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## University of California workers carry out 1-day strike

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On Tuesday, University of California (UC) workers carried out a one-day strike across the university system’s 10 campuses statewide. The action followed two and three day strikes conducted at the end of February.

The 57,000 workers, members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 3299 and the University Professional and Technical Employees (UPTE-CWA), are demanding better working conditions. The prevailing sentiment among workers from both AFSCME to UPTE, is that they should be earning \$50 an hour just to afford basic living expenses in some of the most expensive regions in the country.

“We have had no contract; they’re making us pay for parking and raising the cost of our health insurance, with no raises,” Maria, a patient care worker with AFSCME at UC San Diego said. “There’s a hiring freeze, while the hospital system buys more properties and is opening more locations. See that new facility they are building over there? We will be expected to work it, even though we are already stretched thin. We have each person doing the work of two to three people. It’s unfair.”

Workers who spoke with the WSWs readily drew the connection between their struggle and the broader fight of the working class against the Trump administration, which is slashing the federal workforce, attacking immigrants and attempting to set up a presidential dictatorship.

The UC system has been a hotbed of class struggle in recent years, with repeated strikes by graduate students and others. The UC administration and the California Democratic Party have also played a leading role in the mass repression of student protests against the Gaza genocide.

“For sure, it is connected to the attacks on immigrants,” Maria continued. “Life for everyone is so unfair, there’s no way to live like this. I’m a single mother, no one is going to save us, we have to stand up for ourselves. I have to rely on

my family because we’re pushed into impossible, impossible conditions; it’s not living.

“Most workers here are at minimum wage; and they’re the ones cleaning up the feces, vomit, etc. But UC is increasing our insurance premiums, we have to pay hundreds of dollars a month on parking. We need higher wages that keeps up with the economy and the cost of living.”

Another patient care worker at UC San Diego summed up broader sentiment when she said, “I agree, we all need to unite against Trump. The deportations and attacks on workers are horrible.”

The WSWs spoke with Jack and Michelle, two members of UPTE who work in IT at the UC Irvine Medical Center in Orange, California. Names have been changed to protect workers’ identities.

Jack told our reporters, “I think there should be a general strike right now. It would be very effective in bringing things to a halt. And if the capitalists aren’t getting their profits because everyone stopped working, then they would see that they are at our whim. We actually run the things in this society. If they’re not receiving profits from our hard labor, then they can’t do anything, and they’ll beg us to come back and they’ll invest in their economy to consume more and to continue with the status quo.”

Michelle said: “I think it’s all terrible [what Trump is doing] with all the firings. Already the economy is so bad and people don’t have livable wages. I know people who have already been laid off in SoCal, and I know the stress and the pressure that it has on families.

“In terms of the deportations, I feel it’s a human rights issue. It’s terrible to just criminalize and dehumanize a whole group of people just because of their birth status. I know some people that have gotten deported accidentally, and they’re all being labeled criminals. But some of them are just people who happened to just have tattoos. Because

of the tattoos, they are being labeled as criminals. They [CPB and ICE] are not even looking. They're just saying, 'that's a tattoo and you're Latino.'

"And then people here don't know where their family members are. I saw recently on the news that they can't return them because they've already been like 'paid for' or something like that. So we're trafficking? Human trafficking? I feel like we're playing with people's lives, people who put profit over other people are playing with all of our lives.

"I think it's just infuriating that people who are so higher up just don't care about others or community or the impact that they have or other people's struggles. There's the social impact, the environmental impact, the economic impact. Because they have all the resources in the world, they're fine. But everybody else, they can play with us like we're just pieces on a chessboard."

When asked about their thoughts on the Democratic Party, Jack exclaimed, "Useless. Useless! What are a bunch of paddles [used by the Democrats during Trump's address to Congress] going to do!"

Enrique, an AFSCME worker who works in the UCI Medical Center kitchen, said, "The Democrats and Republicans, hey, they're all the same. Only business, only business. Money, money. This president wants only money. And the Democrats supported a genocide. This president doesn't pay his taxes. He never pays. Trump has millions and millions of dollars, and he never pays. He says he's broke. No way, this guy is a liar."

### **Bureaucracy tries to rein in workers**

The struggle against Trump must be based on a mass movement of the working class. The UC system is California's third-largest employer with a workforce of over 190,000 people, putting UC workers in a powerful position to play a leading role in such a movement.

But this requires that workers rebel against the union bureaucracy which is attempting to sabotage their struggles. Many, including the United Auto Workers (which covers UC graduate students) and the Teamsters, openly support Trump's nationalist policies, while other are limiting their members to useless letter writing campaigns.

As in February, WSWS reporters were again harassed by union leaders who tried to block political discussions on the picket lines as a "separate issue," but the reporters were warmly welcomed by workers.

In reality, the issues could not be more intertwined. UC

President Michael Drake has said that major cuts are on the horizon as a result of the Trump administration's attacks on public education, healthcare and scientific research. Moreover, with the support of the Democrats, the Trump administration is carrying out a massive assault on free speech through deportations of international students opposed to genocide.

AFSCME Local 3299 and UPTE-CWA Local 9119 together represent 57,000 workers across the 10 campuses and five hospitals. However, only a few hundred struck at each campus on Tuesday, a sharp decline from the February strikes. These dwindling numbers are not the result of a lack of a desire to fight, but rather a lack of confidence from workers that their unions and the limited "Unfair Labor Practice" (ULP) strikes could produce any significant change in the situation.

AFSCME and UPTE continue to corral workers' opposition into day-long ULP strikes. This is a bureaucratic maneuver designed to prevent workers from raising economic demands.

At a time of unprecedented attacks on the working class, from the mass firings and aims to dissolve the Department of Education, to the mass firings of federal workers, the trade union leadership is exposing that it will do nothing to organize its members in a mass struggle against the Trump administration.

This is because such a movement would threaten the bureaucracy's social and financial interests. AFSCME President Lee Saunders, who tells workers they would be fortunate to receive an 8 percent pay increase over three years, pockets at least \$398,000 a year, according to federal filings.

The way forward is the building of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, an alternative structure fighting to transfer power from the apparatus to the workers themselves and which rejects "America First" in favor of the global unity of the working class. A UC Workers Rank-and-File Committee must be built in order to link up with workers across the US and the world in a common fight against Trump and the oligarchs.

For more information about building a committee at your workplace, fill out the form below.



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