

University of California academic workers launch strike at UC Santa Cruz, as demands grow for system-wide walkout

Norisa Diaz, Jesus Ugarte, David Benson
21 May 2024

Workers, students, organizations and anti-war groups: Send us your statements in support of spreading the strike! Fill out the form below.

A strike by 2,000 academic workers began Monday at the University of California, Santa Cruz against the police repression of campus Gaza protests. The walkout at one of 10 University of California campuses follows an overwhelming statewide strike authorization vote of 48,000 academic workers in United Auto Workers Local 4811.

The UC administration is continuing its attempts to ban the UC strike. On Friday, it filed an “Unfair Labor Practice” complaint with California’s Public Employee Relations Board (PERB). A ruling is expected at any time. In its filing, the administration makes the authoritarian argument that the strike must be banned because it “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.”

The strike is a major development in the growing movement against the genocide and the nationwide attack on the right to protest by both capitalist parties. The use of class struggle methods objectively raises the need for the emergence of the working class as the basic social and political force against war.

The strike must become the beginning of a broader class movement. In the first place, the entire membership of the United Auto Workers, including autoworkers and defense industry workers, must demand strike action against the war and in defense of the students.

This requires a struggle against the union bureaucracy, which is deliberately limiting the strike to a single campus in order to isolate it and shut it down before it can spread. UAW President Shawn Fain, a close ally of “Genocide Joe Biden,” exemplifies the total integration of the pro-corporate union apparatus with the state. The union is using as a model the so-called “standup strike” in the auto industry last year, which did nothing to seriously impact production and was followed with mass layoffs.

A number of groups active in the protests have issued important public statements denouncing the UAW bureaucracy’s limiting of the strike to one campus. Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) has issued a statement criticizing the limited “standup strike,” writing:

The path forward is clear: UAW 4811 must immediately call a strike at all University of California campuses. ... UAW 4811 leadership must support the demands of their rank-and-file workers, and the broader grassroots movement for liberation. Any strike must demand disclosure, divestment, academic

boycott, police abolition, amnesty and more. This must be a strike for Palestine. Winning our demands requires immediate strike action, we must not stop and we will not rest!

A statement is also circulating among academic workers titled “UAW members and students concerned by UCSC UAW leadership.” It expresses “alarm” at the “lack of a Cops Off Campus (COC) demand” in the official demands of the union at UCSC, “especially in the face of heightened police violence on UC campuses against student protesters.”

It continues, “To our dismay, not only did the leadership refuse to address our concerns, they repeatedly attempted to intimidate us into silence.”

It concludes that the UCSC UAW leadership has “[revealed] itself to be unfit to lead in this historical moment. ... We cannot rely on performative acts by an undemocratic union leadership to achieve justice in Palestine, nor can they keep us safe.

These statements are welcome and important developments. They point to the growing potential for the movement to break out of the shackles the bureaucracy is trying to impose on it.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote last week:

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.

Academic workers at UCLA in particular are demanding to be called out on strike, after police allowed Zionists to brutally attack a protest encampment last month before the police cleared the encampment with rubber bullets and flashbangs and arrested 132 people.

One UC Los Angeles academic worker told the WSWs:

I was there [in the 2022 UC strike], and it’s almost exactly the same group of [officials] doing the same thing they always

do. And they've refused to tell us when they'll call us to strike. The rank and file are pressuring them now to back us.

Pickets at UC Santa Cruz

At UC Santa Cruz, several hundred strikers took part in a picket line at the base of campus. They were joined later by about 100 students, who marched a mile and a half from a university encampment at Quarry Plaza that has been held for more than a week.

Strikers who spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* expressed a general distrust of the UAW bureaucracy, including UAW President Shawn Fain. One described Fain as a "class traitor." Another said, "we don't care about him or what he has to say."

A third-year undergrad student who attended in support told the WSWS that he felt the genocide was "all due to capitalism, and nothing short of ending it will address the issues."

Another striker had participated in the 2020 wildcat strikes at UCSC over cost-of-living adjustments. He disagreed that the method of limiting the strike to a few campuses was appropriate and agreed with the need for a UC-wide strike.

An international student expressed puzzlement at the decision to call out just one campus and wondered whether this was just how strikes normally worked in the United States. He was shocked to learn how a similar "standup strike" was used to ram through a sellout contract last year in the auto industry, which is now being used to lay off thousands.

Asked his opinion on the UC administration's argument before the Public Employee Relations Board (PERB) to get the strike banned, citing the danger of a precedent set by such a political strike, he paused for a moment and then said:

This is a very good question. Because this means that if this is allowed, workers would demand systemic change.

Protests grow in spite of continuing crackdown

Demands for broader action are only growing as capitalist politicians, administrators and police double down on their assaults nationwide. Following a raid and arrests attacking the encampment at UC Irvine last week, on Friday night a dozen people were arrested at the UC Berkeley encampment. The SJP has said that bail for the students was set at a vindictive \$120,000 each.

This is only the tip of the iceberg. The SJP confirmed on social media Monday that despite an agreement with the arrested student protesters at Harvard, 12 students will be prevented from graduating.

Meanwhile, protests and encampments are continuing to grow. On Sunday, 10,000 people rallied at the state Capitol in Austin, Texas despite attempts to de facto ban the protest by closing the Capitol grounds. On Monday, the erection of an encampment in Bucharest, Romania was celebrated globally on social media by tens of thousands.

Healthcare workers speak out

There is growing support for the protests in the working class. A healthcare worker at UC San Diego Health told the WSWS:

I was in Afghanistan, and I saw what happened to women and children there. What is taking place in Gaza is absolutely horrible. Women and children under rubble, citizens constantly bombarded. Why can't they just stop this? I hate war and am opposed to what the US is supporting in Israel.

He added:

The students have every right to protest. They are exercising their First Amendment rights. There was no reason for the response by the university and police that they got. I defend their right to protest.

Responding to the claim that opposing the genocide in Gaza is "antisemitic," he said:

No, I don't agree with that. These protesters are trying to express their opposition to war. They oppose genocide. Simple as that. It's very similar to Vietnam and the protests then. What this is is major opposition to war and US imperialism.

Another healthcare worker said, "I'm disgusted with how the university has responded to the students. They have the right to protest." She added that she would support a broader strike among workers in their defense, "but it would require that we all come out."



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact