

Demand the full contract! Why is AFSCME hiding the agreement?

Voting begins for 42,000 University of California workers, who still have not seen the full deal

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On Tuesday morning, the polls opened for 42,000 healthcare and service workers from the University of California (UC) to cast their vote on a new tentative agreement. Last Thursday, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 3299 called off a state-wide strike at around 1:00 in the morning, announcing the deal and a snap vote.

The vote is an attempt to ram through a contract which is essentially identical to UC's May 11 last offer. The three-day voting closes on Thursday May 21.

Workers still have not been given a copy of the full tentative agreement, which they are being made to vote on. If for no other reason, it should be rejected on principle because of this. Workers should not have to guess at what they are signing; the contract will determine the next four years of their lives and their families. If this contract is so good, why can they not have a week to study it in its entirety? What is AFSCME not wanting them to see?

Voting is taking place in person, during break times at established booths where AFSCME "representatives" are there to sell the contract to workers, encouraging a yes vote while handing them copies of supposed "highlights" and giving no ability to even view the contract in full. The workers that spoke to the WSWs on Tuesday morning relayed that they have had to rush through voting during their 30-minute lunch break.

The only publicly available "highlights" on the tentative agreement make it objectively clear that the union bureaucrats have only repackaged UC's offer and have the audacity to claim "victory."

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.

In place of any retroactive pay after the union kept workers on the job for two years, management is dangling a \$1,500 lump-sum payment, attempting to capitalize on workers' hardship to bribe them into a substandard deal.

At UC Los Angeles and UC San Diego, most workers told the WSWs that the wages in the TA would not keep pace with the cost of living and expressed anger at the speed at which their strike was called off and the current TA announced.

A UC San Diego worker told reporters, "They were telling us the day before, around midnight that we could get a call saying UC folded. That's when I knew this was all an act. If they had kept their mouths shut, they might have fooled me."

Another worker described AFSCME's complacency about keeping them on an expired contracts. "I feel like they've bargaining the same thing for over a year now, and there is no progress."

A food service worker at UCLA described the desperate conditions they face on such low wages. "There was one food service worker who was living in her car. Apparently she had another job, and once she was finished here, she had to go to her next job. It was very hard for her to maintain that."

In order to quell the opposition, AFSCME has carried

out a crude campaign of censorship. The bureaucracy has undemocratically been blocking users, disabling comments, and deleting comments on its social media posts concerning the tentative agreement which raise the call for a no vote.

However, the WSWS was able to capture some of these comments which revealed growing antagonism between the rank and file and the bureaucracy. One worker wrote,

“As an AFSCME member, it’s frustrating watching workers constantly being told to settle for less while we’re the ones keeping everything running every single day. ... A big part of the frustration is that leadership feels disconnected from the employees actually working these positions every day. Frontline workers are the ones dealing with understaffing, burnout, unsafe conditions, and financial pressure, yet too many feel like their concerns and realities are not truly being represented during negotiations.

“What makes this even more concerning is seeing comments and concerns from members being deleted when people express disagreement with the contract or frustration with the process. Workers should not feel silenced for speaking honestly about issues that directly affect their lives and families. A union should welcome transparency, accountability, and open discussion—especially when members have concerns. Deleting criticism does not remove the frustration workers are feeling. It only makes more members feel unheard.”

The union bureaucracy unilaterally kept workers on the job past the original expiration of their last contract in 2017 until 2020. A 2018 strike was cancelled after three days and proclaimed a “victory” by the bureaucracy, who also called police to prevent WSWS reporters from speaking to workers in an attempt to prevent opposition to the contract.

In 2019 the bureaucracy took workers on five unpaid one- to two-day strikes. This was for the purpose of wearing workers down to force them to accept a concessionary deal.

Today, many workers have expressed the sentiment that the union “folded.” But more than that, bureaucracy is actively colluding with UC to block organized resistance which could grind the entire system to a halt and become a lightning rod for a broader struggle against poverty wages from the third

largest employer in the state of California. A strike over the impossible cost of living would also inevitably raise the issue of the domination over the economy by the American financial oligarchy, as well as the economic impact on workers of Trump’s war on Iran.

Workers are looking for the means to fight back, as shown by this weekend’s strike by Long Island Rail Road workers, strike votes by auto parts workers this month at Nexteer and American Axle and elsewhere. Last month, Los Angeles public school workers were poised to strike before, as at UC, the union canceled it in the middle of the night.

Workers can no longer rely on the old framework of struggle waged through the union apparatus. They must develop new organs of political power that give them the ability to expand their struggle to challenge not only management but the capitalist state and the union bureaucracies tied to it.

Therefore, the first course of action for the rank and file must be to mobilize for a massive NO vote, as the first step in the fight to take control away from the union bureaucracies and put it into the hands of the rank-and-file workers. Only through building new, democratic, accountable organizations based on a strategy of international class struggle and unity, not management collusion, can workers win their demands.



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