

Defying strike mandate, UAW keeps 40,000 University of California educators on job after contract expires

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It has been nearly two weeks, since the contracts for more than 40,000 academic student employees and graduate student researchers across the University of California (UC) system expired on March 1. But the United Auto Workers union, headed by UAW President Shawn Fain, has forced workers to stay on the job despite the unbearable working conditions and poverty wages they confront.

The academic workers, who are members of UAW Local 4811, are determined to overturn these conditions, which are the product of the UAW bureaucracy's sellout of previous struggles in 2022 and 2024. In a clear demonstration of their determination to fight, 93.3 percent of the membership, which also includes Student Services and Academic Professionals-UAW (SSAP-UAW) and Research and Public Service Professionals-UAW (RPSP-UAW), voted in favor of a strike.

Despite this clear strike mandate, the UAW International and UAW Local 4811 officials have run roughshod over the notion of "no contract, no work." In doing so, the bureaucracy has blocked at least for now a powerful strike by UC workers, which would have broad implications for the development of the class struggle in California and the US, and the fight against Trump and US imperialism's wars abroad and war against the working class at home.

Because the UAW bureaucracy is in a de facto alliance with Trump and his illegal trade war measures and maintaining a complicit silence over the Iran war, the last thing it wants is to unleash the power of the UC academic workers. The graduate student workers have repeatedly demonstrated their courage and willingness to fight not only for an improvement of their immediate conditions but over broader political issues concerning the entire working class, including against war and state repression.

In November-December 2022, UC academic workers waged a six-week strike that was marked by a rank-and-file rebellion and powerful "No Vote" campaign against the UAW bureaucracy's efforts to push through a sellout contract.

In the more recent three-week strike in May-June 2024, UC

graduate student workers waged an explicitly political strike in opposition to the police violence against Gaza Solidarity Encampments. This was a direct struggle against the Biden administration, which provided military, financial and political support for Israel and cracked down on students based on slanders of "antisemitism." The UAW immediately capitulated to a court order obtained by the UC administrators to end the strike.

The lack of strike action on the part of UAW officials is all the more damning given the initiation of the illegal US-Israeli war in Iran. The same genocidal violence waged against defenseless Palestinians is now being waged against the Iranian population, with missile strikes aimed at schools, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure.

In a statement to UC workers, Will Lehman, a Pennsylvania Mack Trucks worker and socialist who is running for president of the United Auto Workers in this year's election, said:

UC academic workers voted overwhelmingly to authorize strike action to fight the poverty wages and exploitation imposed on you by the university system, its powerful and wealthy backers and Democratic-controlled state government. But the UAW bureaucracy has ignored this mandate from the membership and prevented you from using your collective power.

The UAW apparatus may think it can override your democratic decision but the final word is in the hands of the rank-and-file yourselves. I urge UC workers on every campus to organize rank-and-file committees consisting of academic and other campus workers, along with students, to enforce the will of the membership and prepare a university-wide strike.

A strike by more than 40,000 UC workers will give a powerful impulse to the growing movement of educators, healthcare workers and other sections of the working class across California and the US against the corporate and financial oligarchy that the Trump administration speaks for. The fascist cabal in the White

House, with the complicity of the Democratic Party, is waging a criminal war against the people of Iran and a war at home against the social and democratic rights of the working class.

It will be the working class in the United States that pays for this illegal war of colonial conquest: in the form of massive cuts to public and secondary education and other core social programs to finance the ever-expanding global war, and the lives of working class youth sent to fight and die for American imperialism. And, as you know very well, the war abroad will be used to accelerate Trump's plans to impose a fascist dictatorship in the United States.

UAW President Shawn Fain has said absolutely nothing about the war because the UAW bureaucracy supports it. The same is true for the Democrats. But among workers and young people there is deep opposition to war and state repression. To take forward this struggle, I am fighting for the abolition of the UAW apparatus and the transfer of power to rank-and-file workers in the factories, universities and other workplaces.

The working class, in the United States and internationally, has the power to halt and dismantle the military machine and the US government's apparatus of state repression. Only in this way can society's resources be redirected to guarantee high-quality, free education from pre-school to post-graduate studies, for everyone and provide economic security, healthcare and dignified working conditions for all academic workers.

The UAW bureaucracy and in particular the members of the Democratic Socialists of America in Fain's inner circles and in the leadership of several academic workers' union locals are well aware of the hostility of their members to war, austerity and dictatorship.

While Fain and the UAW International remain silent, officials from UAW Locals 4811, 872 and 2478 issued a joint statement opposing the war against Iran on February 28, the day the war started and the day before contracts expired for UC workers.

Their statement said that the Trump administration's "unprovoked attack on Iran is a disaster for working people everywhere" and acknowledged that "working people in the U.S. do not want another illegal regime change war." Pointing to the slashing of funding for "education and lifesaving biomedical research," "brutal immigration crackdowns" and the administration's proposal to increase the military budget by over 50 percent, it declared, "Until it is brought under control, the White House will continue to destroy lives abroad and impoverish the public at home."

But the local union officials do not propose a single measure to mobilize the working class against this criminal war abroad

and the bipartisan war against the working class at home. Instead, they urge academic workers to appeal to Democrats in Congress to "restrain" the president.

Our representatives in Congress must find the political will to restrain the White House before more lives are lost. ... Academic workers at UC, USC, and Caltech call on the California Congressional delegation to do everything in their power to stop Trump's military intervention abroad.

These are the same bipartisan warmongers who have backed the criminal sanctions and regime change operations against Iran, voted for a \$1 trillion-plus military budget and are baying for war against Russia and China. As for the esteemed California Congressional delegates, they answer to Silicon Valley, aerospace and defense contractors, and the entertainment and telecommunications conglomerates, not the working class.

Such reactionary politics, epitomized by Sanders, AOC, Mamdani and other Democratic Party scoundrels, must be rejected. Instead of collaboration with big business politicians, academic workers must champion a movement of the working class and an industrial and political counter-offensive against capitalism—the source of war, poverty and dictatorship.

Form a rank-and-file committee within your workplace and begin discussions on how to initiate strike action and how to grow your strike to include healthcare workers, public school teachers, truckers, warehouse workers, port workers, railroad workers and students engaged in high school walkouts.

The same opposition to genocide which sparked the 2024 strikes by UC grad workers will resurface again with ever greater intensity. Strikes and rebellions from the rank and file are on the agenda, but this movement must be fused with a political strategy to fight for workers' power and socialism.



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