

Reject the UAW–University of California sellout agreement! Organize a “No” vote and prepare strike action!

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Friday evening, United Autoworkers (UAW) Local 4811, which represents more than 40,000 academic workers in the University of California system, announced a tentative agreement aimed at blocking strike action. Workers were kept on the job for nearly three weeks without a contract, and the tentative agreement is a complete violation of the strike mandate. This TA is intended to cut off the growing movement of the working class and remove tens of thousands of University of California workers from the struggle.

After 93.3 percent of academic student employees—including teaching assistants, graduate student researchers, postdocs, and professional academic staff—voted to strike, the UAW leadership refused to set a strike date, even after the contract expired. After two weeks, the UAW called a “last chance” picket, which did nothing but allow the union bureaucracy to posture as though it were fighting, in an effort to boost its credibility and prepare the sellout. The tentative agreement cooked up with the UC was clearly ready well before the “last chance” practice pickets, since it was announced the next day.

The tentative agreement “highlights” boasts: “Strategic contract expiration on December 31st, 2029: bargaining for our next contract will not be under the Trump administration and ending the precedent of Summer expirations in the last three contracts.” What a contemptible fraud. The time for a broad strike movement of the working class against Trump’s criminal government is now. This is not “strategic” timing that will help student workers. Rather, it will benefit Trump.

A strike by 48,000 academic workers in California would be a critical part of a broader movement of the working class against austerity, war and Trump’s efforts to destroy public health, education and democratic rights. The tentative agreement is being voted on amid a rising wave of working-class militancy, including CSU workers—who are also UAW members—working on expired contracts, as well as nurses,

educators, public-sector staff, logistics and transport workers, and meatpacking workers. Faculty at New York University are poised to strike later this month.

This struggle is not merely for better stipends or housing. The US ruling class’s decision to launch and expand a criminal war against Iran has already driven up energy costs and diverted massive public resources to the war machine, intensifying attacks on living standards and democratic rights. Wars abroad and austerity at home are two sides of the same class offensive.

Voting on the tentative agreement had already begun, but workers had access to the full text of the 185-page agreement for only four days before voting started. This is a clear attempt to ram the contract through before academic workers have had a chance to study and discuss the full terms. Workers must reject this blatantly undemocratic process with a decisive “No” vote. The process has excluded the rank-and-file from the start.

The tentative agreement also preserves no-strike clauses from previous contracts. It contains no provisions for cost-of-living adjustments (COLA)—a core demand of the 2019–2020 and 2022 UC strikes.

The raises on offer vary widely and are structured to obscure how little most workers will actually receive. Salaried academic student employees, which are the majority of those covered, will see annual increases of roughly 3 to 6 percent depending on job category and experience level. For workers at the bottom of the pay scale, the cumulative raise over four years amounts to as little as 10 percent. Meanwhile, the Bay Area, Los Angeles and San Diego, where the bulk of UC workers are concentrated, rank among the most expensive metropolitan areas in the United States.

According to the MIT Living Wage Calculator, a single adult in San Francisco County requires over \$75,000 annually to meet basic living costs. Graduate student stipends at many UC campuses remain well below that

threshold even after these raises are applied. The UAW leadership is presenting a contract that locks workers into four years of poverty wages and calls it a victory.

If ratified, the tentative agreement will resolve nothing in the crisis facing higher education or society more broadly. It accepts as true the claim that “there is no money” to fund research and pay student workers adequately, while the US government spends billions of dollars every day to carry out the illegal war against Iran.

The tentative agreement’s provisions on international workers are being touted as the “strongest in the country,” yet they fall far short of what workers actually need and demanded. The agreement creates a \$400,000 legal consulting fund, to be shared among tens of thousands of international workers across ten campuses, and provides up to three weeks of paid leave to attend immigration hearings. Workers whose visas are temporarily revoked and then restored would retain the right to be rehired.

There is also a “non-collaboration with ICE” clause. But crucially, the agreement contains no binding commitment by the University of California to resist federal pressure to hand over student and worker data to Homeland Security. A union steward at UC Berkeley noted publicly that “all the protections of any significance were dropped in this tentative agreement.”

The preservation of the no-strike clause is perhaps the most consequential element of the tentative agreement and the least discussed. Under this clause, once the contract is ratified, UC academic workers will be legally barred from striking for four years—until December 31, 2029. This means that regardless of what the Trump administration does to higher education, regardless of further attacks on international students, regardless of funding cuts, mass layoffs or the expansion of war, these workers will have formally surrendered their most powerful weapon. This is precisely what the UC administration required.

The UAW apparatus has shown that it cannot be trusted. It has worked to undermine academic workers’ interests despite overwhelming strike mandates. Over the past year, the UAW has delayed or shut down powerful actions among academic workers and other sections of the working class across the country. It has kept members working on expired contracts while negotiations proceed on management’s timetable. The result of these delays is the exhaustion of workers’ leverage and the presentation of concessions as unavoidable.

Academic workers at Columbia University also voted by more than 90 percent to strike and are being blocked and intimidated by the UAW. The bureaucracy is maneuvering to suppress Columbia’s strike by subordinating the campus local to regional and national officials who demanded that

the membership narrow and water down its demands. It threatened to seize control of the local by placing it under “receivership” if it did not comply. Region 9A officials pressured Student Workers of Columbia to drop political protections, such as removing police and ending surveillance, and warned that the International Executive Board would block a strike unless proposals were altered.

Workers in the California State University (CSU) system, who are also members of the UAW, have seen their struggles sabotaged. Their contract was undemocratically and unilaterally extended to keep 10,000 academic workers on the job until September, when they could have struck at the same time as UC academic workers.

The first concrete step academic workers in the University of California system must take is to organize an urgent “No” vote, rejecting both the tentative agreement and the undemocratic character of this voting process. Student workers should publicly demand that all negotiations take place openly, without closed-door sessions. Any future tentative agreement must be presented with an extended review window to give all members, including international students, time to review and debate the contract carefully and vote on its terms.

To achieve these demands, student workers should build campus rank-and-file committees, independent of the union bureaucracy, with recallable mandates. These committees should establish a UC-wide, democratically controlled strike strategy; ensure transparency and democratic control; circulate all tentative agreement language immediately to the membership for discussion; require a binding membership vote before any suspension of strike action; and coordinate actions that can defend the strike from injunctions and isolation.

Academic workers must consciously link their fight to the broader working class internationally. The building of independent rank-and-file committees, as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), would be a critical first step in constructing a network capable of coordinating workers’ struggles internationally and across industries.



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