

Vote NO on UPTE's sellout contract! For rank-and-file control of the struggle!

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The tentative agreement announced last week between the University Professional and Technical Employees (UPTE-CWA) and the University of California administration is not a victory for workers, as the union and corporate press claim. The agreement, which is being voted on through November 20, should be rejected.

UPTE hails the deal as a “historic win” for 21,000 technical, research and healthcare workers, touting headline wage increases of 8 percent in 2025, followed by 7, 6, and 6 percent in subsequent years. In reality, the contract contains no protection against inflation, no genuine cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) and bakes in mechanisms to divide workers by title, seniority and classification. Even the raises are front-loaded to create deceptive numbers.

The raises are structured into separate “step” and “across-the-board” increments every six months. A 2 percent “step” increase in January, followed by a 5 percent “across-the-board” raise in July, produces a headline of “7 percent” but yields only about a 4.5 percent average over the year. Some workers will see less, while others receive one-time “lump sums” that do not raise base pay or pensions. The result is a two-tier wage system under another name.

The inclusion of so-called “retroactive pay” does nothing to alter this reality. UPTE claims that 2025 will bring “8 percent or more”: a January 2 percent step, a July 5 percent across-the-board raise (or \$25 minimum), and “title-specific equities” of at least 1 percent, retroactive only to the date of ratification and payable within 120 days.

But “equities” are not structural wage increases. They are minor, uneven adjustments applied to certain job titles that UC claims are “out of alignment,” typically amounting to 1–2 percent and awarded only once.

These do not raise the wage scale, do not address inflation and do not apply to all workers. They are used to fragment the workforce and inflate the headline percentage without providing any real, across-the-board improvement.

For 2024, workers continued laboring under an expired contract with no raises whatsoever, absorbing an entire year of inflation as their real income eroded. Because the “equities” are retroactive only to ratification (not to the contract’s 2024 expiration) UPTE’s presentation of this as “back pay” is deliberately misleading. It merely compensates, at best, for a fraction of the stagnation workers have already endured, and even that comes months late.

The provisions for the other years repeat the same deceptive arithmetic: a small step increase early in the year followed by a mid-year ATB, producing a larger nominal number while concealing the far smaller real gain spread unevenly over twelve months.”

On healthcare, UPTE boasts that “most” employees will not see increases in their medical premiums in 2026, and that Blue & Gold or Kaiser rates will not rise by more than \$64 per month from 2024 levels. The union’s framing hides the reality that some workers will still pay more, that the cap lasts only a single year, and that the broader cost-shifting in healthcare continues.

For 2027 and 2028, the deal offers only vague “annual caps,” after which UC is free to shift further costs onto workers. These token limits come amid escalating healthcare premiums, co-pays and deductibles throughout California.

The University of California administration immediately celebrated the tentative agreement, with President Michael Drake (whose compensation exceeds \$1 million annually) calling it “a fair and fiscally

responsible agreement.” UC and the UPTE issued a joint statement praising their “collaborative spirit” and “commitment to employee welfare.” The reference, however, to a “fiscally responsible agreement” makes clear that the university’s profit-driven operations will not be disrupted.

Meanwhile, UC workers face a deepening social crisis. Over the past three years, inflation has eroded more than 17 percent of real wages nationwide, while housing costs in California have reached record levels, with one-bedroom rents near UC campuses exceeding \$2,700 monthly. Gasoline prices remain among the highest in the country, and food costs have surged nearly 30 percent since 2020.

At the same time, the Democratic Party-controlled state government has pursued austerity, targeting undocumented adults with \$5 billion in cuts to Medi-Cal, deferring roughly \$274 million in state payments to UC and delaying scheduled increases, effectively shifting costs onto campuses.

UPTE’s deal reinforces this austerity. By removing any link between wages and inflation, it guarantees that scientists, technicians and health professionals who maintain the university’s research and medical operations will fall further behind the cost of living, locking in real pay cuts for four years.

The timing of the agreement exposes its function. Announced just one week before 86,000 UC workers were set to join a two-day systemwide strike with AFSCME, clerical staff and nurses, it preemptively undermined the largest coordinated UC strike in decades. By abruptly canceling its participation, UPTE deliberately sabotaged the unified struggle, handing the UC regents and Governor Gavin Newsom a political victory on the eve of the walkout, while isolating the remaining strikers.

This is part of a broader, coordinated effort by the national union apparatus to stifle the growing wave of working class resistance. UPTE’s parent organization, the Communications Workers of America (CWA), has played a leading role in shutting down or isolating struggles nationwide, from healthcare and public-sector workers in New Orleans to educators in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

The aim of the apparatus is to weaken and divide workers and to prevent momentum from spreading to upcoming battles, including the Long Island Rail Road

and United Auto Workers contracts in 2026.

UPTE’s top officials, far removed from the rank and file, form a privileged layer dependent on labor-management partnerships. They occupy joint committees with UC and maintain close ties to Democratic Party officials who dominate the UC Board of Regents. These regents, drawn from finance, tech and real estate, have long pursued the transformation of the university into a corporate profit center serving Silicon Valley, the defense industry and biotech conglomerates.

The way forward for UC workers requires a break from the straitjacket of the union bureaucracy through the formation of rank-and-file committees, that is, independent, democratic organizations controlled by workers themselves. Workers should reject the UPTE tentative agreement and demand control over any future negotiation. They should link up across UC campuses with AFSCME, CNA, and other sections preparing to strike and unite their struggle with that of the broader working class against the deepening assault on jobs, wages and democratic rights.

The fight at UC is part of a nationwide and international class struggle unfolding under conditions of economic crisis, rampant inequality war, and growing authoritarianism. While the Trump administration attacks workers and immigrants at the federal level, the Democratic Party in California deploys the union bureaucracy to enforce its own austerity agenda and protect corporate profits.

UPTE’s betrayal is therefore a political act designed to disarm workers in the face of this bipartisan offensive. UC workers must advance their own program for full inflation-indexed wage increases, the abolition of two-tier divisions, restoration of public funding for education and healthcare, and the defense of social rights, by organizing independent rank-and-file committees and uniting their struggle with workers across the country and the world.



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