

UPDATE: UAW calls off strike at University of Washington after less than one day

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UPDATE: As of 9:58 pm local time Tuesday night, United Auto Workers 4121 announced a tentative agreement (TA) with the University of Washington. In addition, it has unilaterally agreed with campus administration to “pause striking pending the ratification vote period.”

Workers must insist there can be no end to the strike until the TA is actually voted on by the rank-and-file! The agreement must be presented in full, with adequate time for workers to study the language in the contract and ensure their demands have been met.

The momentum of the strike must not be lost, especially in the midst of the strike vote of UC workers against the police crackdown against anti-genocide protests. The fight must be expanded, with the rank-and-file, not the bureaucrats, in charge of ensuring the democratic will of the membership is carried out.

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A strike of 6,000 teaching assistants (TAs) and research assistants (RAs) at the University of Washington (UW) in Washington state began on Tuesday, in response to the university’s refusal for any significant wage increase for the academic workers.

The TAs and RAs are members of UAW Local 4121, which also includes postdocs and research scientists at UW. A strike vote was held between April 23-25 and passed nearly unanimously, with more than 99 percent voting in favor of a strike. The contract formally expired May 1.

The strike takes place as the 48,000 academic workers of UAW Local 4811 in the University of California system are voting on strike action against police repression of anti-genocide protests.

Campuses across California, especially UCLA and UC San Diego, have been turned into militarized zones. At UCLA in particular, peaceful protesters were arrested after a five-hour assault in a police-abetted Zionist attack

on the Palestine Solidarity Encampment.

The strike at UW is an important development. It points to the immense potential for the growing movement against war to unite with the massive opposition in the working class to exploitation and inequality.

The strike also comes only a week after autoworkers at Stellantis’ Warren Stamping plant near Detroit voted to authorize strike action over health and safety issues.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls for the broadest possible mobilization in the working class in support of the graduate students, including further industrial action to end the Gaza genocide and the police state measures being implemented to suppress opposition.

A strike at UC must be expanded to all 400,000 members of the UAW, including all 8,000 members of Local 4121 in Washington state, the union’s 150,000 autoworker members and thousands more in defense plants.

The fact that the vote at the University of Washington was passed so decisively reflects the enormous and growing anger in the working class, driven by intolerable conditions.

In the Seattle area, the average rent is a little over \$2,000 a month, while the base salary for this section of workers is just \$2,664. The university is only offering an increase to \$2,850 a month, while at the same time insisting that the workers pay a new premium of \$1,100 per year for their health insurance.

The WSWs spoke with a member of UW’s staff, who discussed their support for the UW strikers. “What’s different in this round of contract talks is just how militant the RAs and TAs have been. There was a practice picket a few days ago and they seemed very energetic.

“A lot of them wanted to strike sooner because they were concerned that the strike would happen during finals, which would really hurt the undergraduates more than the administration. The contract ended on May 1 and

I think the UAW was trying to buy time with the negotiations that happened after. They really don't want to upset management.

"It's similar in my own union, the SEIU, where there is never any discussion of political issues, like the Gaza genocide. We essentially run the university, but the demands of the union are always just appealing to management. I once brought up calling a strike at a union meeting, but all the officials dismissed it out of hand. What are these bureaucrats even for, if they won't even threaten to withhold labor?"

When asked about a way forward for the striking workers, the UW worker responded, "The union heads just work to impose no-strike pledges on their members. That's why there has to be a turn to the rank and file, for them to run the strike.

He urged rank-and-file strikers to mobilize in defense of the strike against the inevitable sellout attempt by UAW bureaucrats. "I've read the WSWS for many years and its perspective is always borne out. When push comes to shove, these unions always betray their workers."

The UW worker also called for a broader struggle among the working class to fight alongside both struggles. "What would happen if the longshoremen in Los Angeles and San Diego walked out to defend students on campuses? The Biden administration wouldn't be able to build its 'arsenal of democracy.'"

The term "arsenal of democracy" is a propaganda term employed by Biden which refers to the World War-II era conversion of industrial plants, including those in the auto industry, to military production. UAW President Shawn Fain, who along with the UAW bureaucracy has endorsed "Genocide Joe" against overwhelming rank-and-file opposition, has adopted this rhetoric wholesale. At every public appearance, Fain wears a shirt displaying this slogan as well as a picture of a B-24 bomber.

Weapons production in the US today would be better termed "Arsenal of Genocide." In Gaza, the US-backed Zionist regime is currently carrying out a massive bombing campaign against Rafah, where 1.5 million Palestinians are huddled after being forced there by successive advances of the Israeli invasion. The northern sections of Gaza are suffering famine and the southern sections, where Rafah is located, are not far behind.

In Ukraine, US imperialism has provided more than \$100 billion to the fascistic Zelensky regime in a war that threatens to explode into a nuclear World War III.

Biden is relying on the UAW bureaucracy, as well as their counterparts in the Teamsters, the International

Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) and every other trade union bureaucracy to prevent disruption of the production and flow of war materiel to the developing fronts in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

This is why UAW Local 4811, having delayed the strike vote at UC by two weeks, has made clear that it will only call a strike "if circumstances permit," patterned after the so-called "standup strike" last year in the auto industry.

These were toothless rolling strikes that did nothing to dent production. The UAW shut them down to impose a contract—with the personal backing of Biden, who appeared onstage alongside Fain at a pro-contract rally while genocide protesters demonstrated outside—which is being used to lay off thousands.

But the growth of the class struggle is undermining the ability of the bureaucracy to keep control of the rank and file. There is enormous anger in particular over the UAW bureaucracy's close ties to the Biden White House and the Democratic Party.

Academic workers at UW must strive for the maximum possible unity of their struggle with those of grad students in California and in the auto industry. The political and economic demands being raised separately are, objectively, only two sides of the same coin. They must be brought together and fought for together.

To achieve this unity, workers cannot wait on the union bureaucracy, but must begin taking action themselves. Grad students, autoworkers and others across the country must form rank-and-file committees to open lines of communication between different sections of workers, plan joint actions and organize to enforce their democratic will against any attempt by union officials to violate it.

For more information about rank-and-file committees, fill out the form below:



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