

As 2,000 out of 48,000 set to strike Monday

Regents and UAW bureaucracy seek to contain political rebellion of UC academic workers

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As of Sunday night, 2,000 academic workers are scheduled to begin strike action Monday at the University of California, Santa Cruz, following a strike vote last week by United Auto Workers Local 4811, which comprises 48,000 teaching assistants, graduate student researchers, academic researchers, and post-doctoral students across the UC system.

Last week's strike vote across all UC campuses, which passed by 79 percent, reflects a powerful movement that has emerged among rank-and-file academic workers, who are overwhelmingly in favor of bringing their collective economic power to bear to stop the ongoing repression of campus anti-genocide protests by university administrators and police.

This rapidly emerging movement for a political strike is already confronting both the intransigence of the university authorities and the UAW bureaucracy, which is part of the same Democratic Party-dominated political apparatus that includes the Biden administration and the UC Board of Regents.

Despite the overwhelming popular support for an immediate mass strike, the UAW leadership is attempting to contain the strike within the narrowest possible channels using the model of a "stand-up strike," which was used to break up and betray the struggle of autoworkers for better wages and working conditions last year.

By scheduling an isolated strike of only 2,000 members at a single non-urban campus on Monday, the UAW bureaucracy is refusing to bring the full economic power of the membership to bear, including at campuses such as University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) and University of California Irvine, where the repression of anti-genocide protests has been the most violent.

There are 17,000 undergraduate students at UC Santa Cruz, one of the 10 campuses in the University of California system, out of 233,000 total across all UC campuses.

In contrast to the UAW bureaucracy's efforts to limit the strike movement of academic workers, the UC Board of Regents has taken the most aggressive positions in response to the strike vote. The Board of Regents is controlled by California's Democratic Party, presided over by California's Democratic governor Gavin Newsom, and consisting mostly of his political appointees.

Within minutes of the strike vote, UC sent out a menacing letter, taking the position that any strike would be categorically illegal. On that basis, the university threatened to engage in what would otherwise be illegal strikebreaking, such as directly retaliating against strikers (which UC calls "corrective action").

"This strike is illegal," said Melissa Matella, UC Associate Vice President of Systemwide Labor Relations, in a statement issued Thursday. "UAW's decision to strike over nonlabor issues violates the no-strike clause of their contracts with UC and sets a dangerous and far-reaching precedent that social, political and cultural issues—no matter how valid—that are not labor-related can support a labor strike."

On Friday, UC filed an "Unfair Labor Practice" charge with the state Public Employment Relations Board (PERB), asking the board to order the union and all its members to "cease and desist" strike activity.

According to the PERB online search portal, documents from the case file are not publicly accessible. However, J. Felix De La Torre, general counsel for the labor board, has indicated that a decision could be issued as soon as "early next week," according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

Based on the information that has been made public so far, as grounds for its ULP charge, UC is evidently citing a provision to which the UAW had agreed in its current collective bargaining agreement. In that provision, the union "agrees that there shall be no strikes, including sympathy strikes, stoppages or interruptions of work, or other concerted activities which interfere directly or indirectly with University operations" for the duration of the agreement.

Though this raises questions as to why the UAW bureaucracy agreed to a "no-strike" clause in the first place, under American labor law, the language would not, in fact, actually render the strike illegal. As Noah D. Zatz, a professor of law and labor studies at UCLA, wrote in the *Daily Bruin* student newspaper last week, such clauses "do not preclude strikes over issues outside the contract itself, including serious ULP strikes and sympathy strikes." "To reach that far," Dr. Zatz added, "more specific contract language is needed."

At the same time, the fact that this clause was included at all in the contract underscores the depth of the betrayal of the 2022 academic workers' strike by the UAW bureaucracy. After a six-week struggle involving substantial hardship and sacrifice on the part of the striking academic workers, the UAW bureaucracy brought back a tentative agreement that conceded all of the students' most significant demands, which it proceeded to cram down despite substantial opposition.

