

“The killing and oppression in Gaza has to stop”: Mass opposition to anti-democratic order to break University of California strike

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Are you a UC academic worker? To join the fight for rank-and-file committees and the expansion of the UC strike, fill out the form at the end of this article.

The strikebreaking order issued by a California judge last Friday has provoked broad opposition from University of California academic workers, who are determined to continue their historic walkout to stop the US-backed genocide in Gaza and the police crackdown on campus protests.

Last Friday, Orange County Superior Court Judge Randall J. Sherman, an appointee of former Republican Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, ordered workers to return to work until June 27 while final exams are taken at many campuses. Since the leaders of United Auto Workers Local 4811 already declared that the end date of the strike would be June 30, the effect of the “temporary restraining order” would be to shut down the strike.

The judge hypocritically claimed the strike was doing “irreparable damage” to UC students, while ignoring the real damage done by the UC administration’s suspension of First Amendment rights and the violent attacks and arrests of academic workers and their students.

The strike began May 20 after police and Zionist thugs physically attacked protesters at UCLA. The struggle was initiated by rank-and-file workers, not the UAW bureaucracy, which has endorsed the reelection of Biden and sought to limit the walkout to one or two campuses under its bogus “stand up strike” policy.

The judge intervened at the end of last week after threats of wildcat strikes forced the UAW to expand the strike to include 30,000 of the 48,000 UC academic workers. There is little doubt that the UAW bureaucracy welcomed the court intervention as an excuse to shut down the strike. In a statement sent to strikers at 10pm Sunday night, UAW 4811 President Rafael Jaime declared, “All striking academic workers should return to work Monday morning, in compliance with the court order.”

Student workers and faculty have recently revealed to the WSWs that the University of California is ordering faculty to provide passing final grades to all students amid concerns that

student teaching assistants may continue withholding grades as part of an independent strike action.

The office of the president at UCLA has announced a new investigation by its “21st Century Policing Solution” asking for students to provide details on students involved in protests and encampments who may have initially escaped the police dragnet. Academic workers and students have denounced the efforts to recruit informers.

Student workers at UC Santa Cruz (UCSC) have already launched a campaign to defy the university’s order, with one viral post on instagram writing, “Calling all faculty and lecturers, as the striking grads across all of California face a TRO by a conservative judge on the UC’s dime. WITHHOLD YOUR GRADES, DON’T BE A SCAB.”

Another UCSC worker wrote to the WSWs stating that the workers needed to “keep striking.” The worker noted it was absurd to stop the strike, especially as the UC has yet to spend even a single second negotiating with the student workers over their demands.

A UCLA graduate student told the WSWs, “While this is a temporary victory for the UC, the historic student labor and anti-genocide movement is still going strong. Upcoming graduation and commencement ceremonies this weekend will showcase the strong sentiments of student activists taking a stand against imperialism and colonialism.

“While there will be less protections for students deciding to disrupt with the temporary restraining order,” the student wrote, “there are still multiple planned actions and methods of civil disobedience that will still occur. Additionally, I believe that students will continue protesting and possibly take labor action in the Fall school year.”

A UC Irvine alumnus wrote, “The ‘stand-up’ strategy failed, and they don’t know what to do. Faculty are apparently being told to pass failing students. Grades are what we produce. They are our point of maximum pressure.”

From the beginning, the UAW apparatus has sought to limit the strike to appeals to the Public Employee Relations Board (PERB) for a ruling that UC violated state labor laws by suspending free speech rights and ordering the arrest of

protesters. The strikebreaking intervention by the courts, however, demonstrates that the defense of democratic rights will not be protected by any government agency but only through a powerful movement of the working class, including the expansion of the UC strike and joint actions by industrial workers.

The fight for this requires a struggle against the UAW bureaucracy. UC workers must build their own rank-and-file committees to shut down the entire UC system and appeal directly to workers in the auto, aerospace, defense, logistics and other industries.

This means breaking the information blackout on the UC strike by the UAW apparatus, which has done nothing to inform UAW members about the decisive struggle. Those autoworkers who have been told about the strike by the WSWS have expressed their support for a common struggle against the US-backed genocide and police state measures against protesters.

“What the judge did is unjust, but I’m not surprised given the crooked nature of this country,” Jake, a Stellantis worker at the Warren Truck plant in suburban Detroit, told the WSWS. “It’s awful what Israel is doing to the Palestinian people, and the killing and oppression has got to stop.

“Congress is inviting the Israeli leader to speak. The politicians are not interested in doing what is right for the people, only for what benefits the political and big money interests. The US won’t rein Israel in because of its own war crimes. Now, they want even bigger wars against Russia and China.”

Asked how UAW members should respond to the judge’s strikebreaking injunction, he said, “Every worker, whether an autoworker, a nurse, a firefighter or a teacher, should stand up for constitutional rights.”

A supporter of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) at the Ford Michigan Assembly Plant in Wayne, Michigan, said, “I didn’t know about the strike against the war in California. The UAW is keeping it quiet, and that is wrong. If any part of the union goes on strike, everybody should know about it.”

Pointing to the recent police attack on a pro-Palestinian encampment at Wayne State University in Detroit, she said, “That was a shock to see the police arrest students at Wayne State. I support them. If only a few of us go on strike, nobody will listen. But if everybody joined in to shut down the country, they would have no choice but to stop the war.

“They are spending all this money on these wars. I know the country is bankrupt. I have seen them threatening to shut down the government. We need to expand the IWA-RFC to publicize this information about what is going on. I joined at the beginning of the pandemic. The union and the company were not telling us what was going on, and people were catching COVID and dying in front of me, on my shift and the other shift. We need our own organization.”

A supporter of the Ford Rouge Workers Rank-and-File Committee, who is waiting to start work at the Michigan Assembly Plant after having been laid off at the Rouge Electric Vehicle Center in mid-March, also said he had heard nothing from the UAW about the UC strike. “I didn’t hear anything about it from the union, she said, “They are supporting Biden.

“They want war. They do not want peace. It is genocide. We can’t just live. Why can’t we share? There is enough to provide for everybody.” She went on to describe the conditions that she and her co-workers who were laid off more than two months ago confront.

“Workers already face a war at home in every country. We were laid off, and we’re fighting for jobs just trying to live. Everybody has debts piled up on top of them. When you go to the union because your money’s not coming in, you get the runaround. I don’t want to hear that.

“We need homes, jobs and enough to live on while they are sending our money to fight these wars. The people who control the government are sitting in the Cayman Islands getting rich off of our labor. I support the students. They have the right to peacefully protest. The campus wasn’t like that before the war. We should all be on strike to defend them.”

An engineer who emigrated to the US commented on President Biden’s denunciations of student protesters and hostility towards them by the US media. “We never could have imagined the level of force that is being used here to suppress the youth, who are coming out to protest—the way they were beating the kids, women and girls. They had no respect for the teacher—a professor put on the ground forcefully. He was no threat.

“The images from Gaza are horrifying in the extreme. To free four hostages, they killed nearly 300 people and injured hundreds more. The US government has twisted the meaning of words like ‘freedom,’ ‘democracy’ and ‘human rights.’ Their criteria is power. They want to have puppets in every country, including in America. We have to open our eyes and open those of the people around us.”

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