

“We didn’t really win anything ... I’m voting no.”

Vote “NO” on the AFSCME-University of California contract! Build rank-and-file committees to take control from the sellout bureaucrats!

Evelyn Rios
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A shotgun vote for a new contract begins Tuesday for 42,000 University of California service and patient care workers, after their strike was canceled in the dead of night by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) last Thursday.

Voting lasts through Thursday, May 21. Workers have yet to receive the full contract; only the so-called “highlights” of the agreement have been released.

If for no other reason, workers should reject the contract on principle. They should insist they will not accept any deal before they have the full language and at least a week to read and discuss it among themselves. Workers should organize to impose rank-and-file oversight of the voting itself.

This should be the start of a new struggle, this time independent of the union bureaucrats. Workers must form rank-and-file committees at every campus to give themselves the power to use all means at their disposal to fight until they have won their demands, not what AFSCME officials dictate they must accept.

Why workers should vote “no”

Even the “highlights” makes clear the contract meets none of workers’ demands. There are no retroactive wage increases. In its place, management is dangling a \$1,500 lump-sum payment, attempting to capitalize on workers’ hardship to bribe them into a substandard deal.

AFSCME boasts that the TA increases starting pay to \$26.50 in 2026, finally reaching \$30.10 by April 2029. Across the board wage increases are 5 percent in 2025, 6 percent in 2026, 5 percent in 2027 and 4 percent each in 2028 and 2029, for a total of 24 percent over the five-year contract.

This does nothing to lift the lowest-paid section of the UC workforce out of poverty in a state where rent, fuel and food costs

continue to rise sharply. A gallon of gas alone has jumped past \$6.00 a gallon in California due to the Trump Administration’s US-Israeli war on Iran.

Moreover, it is only 2 percent better than the administration’s last offer from May 11, which offered annual across the board increases of 5, 5, 4, 4 and 4 percent.

The tentative agreement’s treatment of healthcare costs is presented as a concession to workers, but it is nothing of the sort. Premium increases are merely “limited” to 5 percent for some plans and 7.5 percent for others.

Worst of all is the complete absence of any measures to address housing. One of workers’ main demands was for \$25,000 housing payments to address an unlivable cost of housing crisis—a crisis so severe that UC has itself acknowledged that full-time employees are living in their cars.

That demand has been abandoned entirely. AFSCME is attempting to cover their tracks by their support for a state ballot measure for a zero-interest loan program for first-time homebuyers.

“We didn’t really win anything”

There is no reason workers should not have good wages, healthcare and affordable housing. The money exists, it is a question of who controls it. UC’s revenues were \$60.7 billion in 2025. \$10 billion sits in UC’s unrestricted reserves as of 2026. Meanwhile, the Trump administration spent \$1 billion a day on the war in Iran and is requesting an extra \$500 billion for next year’s military budget.

“The world has gone to hell. Housing interest is high. Credit card interests are high. Gas is high. Food costs are high,” Jaime, one of the head custodians at UC Los Angeles, told the WSWS, “I have two children, a one-year-old and an eight-year-old.”

“Even the \$1,500 doesn’t cover everything we’ve lost. We didn’t really win anything. We’re the ones that suffer, we’re the ones that pay for parking, we’re the ones that pay our medical insurance. My insurance went up. You know, my anxiety medication used to cost me anywhere from \$20-\$25. Now it’s \$120.”

“So come that day, I’m going to vote no. If I’m being honest, I’m voting no ... I feel like the union folded really fast. I’m not a huge fan of the union ... of where we are right now, representation-wise. And the union loves to donate. They donate funds to the Democrats, and I think these congress-people and these lobbyists do the same thing for the union. But it’s all at our expense, to be honest.”

AFSCME censors criticism

On social media, angry comments flooded AFSCME Local 3299’s Instagram post announcing the deal. Officials responded by disabling and deleting all comments. Workers took to other posts to express outrage over their censorship, “Why is the union freezing comments on the new posts? Why are people being silenced?” A second worker stated, “Our union deletes comments that don’t favor them.”

Before the comments were disabled and deleted however, the WSWS captured and analyzed them. Major issues raised by workers and unaddressed in the tentative agreement include: The demand for a 15 percent night shift differential which was conceded; anger at the toothless language that they have a “right to negotiate” on-call pay and shift differentials rather than a concrete raise; no cap on what UC can charge workers for parking fees; and the abandonment of the housing benefit.

One person wrote “We really thought we would get the housing funds. The talking they did was very misleading.” Indeed, AFSCME purposefully used vague language to give the impression they were demanding housing assistance or stipends for their membership who are in need of immediate financial relief. In reality, the “demand” was a sham, consisting of a potential issue on the November ballot for a zero-interest loan program to assist first-time homebuyers with down payments.

A struggle against management and the union bureaucrats

The key question facing workers is the development of new organs of power that give them the ability to deal not only with management, but with the union apparatus itself. The union bureaucracy is not just “folding,” but is actively colluding with UC to prevent a powerful strike which would grind the entire system to a halt. Totally integrated with the UC administration and the Democratic Party, the union bureaucrats refuse to permit a struggle that breaks out of their control—because such a struggle

would expose and destroy the cozy relationship they depend on.

The UC system is a hotbed of class struggle. There have been no fewer than 14 strikes across the UC system since 2017, 10 of which have involved workers in AFSCME Local 3299. Every single AFSCME strike was confined to one or three days, each ending without workers winning their demands.

Academic workers in the UAW mounted three struggles that took the form of semi-rebellions against their own union apparatus—most powerfully the six-week strike of 48,000 workers in 2022. This year, following a 93.3 percent strike vote by 40,000 UC academic workers, the UAW kept workers on the job on an expired contract, then rammed through a sellout agreement that workers had only four days to study before voting began.

The same dynamic is playing out everywhere. The more favorable the conditions for workers to fight and win, the more openly and shamelessly the bureaucracy betrays.

AFSCME’s actions mirrors in particular what happened last month to 77,000 Los Angeles school workers—teachers, administrators and support staff—who were poised to carry out the first-ever unified district-wide walkout in the second-largest school district in the country. In the dead of night, under the direct intervention of Mayor Karen Bass, the unions reached a last-minute deal and called the strike off, handing workers contracts that leave support staff in poverty and open the door to sweeping austerity cuts.

Workers are more powerful than the apparatus and both corporate parties. The question is how to organize this power.

The first step is to organize rank-and-file committees against the tentative agreement and strike it down with a resounding No Vote. But this is only the beginning. Workers must expand this network of rank-and-file committees to every UC hospital and campus, that takes the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of AFSCME officials and places it where it belongs—with the workers themselves. In contrast to the bureaucracy, these committees would operate with full transparency and coordinate across the entire system so that the power of 42,000 workers can be brought to bear as a unified force.

AFSCME members must reach out to academic workers, nurses and other sections of the UC workforce, as well as to workers across California and beyond who face the same attacks on wages, healthcare and housing. Such committees, linked together as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), are the means by which workers can build the genuinely democratic, internationally coordinated movement needed to win.

Contact the *World Socialist Web Site* today for help in building rank-and-file committees at every hospital and campus.



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