

University of California strike vote must be the start of a working class fight against war and assault on democratic rights

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Voting began Monday morning by 48,000 graduate student workers across 10 campuses in the University of California system to authorize strike action over the police crackdown against anti-genocide protests. Online voting by the members of United Auto Workers Local 4811 continues through Wednesday.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls for the widest possible “yes” vote. Rank-and-file workers must begin preparations now for an all-out strike, encompassing broader sections of the working class. They must reject the efforts by the UAW apparatus to limit and contain it.

The strike vote takes place against the backdrop of ongoing student-led actions against the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza. Over the weekend, students staged protests at UC Berkeley, which is one of the campuses where the vote is being held, Virginia Commonwealth University, Duke University and others.

Protests throughout the country have been met with an unprecedented police mobilization and crackdown on basic democratic rights, supported by both Democratic and Republican politicians. At least 3,000 protesters, mainly students, have been arrested nationwide in just the past three weeks.

The vote at UC was sparked by a police assault on an encampment at UCLA, which was forcibly shut down by riot cops after they had stood by while right-wing Zionists attacked protesters for five hours. In-person classes have been canceled and the campus has been placed under effective police control.

The strike vote also takes place as the genocide in Gaza enters a new stage with the assault on Rafah. Israel has completely shut off food shipments and

extreme famine conditions exist in the north. Tens, if not hundreds of thousands will die in the next phase of the genocide if urgent action is not taken to stop it.

The genocide has the support of the entire ruling class and its two parties, the Democrats and the Republicans. And as terrible as it is, the genocide is only one front in an emerging Third World War.

The US and the other imperialist powers are planning a massive escalation of the war against Russia over Ukraine. They have repeatedly said that the threat of nuclear annihilation will not deter NATO even from strikes on Russian soil and the direct deployment of Western troops.

The protests of students, while admirable and courageous, are not sufficient to stop the genocide in Gaza.

It is the international working class, which produces all of society’s wealth, that has the power to oppose and defeat the criminal actions of the capitalist ruling elite.

The war abroad is at the same time a war on the working class at home. In order to free up social resources for war, the ruling class is carrying out mass layoffs. In the US alone, hundreds of thousands of cuts have been announced this year. This includes thousands of autoworkers, only months after a supposed “historic” contract was passed with the support of the Biden White House.

There is immense potential for the opposition of workers to exploitation and inequality to link up with the widespread antiwar sentiments in the general population. Workers confront catastrophic conditions produced by soaring inflation, the collapse of infrastructure and the evisceration of social programs.

Last week, workers at Stellantis’s critical Warren Stamping plant voted to strike over health and safety issues, but this is only one reflection of the deep anger that exists.

It is the union apparatus that is playing the central role in blocking the development of a movement in the working class against war.

United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain is, for all intents and purposes, part of the Biden administration. The UAW endorsed Biden for re-election and ejected anti-war protesters from his acceptance speech. At the same time, the UAW leadership fraudulently claimed support for a “ceasefire” only to get out in front of the workers.

Other union bureaucrats make no attempt to disguise their hostility to the protests. American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, who criss-crosses the globe in support of US-backed wars, has slandered students and educators protesting the genocide as “antisemitic.”

The UAW bureaucracy did not want to call this vote and is already trying to limit it. Having delayed the UC vote by weeks, the union leadership has not called strike votes anywhere else, even on campuses such as New York University where protests have also been attacked. The bureaucracy has also indicated it is looking for a deal to “de-escalate”—in other words, to shut down the protests—along the lines of the betrayal at Northwestern University in exchange for toothless promises by the university administration, which made no commitment to divest from firms doing business with the Israeli war machine.

The UAW apparatus has said that even if the graduate students vote to strike, they will not be called out all at once. Instead, the UAW intends to model any action after the “stand-up” strike in the auto industry last year, which kept the vast majority of workers on the job and paved the way for concessions contracts and layoffs.

The WSWS calls on academic workers to reject this effort to defeat their struggle. A vote to strike means a vote to strike! It does not mean staying on the job while the apparatus engages in maneuvers behind the scenes.

All 400,000 active members of the UAW, which includes autoworkers as well as workers in defense plants, must mobilize in support of the students and the Palestinian people. Strike action must not be limited to the UC system, but embrace strategic sections of

American industry to force an end to the genocide.

Moreover, it must be expanded to workers all around the world, who are united in the process of production and have no interest in the escalation of a war that threatens all of humanity.

Organizing this action, free from bureaucratic interference and sabotage, requires the development of rank-and-file committees. As Will Lehman, a socialist autoworker who ran for UAW president in 2022, recently said:

We must begin fighting for this now. Hold mass meetings at your workplace to discuss actions. In the face of inevitable opposition from the UAW bureaucracy, organize rank-and-file strike committees to enforce your democratic will.

Humanity is at a crossroads. The capitalist road leads to deepening economic and social crises, culminating in fascism, world war and ultimately the extinction of human civilization. The only alternative is the emergence of the working class, which has no interest in war, exploitation and dictatorship, as a revolutionary political force.

The fight against war and inequality must be combined with the struggle against the outmoded capitalist system. The profit motive, whose destructive logic is being played out in Gaza as well as on the campuses, must be replaced with rational planning of the world’s resources to meet human needs, under the control of a workers’ government. This is the program of socialism.



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