

57,000 University of California workers launch strike

Our reporters
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On Wednesday, nearly 57,000 University of California (UC) workers began a strike across all 10 campuses and five medical centers.

Workers have every reason to strike. UPTE-CWA's 20,000 research and technical employees have accused UC of hiding staffing vacancy data, unlawfully raising healthcare costs, and stifling worker advocacy. The 37,000 AFSCME Local 3299 members, including hospital technicians, echo these concerns.

Despite widespread dissatisfaction over wages, understaffing and deteriorating conditions, rather than mobilizing workers for a real struggle AFSCME and UPTE have limited the action to just two and three days, respectively, framing it as an Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) strike. This follows a long pattern of deliberately limiting strikes to one or two days, as seen in November 2024, when a two-day strike resulted in no meaningful gains.

The decision to categorize the strike as a ULP further dilutes its potential impact. This legal framework restricts the scope of the strike, preventing workers from addressing the core economic issues at the heart of their discontent. By focusing on legal technicalities, the union bureaucracy diverts attention from the pressing matters of fair wages and adequate staffing, effectively neutering the strike's effectiveness.

The militancy of the UC workers stands in stark contrast to the tepid strategies employed by their unions. These employees are integral to the functioning of the university system, performing critical roles that range from patient care to research support. Their commitment to their work and their willingness to take collective action underscore a profound potential for meaningful struggle.

However, this militancy is consistently undermined by the union leadership that opts for symbolic, short-

term strikes over sustained and united action. Time and again, the bureaucracies have sabotaged strikes, just as AFSCME did in 2019 with six ineffective one-day strikes.

WSWS reporting teams distributed copies of the WSWS Healthcare Workers Newsletter statement, "For an indefinite strike by University of California workers! Build a working class movement against the policies of the Trump administration!" That statement declared: "The WSWS calls for a mass mobilization of the working class against the new government. This must be directed above all at the source of dictatorship in the capitalist profit system.

"Rank-and-file committees, composed of workers and not union officials or Democratic Party operatives, must be built to give workers the power to countermand decisions that violate their will and provide the means to link up with workers across the UC system, the healthcare industry and around the world."

From the very first hour of the strike, deep dissatisfaction and long-standing grievances were on full display, as workers took to the picket lines with unwavering determination and were very eager to speak to the WSWS.

In San Diego, Matthew has been working at UCSD for 15 years in an outpatient clinic setting working hands-on with patients. "Staffing shortages are a huge issue, we're always working short. We're all working overtime right now. The staffing ratio is just not there. We're operating 18 patients with three to four people on the floor! The lack of safe staffing puts our patients and us at risk."

Matthew explained the difficulties of living in an expensive city. "We don't make anywhere near enough to work in this city. I should be making \$120,000 to \$160,000 a year to afford my mortgage that I bought 20

years ago. I make maybe \$60,000 if I'm lucky. I [have to] have other means of income, different side hustles in order to survive here. I cannot support myself off of this. One paycheck barely pays the utilities."

Matthew agreed that Trump's attacks on immigrants and the mass firings of federal workers are ultimately aimed at the entire working class. "I would agree with you 100 percent," he said. "There's a broader issue at the forefront, and it's going to take grassroots efforts. It's going to take employees just like us doing this, standing up and saying, 'No, enough is enough' ... we need to hold out and [UC must] give us what we want, or else we're not coming back."

Referring to the email from Musk to federal workers demanding they list out their tasks, Matthew stated "I would like Musk to list out what HE does."

Cindy, a patient care technician, has been working at UCSD since 2018 but was only given full-time work in the last two years. "I was working per diem. If you work over 1,000 hours in a year, you're supposed to be able to level up, but I was easily working that, I should have been able to level up, but nobody ever talked about that. It's something that's hush hush, and you're told to wait your turn and wait for somebody to retire or exit a full-time spot for you to be able to apply."

Cindy also noted that she also had to work an additional job, pointing to the destruction of the 40-hour workweek. "I think last week alone I worked 75 hours. Fifty-seven of those were here, and the rest were at my other job where I do the exact same position." She noted that she makes somewhere around \$27 at her other job and about \$34 an hour at UCSD, adding, "We should be making around \$50-something an hour, and that was calculated two years ago before inflation got this crazy."

Victor works in animal care at UC San Diego Hillcrest. He pointed to Trump's massive attacks. "One thing I've seen immediately once the Trump administration started was a lot of people losing grant money. I see a lot of researchers struggling right now, and we are talking about important research. Overnight, a lot of the minority grants just dried up, and it's really sad to see."

He agreed that the appointment of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is a great threat to science. "It's really wild considering the recent pandemic. It seems like their goal is to keep people ignorant so that we keep falling

for their b***shit, and so I mean, if we could just keep funding education that would be a huge start because then people would vote a little more sensibly."

Victor added: "Political independence certainly does seem like the only way, because it's hard to agree with either side."

Iris works in radiology at UC San Diego Hillcrest. She, like her brothers and sisters, is feeling great hardship. "They are trying to wipe out the middle and lower class, and it's all for the rich, it all comes down to that. We think the economy is bad now, it's going to be 10 times worse. I really hope that they block his [Trump's] agenda, and Elon Musk is just a [expletive] basket case."

"At the end of the day [Trump] is breaking up families. My husband's family is of Mexican descent. He is born and raised here, but I still have to worry. Like I need to tell them about their rights and stay informed for my husband and for my kids and in-law folks, and it's just a really sad time we are living in right now."

She joined the choir of workers who view RFK Jr as a threat. "It's just horrible, it's horrible everywhere you look at it, every part of the government right now. Everyone that lives in Canada and Europe is looking at us like a big circus right now. It's horrible. I hope we are all able to unite, and come together as one as the people and make a difference."



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