity for the development of socialist consciousness within the working

class and that their interests are in line with opposition to war.

Jerry White, the Socialist Equality Party's vice presidential candidate, also spoke. "Gaza is, in fact, just one front in the expanding global war by American imperialism ... [including a] direct war with Russia," he said.

None of this is being explained to workers by the UAW or any other union. And there is a deep, deep discontent in the working class against war after 35 years of endless wars. ... But the central issue, as has been explained, is really the development of an interconnected struggle of young people on the campuses, young people in the high schools really fighting to develop the independent political movement of the working class that is the social force to stop war.

But the UAW is doing everything it can to keep workers in the dark about this strike. And it's very critical. We established lines of communication between the UC students and the Detroit autoworkers, and we are developing a very powerful industrial and political counteroffensive against war.

The model that is consistently pointed to is the anti-apartheid divestment campaigns of the 1980s and 1990s. I was politically active in that period, and this was embraced by the whole political establishment, the Democratic Party, to have a power-sharing agreement in which the apartheid regime essentially ceded to the installation of the African National Congress, Nelson Mandela ... but preserved capitalism. And just this last week, the ANC was punished at the polls by masses of South African workers, because they oversee one of the most unequal societies in the world in which the ANC leaders ordered the shooting down of striking miners.

White concluded:

We have to understand this history, that while it is certainly legitimate for students to demand divestment, this is in itself completely inadequate. They must turn to the working class, the only social force which has the power to halt the war machine. And above all, it has the power to unify around the world to put an end to the capitalist and imperialist system, which produces war.



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