

“What the people want and what the bureaucracy wants are in conflict”: University of California academic workers speak out as state-wide Gaza strike expands

Alan Gilman, Tom Hall
5 June 2024

A state-wide strike continued by workers at five University of California campuses Tuesday against police attacks on student protests against the Gaza genocide. A sixth campus, UC Irvine, is set to join the strike tomorrow, increasing the number of workers on strike to more than 30,000.

The strike is a product of a rebellion against the union bureaucracy. The initiative for the strike came from the rank and file, and officials in United Auto Workers Local 4811, which covers 48,000 academic workers in the UC system, tried to limit it at first to only one campus. The bureaucracy only sanctioned strike action at other campuses once it became clear that workers there would walk out anyway.

“What the people want and what the bureaucracy wants, are in conflict,” one picket told the WSW. Another said, “It feels like they didn’t tell us anything about the strike. Everything feels so rushed, it was like there was no preparation for it.”

A computer science student spoke out against the UAW’s endorsement of Biden, who is arming Israel to the teeth and directing the campus crackdowns. “It doesn’t seem right to endorse Genocide Joe, when the membership is on strike against the genocide.”

Cosmo and Rebecca, two undergrad students at UC Santa Barbara, were speaking from the encampment. “We stand with the students because the students are us,” Rebecca said. “And I think it’s important that we acknowledge the TAs [teaching assistants] and the graduate students who are going outside of the union’s laws and rules and striking full time because it sets a precedent. I think it’s very powerful too that the strike is even happening in the name of free speech, though. I

think it shows that the grad students are kind of tired and also facing a lot of the same scrutiny as undergraduates from the UC system.”

Cosmo added that he felt the union “needs to stand up a little bit and support the people who they’re supposed to protect instead of conceding to their oppressors.”

While students have taken a courageous stand, the working class must intervene through industrial action to force an end to the war and to the attacks on the right to free speech. This was the topic of discussion Tuesday night at a meeting sponsored by the *World Socialist Web Site*, “From Wayne State to University of California—industrial workers must oppose protest crackdowns.” More than 180 workers, students and retirees attended from across North America. The *World Socialist Web Site* will publish a detailed report on the meeting tomorrow.

On Tuesday afternoon, International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) member David Rye spoke to pickets at UC San Diego during a community speakout event. “The same ruling class that seeks to send bombs to Israel and Ukraine is the same ruling class that seeks to speed up the exploitation of workers in the auto industry and in the railroad industry,” he said. “The workers in these industries are disgusted by war, just as they are disgusted by their own exploitation.”

The great issue, he said, was to “turn the movement against war and the movement against exploitation into one great working class movement. This can only be done from a socialist perspective.”

UC Riverside is the only campus with a large student body still in session which the UAW has refused to call out. (UC San Francisco, a graduate student-only medical

campus, is also still holding classes.) They have apparently justified this decision on the basis of a toothless divestment deal to shut down the encampment reached between protest organizers and the campus administration. This commits the university to nothing except the formation of joint boards, the cancellation of study abroad programs and the publication of information about the school's financial ties to Israel and the US military.

However, UC Riverside students themselves have apparently ignored this deal. On Tuesday, renewed protests broke out centered around the occupation of a campus building, which protesters renamed Sidra's Center, after a seven-year-old Palestinian girl killed in an Israeli airstrike.

Also this week, the state Public Employee Relations Board (PERB) rejected an appeal by the UC administration to ban the strike. This followed the rejection of an earlier application for a court injunction by the university. The PERB rejected the university's application on the grounds that it had not met the high standard for showing the strike had caused "irreparable harm" to school operations.

But while the ruling class has declined so far to use the courts and labor relations boards to bar the strike, this could change at any time. The police raids last week at UC Santa Cruz and at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, show there has been no let-up in the drive to ban all opposition to war.

The decision to avoid imposing an injunction is a tactical decision to give the UAW bureaucracy time to bring the strike back under control and to ultimately end it by limiting it to the perspective of campus protests and financial divestments by individual universities.

But there is enormous support for a broader struggle in the working class. On Tuesday, a Ford worker from southeast Michigan called for broad strike action, warning in particular about the lessons of the partial "standup strike" the UAW bureaucrats used last year to force through a sellout. The UAW has continued to falsely claim that it "won" unprecedented job protections, when in fact thousands of autoworkers have lost their jobs so far this year.

"On September 14" when the last contract expired, he said, "I was waiting for [the union] to pull the plug. It didn't happen. The whole union sold out. All three shifts were pumping out trucks, when we had the power to stop the world."

He continued:

If it was up to me, all this time [since last September] we would have been on strike. We were supposed to have won more time with our families, instead we got less. We went from four 10-hour days each week, to five 10-hour days, and a mandatory eight-hour shift on Saturday.

My daddy worked at Ford, and I never really saw him when I was growing up. I have three kids, and I don't want them to be telling my grandchildren the same thing. They are taking our life away.

All of us have to stop working at the same time. We want all workers to have a pension, decent wages and medical care. Everybody has to do it at the same time.

They want to get us out of there and keep bringing in people off the street for half the money. Fain lied, and he put on a good show. "My workers are going to be mad if I don't do something," he said. He promised to win back everything we gave up. In the end he wound up with more concessions and mass layoffs.

I don't agree with war. I'm not going to kill somebody I do not know. I talk to everybody. I don't care what color you are or where you are from. We are still human beings. We are all the same. The Democrats and the Republicans, all of them are ignorant. Trump wants to be a dictator. This is America. We don't agree with dictatorship. I've got nothing against the workers of other countries.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact