

University of California healthcare workers vote overwhelmingly for strike, again

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Thousands of University of California (UC) healthcare, research and technical workers have overwhelmingly voted to authorize a strike, against years of worsening conditions and amid growing opposition to the relentless attacks on jobs, wages and work environment by the university's corporate-backed administration.

Nearly 20,000 workers—including nurse case managers, mental health counselors, pharmacists and lab technicians—members of the University Professional and Technical Employees-CWA Local 9119 (UPTe), plan to walk out for three days starting February 26, in protest of UC's ongoing austerity measures and union-backed concessions.

For years, UC workers have suffered under crushing workloads, staff shortages and stagnating wages, all while university executives amass wealth and lavish salaries. Mental health counselors, lab researchers, pharmacists and IT analysts are pushed to their limits, struggling to provide critical services for students and the broader community.

These workers are crucial in the operation of hospitals, clinics and critical research on cancer, climate change and infectious diseases. Lab technicians at UC Davis, instrumental in tracking the spread of bird flu, are among those participating.

Workers are demanding an end to chronic understaffing and the ever-increasing workloads that undermine patient care and scientific research. However, UC administrators, acting on behalf of the corporate and political elite, have dismissed workers' demands, imposing draconian restrictions on picketing and retaliating against workers who participated in a previous strike last November.

While workers have voted by 98 percent to strike, their struggle faces significant dangers as the UPTe

leadership continues to isolate their fight, keeping it separate from the broader working class and limiting it to fruitless appeals to UC's corporate management. The union has already delayed action for months and refuses to mobilize the full strength of the working class against these attacks.

UC has offered only an insulting 5 percent wage increase beginning in July, followed by a mere 3 percent raise in subsequent years, a raise that fails to even offset the rising cost of living. Meanwhile, the university falsely claims there is no staffing crisis and has aggressively raised healthcare costs. Workers are being forced to subsidize the wealth of UC's bloated administration and its corporate partnerships.

This struggle unfolds amid broader attacks on healthcare and research funding, with the confirmation of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as Donald Trump's health secretary. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) are facing massive budget cuts and firings under the right-wing policies of the Trump administration.

Among the casualties, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has announced firing of 5,200 employees and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is being drastically scaled down, with its renowned Epidemic Intelligence Service, known for deploying top experts worldwide to track pathogens and prevent emerging epidemics and pandemics, facing near-total elimination.

While a federal judge has temporarily halted these cuts, UC administrators are more concerned with maintaining their social status and securing corporate funding than addressing workers' legitimate grievances.

The overwhelming strike vote demonstrates the urgent need for workers to take control of their struggle and forge a real path forward, independent of both the

union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party establishment that dominates the UC system, with California Governor Gavin Newsom as the ex officio President of the UC Regents.

The strike vote takes place amid a broader attack on workers and democratic rights, intensified under the Trump administration. Students at UC have already seen the repression of protests against the genocide in Gaza, with administrators wielding false accusations of antisemitism to justify crackdowns. The Democratic Party, which controls California and the UC Board of Regents, is fully complicit, proving once again that it represents the interests of the corporate elite, not workers or students.

The union bureaucracy, far from leading a real fight, has played a critical role in suppressing worker militancy. A three-day strike will be a repeat of the two-day strike in November that saw 4,000 UPTE employees walk out, along with 35,000 American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 3299 workers. It was nothing but a stunt designed to let off steam while resolving nothing.

The WSWs warned at the time that the only way forward was the formation of rank-and-file committees, independent of the union leadership, to take direct control of the struggle.

Instead of mobilizing the full strength of UC's workforce in an all-out, indefinite strike, the UPTE (and AFSCME) bureaucracy once again opted for controlled opposition. They framed the strike in purely legalistic terms—an “unfair labor practice” strike—avoiding broader economic and, importantly, political demands, and minimizing disruption.

The struggles of UC workers cannot be separated from the broader class war being waged against the working class. The Trump administration's policies have already had disastrous effects, from mass deportations to the gutting of public healthcare. Federal funding for UC research is under threat, and university administrators—far from fighting back—are preparing to cut jobs and services to protect their bottom line.

The Democratic Party which dominates California politics is hostile to the working class. Governor Gavin Newsom and the UC Regents, packed with corporate executives and Democratic Party operatives, have overseen years of wage suppression, tuition hikes and privatization efforts, in addition to attacks on

democratic rights on campuses. The unions, closely tied to the Democrats, serve as an obstacle between workers and the real fight they need to wage.

The only way forward for UC workers is through the establishment of independent rank-and-file committees to take control of the strike and the broader struggle. These committees must link up with other workers and, importantly, students, who face skyrocketing tuition, unaffordable housing and repression for political activism. The fight for better wages and working conditions is inseparable from the fight to defend public education and democratic rights.

The struggle at UC is part of a broader fight against the capitalist system itself. To win, UC workers must unite with healthcare workers, educators and all sections of the working class, both nationally and internationally.

In the context of increasing attacks from the fascist Trump administration, the time has come for workers to break free from the stranglehold of the union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party. The overwhelming strike vote is a mandate for real action—not another staged performance orchestrated by UPTE. Only through rank-and-file control can workers and students begin to mount a genuine fight against the attacks on their livelihoods, their rights and their futures.



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