

# Student workers hold “Last Chance” pickets across University of California System

Our Reporters  
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On March 12th, hundreds of University of California student workers, teaching assistants and researchers participated in “last chance” rallies across the 10-campus system. Workers are demanding cost-of-living adjustments, critical wage increases and hours guarantees, expanded housing and adequate funding for programs.

Around 40,000 UC workers in United Auto Workers Local 4811 voted overwhelmingly to strike, but have been kept on the job by union officials nearly two weeks since their contract expired on March 1.

At the University of California Berkeley, approximately 600 students demonstrated Thursday. At the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), approximately 300 student workers participated. Students expressed a determination to fight, not only for improvements to working conditions, but against the assault on the sciences being carried out by the Trump administration.

Two community health sciences graduate students expressed their outrage at the lack of funding for their program, and the dire living and working conditions they are forced into as a consequence of the cuts.

“I don’t have any funding,” Richard said. “So that means every quarter I have to find funding: some TA shift or some teaching position that’s outside. It really has taken control of so much of my life—what I’m able to do, what free time I have. That’s taken most of my focus.”

Danielle, a 3rd year Ph.D student in the Department of Community Health Sciences, said: “They’ve continued to cut our positions, and they’ve forced us down to 25 percent [hours relative to full-time status, down from 50 percent] which is not a livable wage. You have to take multiple jobs.” Agreeing with Richard, she added “if you’re focused consistently on

trying to find a job and trying to find funding, you’re not able to focus on your research.”

Several graduate students at UCLA spoke out about the cuts to funding for public outreach programs which makes the sciences and culture accessible to the general public. The slashing of these programs over many decades has lowered the level of scientific awareness in the population, creating a vulnerability exploited by anti-vax cranks like RFK Jr.

“We’re taught that we have to engage with the communities, and working with the communities.... They have had programs that are more open to the communities as a public institution, and they cut those programs because they don’t make enough money... it’s frustrating to see that happening and this institution being about money.”

University of California student workers have been a major center of working class militancy in recent years. In 2019 and 2020, UC workers at the Santa Cruz campus conducted months-long wildcat actions demanding cost of living adjustments. In 2022, workers across the UC system conducted a five-week strike, in the course of which they rejected a sellout agreement pushed by the UAW bureaucracy. In 2024, workers launched a strike against UC administrators’ violent crackdown against Gaza protests.

“I was here and participated in the 2022 strike, as well as the 2024 strike, and now I’m here for this one,” one worker said.

Volunteers with the Will Lehman campaign found broad support for the platform Lehman is running on. Volunteers distributed the campaign statement “University of California academic workers: Enforce your strike mandate!”

Lehman’s statement accused UAW officials of ignoring workers’ vote to strike. “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,” Lehman said.

He continued: “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.”

Campaigners explained to students the way in which UAW president Shawn Fain has backed the “America First” tariffs of the Trump administration, after having collaborated closely with the Biden administration.

There was enthusiasm that an openly socialist worker was running for the presidency of the UAW. Volunteers for the Lehman campaign also spoke to student workers at University of California Berkeley, where the call for a general strike against the Trump government found broad support. Students supported Will’s call for the working class to mobilize against Trump’s illegal war on Iran.

The UAW bureaucracy is doing its best to try to keep in front of rank-and-file anger before they lose control. A critical role is being played by pseudo-left tendencies which insist that graduate students adopt a strategy of “pressuring” the union apparatus, rather than organizing rank-and-file committees to take democratic control over the struggle.

UAW local officials at the University of California system have issued statements opposing the war against Iran and the murder of Alex Pretti. But they have proposed no action to fight war and police dictatorship other than that graduate students call their congresspeople.

The decision to hold “practice pickets,” rather than calling a strike, is part of their maneuvering. It is an attempt to get ahead of the workers through empty posturing. The “strike ready” picket was notably used by the Teamsters in 2023 so that they could present a sellout contract as the product of a “credible strike threat.” Since then, tens of thousands of UPS workers have lost their jobs.

UC workers have innumerable and powerful allies in the working class. This includes 10,000 California State University (CSU) workers, who endure the same

working conditions and are also members of the UAW. To avoid a situation where 48,000 University of California workers and 10,000 California State University workers are on strike simultaneously, the UAW local 4123 unilaterally extended the contract beyond its original expiration date. This was done without any vote or input from the membership, in an effort to delay the threat of a strike until at least September.

UC workers must organize to break through the delays and enforce the democratic will of the membership to strike, while also imposing real control over bargaining to prevent a sellout. This means forming rank-and-file strike committees, composed of grad students and independent of the UAW bureaucracy, including the radical-sounding leadership of local 4811.

The strike vote and the emergence of the UC student workers as a section of the working class in struggle is part of a broader movement of the working class in the United States and Internationally. The UC students must consciously link up their struggles with the growing struggle of workers in every sector of the economy, from public education, to nurses, autoworkers, postal workers and oil refinery workers.



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