However, more importantly than the "no-strike clause," the UC's filing Friday insists more generally on the illegality of "political" strikes. "Particularly in today's climate, if UAW can disregard no-strike clauses, the University—and every other public agency in California—would face constant strikes advancing political and/or social viewpoints," UC's filing stated, according to language quoted in the *Los Angeles Times*.

This sentiment was echoed in comments to the *Los Angeles Times* by Heather Hansen, a spokesperson for UC's office of the president, who said that a strike would set a "dangerous precedent that would introduce non-labor issues into labor agreements." Characterizing the university's position, the *Los Angeles Times* wrote that the student body is "inappropriately flexing its muscle on a political issue."

On the contrary, the working class "flexing its muscle on a political issue" by bringing its economic power to bear is precisely what makes this strike vote so important—and dangerous from the standpoint of the political establishment and all of its auxiliaries. Indeed, if the working class internationally were to begin "flexing its muscles" on political issues, it would quickly discover that it has the power to radically transform the whole world situation for the better.

At the same time, the characterization of the circumstances that prompted the strike vote as "non-labor issues" is tendentious in the extreme, as if the militarized police rampages, slander campaigns, and discriminatory witch-hunts have had no effect whatsoever on the working conditions of graduate students.

The invocation of "unfair practices" against the academic workers who voted to strike turns reality on its head. If anyone's "practices" have been "unfair," it has been the university authorities, who have brought in the police to zip-tie peaceful protesters and shoot them with rubber bullets, suspended students en masse without due process, rendered them homeless, barred them from medical care, slandered them, jeopardized their student visas, violated their privacy, threatened their careers, stood by as they were physically attacked by far-right hoodlums, and menaced them with other forms of retaliation.

UC academic workers have every moral, legal and social right to strike and more, as a basic class measure of self-defense against a lawless and tyrannical administration that is trampling on their fundamental rights in an effort to suppress opposition to an ongoing genocide. There is no acceptable reason why, following the four-to-one strike vote last week, the entire membership of 48,000 was not called out immediately.

An all-out strike by 48,000 graduate students against the bipartisan campaign of repression against opposition to the Gaza genocide would have a tremendous impact, as the terrified Board of Regents recognizes. Such a strike would win natural allies

among workers throughout the country and the world.

This struggle to unlock and unleash the power of academic workers as part of the working class pits rank-and-file academic workers against the treacherous and compromised UAW bureaucracy, which represents a force no less hostile to their struggle than the Board of Regents. All academic workers involved in this struggle should be on alert for efforts by the UAW bureaucracy to shut down the strike—including as soon as tomorrow.

At the head of the UAW bureaucracy sits Shawn Fain, who has endorsed and appeared alongside "Genocide Joe" Biden, makes frequent trips to the White House and embraces imperialist militarism with the slogan "workers are the arsenal of democracy."

The record of the UAW bureaucracy as it relates to graduate students also includes dismantling the four-month wildcat strike of academic workers in 2020, which was concentrated at UC Santa Cruz, as well as the 2022 contract sellout. Even the UAW bureaucracy's decision to hold last week's strike vote was made reluctantly and after substantial delay.

Nationally, the UAW bureaucracy's reputation has never recovered from a corruption scandal implicating the entire national leadership, which saw 12 officials convicted and sent to prison, including two former presidents. The first-ever internal union elections in 2022 were marked by massive voter disenfranchisement, although they saw a substantial vote for rank-and-file socialist autoworker Will Lehman and his campaign to "abolish the bureaucracy," including within Local 4811.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* perspective Friday concluded:

Academic workers must now impose their democratic will through the formation of rank-and-file strike committees to mobilize for immediate, system-wide work stoppages. Against the attempts by the bureaucracy to limit their struggle, they must turn out to the autoworkers and the entire working class for support, establishing lines of communication to prepare for joint actions.

The working class as a whole must come to the defense of the students. Workers must take action to defend democratic rights and organize industrial actions to stop the genocide and spiraling of imperialist wars all over the world whose cause is the bankrupt capitalist system.



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