

UAW formally ends UC academic workers strike as university works to expand no-strike clause

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The strike by tens of thousands of academic workers at the University of California (UC) against the police crackdown on protests against the Gaza genocide came to a formal end on June 30th with the expiration of the strike authorization mandate.

At the height of a powerful three-week struggle, the UC Regents—comprised of the top state officials including Governor Gavin Newsom—obtained a court injunction in their favor which placed a temporary restraining order (TRO) on the strike and promoted the UC administration’s argument that the strike was “illegal”.

The injunction was dutifully obeyed by the United Auto Workers (UAW) bureaucracy, which did not want the strike and was struggling for a way to end it. The bureaucracy, modeling the actions after the bogus “stand-up strike” which paved the way for mass layoffs in the auto industry, at first restricted walkouts to only a single campus.

It was only after a rank-and-file rebellion threatened to escape their control that the union was eventually forced to call out 6 out of 10 campuses and around 30,000 out of 48,000 members in Local 4811.

The UAW also limited the strike in advance to end on June 30 in the strike authorization vote it conducted in early May. Academic workers learned of this arbitrary time limit only upon opening their strike authorization ballots.

Not only did the UAW bow to the injunction, but voluntarily allowed it to be extended. Last week the UC President’s office released a statement that read: “Both parties agreed to extend a temporary restraining order (TRO) through June 30. Since UAW had only authorized the strike through June 30, this extension

signifies a formal end to the strike.”

This has allowed the UC administration to go on the offensive. It is working to enforce a more expansive interpretation of the “no strike clause” contained in the UAW contract, itself a sellout which the bureaucracy imposed on workers after selling out an earlier strike in 2022.

Missy Matella, associate vice president of UC Systemwide Employee and Labor Relations added to the statement that “While we are relieved this strike is over, we continue to seek clarity that our no-strike clauses are enforceable and that we can rely on our contracts to provide labor peace through the term of our agreements, supporting UC’s ability to provide critical academic and research services to our community.”

Even though the contract contains blanket bans on strikes, the argument that this includes strikes against “unfair labor practice” issues such as the UC’s retaliation against academic workers for political speech is completely false. Nevertheless, the UC’s argument is currently being considered by the state’s Public Employment Relations Board. If the Board sides with the UC, it would be a major attack on the basic right to strike in California as well as the United States.

The decision to extend the restraining order exposes the bureaucracy as tools of not just the UC administration, but of the courts and the pro-war political establishment.

UAW president Shawn Fain is a surrogate of “Genocide Joe” Biden, installed in a sham election with only 9 percent turnout two years ago. He is one of the most visible campaigners for this senile warmonger, whose campaign for re-election is on the verge of collapse. The UAW bureaucracy has routinely shielded

Biden from pro-Palestine protests, such as when it threw out protesters during Biden's speech accepting the UAW endorsement and later when it worked with riot cops to shield Biden from protests at a trip to Detroit.

Meanwhile, the union bureaucracy in the UAW, as well as the Teamsters and other major unions, are imposing the government's policy of mass layoffs by enforcing sellout contracts and blocking strikes. The White House also sees the unions as key to enforcing "labor peace" at home while it prepares to launch even more criminal wars abroad.

However, there are significant cracks opening up in this corporatist policy. This is first of all expressed in the deep crisis of the Biden administration itself, and the real possibility that Biden may be forced to step aside as the Democratic candidate due to concerns over his physical and mental fitness for the job.

A parallel crisis has opened up in the UAW. Shawn Fain is being investigated on corruption allegations by a federal monitor. A judge also recently sided with Will Lehman, a socialist autoworker who ran against Fain for president, in his lawsuit over the massive suppression of voter turnout in the union election.

On Friday, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees issued a call for new elections in the UAW, overseen by the rank-and-file. "The exposure of election fraud, combined with the continued sellout of workers' interests and corruption, makes an indisputable case for the holding of a new UAW election," the statement declared. "But workers cannot rely on the Labor Department, the UAW monitor or the courts to defend their rights. If a genuinely democratic election is to be held, rank-and-file workers must fight for it and oversee it."

In spite of the ruthlessness of the government and the sellouts of the bureaucracy, the fight against war will only continue to grow in strength. Workers must draw the lessons from this strategic experience.

As the WSWS wrote at the end of the UC strike, "The chief lesson of the University of California strike is that the working class must become the basic force against war." This cannot be done without first settling accounts with "the pro-capitalist, pro-war political system and the trade union bureaucracy which defends it."



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