

“They say we have freedom of speech but when we utilize it, we’re persecuted”: Detroit autoworkers support strike vote by University of California academic workers

Shannon Jones
14 May 2024

Autoworkers in the Detroit area are expressing support for the 48,000 University of California academic workers who are voting this week to authorize a strike at the public university system. The UC workers are demanding a halt to the police crackdown on pro-Palestinian demonstrations and the protection of free speech for undergraduate students and union members.

The student employees, graduate students, and academic and postdoctoral researchers are members of United Auto Workers Local 4811. The UAW apparatus, which has endorsed the reelection campaign of President Joe Biden, has done virtually nothing to inform other union members about the UC workers’ strike vote and the political demands they are fighting for.

The UAW was forced to call the strike vote after the eruption of opposition following the police-abetted April 30 attack by Zionist counter-protesters on a Palestine Solidarity encampment at University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA).

The Socialist Equality Party’s candidate for US president Joseph Kishore has publicly called for the largest ‘yes’ vote for a strike. In a statement published on the Socialism 2024 campaign site, Kishore said the police crackdown had been clearly timed in the run-up to the Israeli invasion of Rafah, which began last week, and was “the latest and most brutal act in a genocide that has killed more than 45,000 people, the majority women and children.”

Biden is overseeing the attack on protests, which has the support of both the Democratic and Republican

parties, Kishore said. “Both the Democrats and Republicans fully back Israel in carrying out the genocide.”

SEP vice presidential candidate Jerry White went to two auto factories in the Detroit area Monday to discuss the UC workers’ strike vote. He said the strike should be spread to all UAW organized facilities, including defense industry plants that were supplying Israel with weapons.

According to a report on the SEP campaign web site, many workers supported strike action to defend First Amendment rights. “They say we have freedom of speech until we use it, and they persecute us,” one veteran worker at the Stellantis Warren Truck plant told White. Another Warren Truck worker urged the UC academic workers to “keep your heads up because you’re fighting for the right cause, to stop genocide.”

A Ford worker at the Dearborn Truck Plant said the massacre of Palestinians “affected people in my neighborhood,” referring to the large Arab-American population in Dearborn. “I am very proud of them [UC students], and I stand behind them,” she added.

Several workers condemned the Biden administration and Congress for providing Israel with billions in military and financial support while teachers were being laid off and other social services slashed.

“[Y]ou see more of our taxes going for war instead of our hospitals and schools,” one Warren Truck worker commented. “Plus, look at our streets and our bridges collapsing.”

A Ford worker added: “Money that is funding a lot of these wars could go to help our own people, homeless

people. They say there is no money for us, but next thing you are reading is that \$95 billion is going to somewhere else. You read that and you look confused and say, ‘I thought we had no money for our own people?’”

After the campaign, White issued a statement, saying:

We urge UC workers to vote to strike. This will send a powerful message to all workers that they can fight to defend democratic rights against both big business parties and halt these wars. It will be the workers that pay for these wars, with the lives of their children and through massive cuts in social programs. But this fight requires the building a powerful network of rank-and-file committees because the UAW President Shawn Fain and the UAW apparatus back Biden and his imperialist wars. The working class must use its power to shut down the war machine and unify with workers and young people around the world to put an end to the capitalism, the source of war.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact