

University of California files for injunction against academic worker strike over Gaza protest crackdowns

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21 May 2024

The University of California system has filed an injunction to ban a strike by academic workers opposing the police crackdown on campus protests against the genocide in Gaza. On Monday, 2,000 workers at University of California Santa Cruz walked out, but the United Auto Workers has left 46,000 of its members on the job at the system's nine other campuses.

A press release by UC employed sweeping authoritarian language, declaring the strike is illegal because its “goal is to pressure the University to concede to a list of politically motivated demands closely linked to the protests occurring across California and the nation.”

Adding insult to injury, the press release ends: “The University has allowed—and will continue to allow—lawful protesting activities surrounding the conflict in the Middle East.” In fact, students have been beaten and arrested across California and the United States. Only last week, police smashed up an encampment at UC Irvine while the academic workers’ strike voting process was ending.

This is a major escalation of the assault on the right to free speech, including the right to protest a genocide. This has already been ripped up *de facto* through weeks of police raids that have led to over 3,000 arrests nationwide. But the court filing amounts to a demand that *all* strike activity of a political character be banned in the United States.

As a matter of fact, the ruling class long ago passed a ban on political strikes in the Taft Hartley Act of 1947, widely denounced as the “slave-labor bill.” However, the claim that the UC strike is illegal is factually absurd

An Unfair Labor Practice complaint filed with the state employee relations board Friday used similar language. “Particularly in today’s climate, if [the] 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,” the complaint warned.

In other words, a precedent must be set that workers and youth can not only be prevented from exercising their right to free speech, but are banned from active opposition when their rights are violated. The only form of political activity which is acceptable to the ruling class is voting for one of the two official pro-war parties in elections—and even this is under threat, as shown by the January 6 coup attempt.

The very forces seeking to have opposition declared “illegal” are themselves criminals. At the same time that the UC files for an injunction, prosecutors with the International Criminal Court are seeking arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other officials for genocide.

This would make the Biden administration, as well as the whole US political establishment and campus administrators, unindicted co-conspirators. The irrefutable legal case against the Israeli government also exposes the absurd slander that the protests are motivated by antisemitism.

The response of the US political establishment to the looming ICC warrants has been hysterical denunciations. Additionally, the US has long refused to acknowledge the court’s authority, and Congress even passed a law in 2002 allowing the president to rescue American war criminals from The Hague. At the same

time that it rejects all restraint on its own criminal activity, US imperialism demands that workers accept the authority of capitalist courts to ban strikes as inviolable.

Union bureaucrats as policemen

The isolation of the strike by the UAW bureaucracy creates conditions favorable for the ruling class to ban the walk out. This is an outcome which the bureaucracy, which supports Biden and expelled protesters from its own Political Action Conference this year, would welcome.

The limited strike at UC is patterned after the so-called “standup strike” used to impose a sellout contract on autoworkers last year, which has since been used to lay off thousands of people. Last week, the UAW also shut down a strike by academic workers at the University of Washington after only a few hours, just before workers at Western Washington University began their strike. They clearly did not want both WWU and UW workers on the picket lines together while the bureaucrats struggle to keep the political strike at UC from spreading.

UAW Local 4811, which covers the UC workers, responded to the injunction with a statement claiming “More campuses are preparing to strike.” But instead of announcing an expansion of the strike to more campuses, the statement begs the administration to bargain “in good faith.” Local 4811 President Rafael Jaime said: “We are open to sitting down with UC to resolve these Unfair Labor Practices ... We’re disappointed that UC has refused to engage in [the California Public Employment Relations Board’s] resolution process.”

The statement ends by declaring that if the university does not accept their “openness to sit down and resolve this situation,” then “our union’s Executive Board will announce the next of the campuses to Stand Up no later than Friday.” But by then, a court may have already declared the strike illegal.

But any deal to end the strike with some sort of agreement with UC administrators would amount to an injunction in all but name, enforced through a

bureaucracy which acts as an extension of the government and the police. There has not even been an official call for the removal of police from the campuses as part of their deal. In other words, not only the genocide but even the police occupation of universities would continue.

It is urgent that the working class, both across the United States and the world, mobilize to defend the strike. The strike must be immediately expanded to the entire UC system, as well as the whole UAW membership.

Transportation workers and other key industrial workers must also prepare actions in support of the strike. The potential injunction against the UC strike follows Congress’ strike ban in 2022 against railroaders, after they defied a sellout contract worked out between the White House and the rail unions.

But academic workers cannot wait for “approval” to massively expand the strike, which they already voted overwhelmingly to approve last week, that will never come from the bureaucrats. They must act now, forming rank-and-file strike committees to enforce their democratic will.



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