

“We have to fight”: Tens of thousands of University of California workers start 2-day strike

Our correspondents
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UC workers and students: Tell us why you support this week’s strike by filling out the form below! All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Nearly 40,000 University of California workers began a two-day strike Wednesday across the state. The workers, members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 3299 and University Professional and Technical Employees (UPTE-CWA) Local 9119, include custodians, janitors and other low-paid positions, as well as technicians and healthcare staff.

Workers are demanding wage increases to match the outrageous cost of living in California, reduced healthcare costs, which have been significantly increased by the UC without negotiation, and improved job conditions to address chronic understaffing, which harms both employees and the quality of services provided.

At **UC San Diego** Hillcrest hospital, workers voiced common grievances: underpaid, overworked, subject to unsafe conditions.

“We’re angry and we’re hungry. ... We have to fight, it’s not fair,” said one worker.

This is the first major strike in the United States since the presidential election returned Trump to the White House earlier this month. As the WSWS has said, “Whatever the illusions of those who voted for Trump, the new administration will provoke massive social conflict on a scale never before seen in the United States.”

Another worker expressed great concern about the incoming Trump administration. “Trump is going to be a disaster,” he commented.

The workers from AFSCME are among of the most

impoverished and vulnerable layers of the UC workforce composed heavily of immigrants. Many of these workers’ families, already facing poverty wages, endure additional threats because of their immigrant status. They are under direct threat from Donald Trump’s plans to militarize immigration enforcement, including mass deportations, heightening fears among immigrant workers.

Their labor is essential to maintain one of the world’s most prestigious public university systems. The UC administration, hoarding an investment portfolio worth over \$150 billion, has reduced thousands to housing and food insecurity.

In California—the richest state in the US—obscene wealth contrasts starkly with workers struggling to survive amid soaring inflation and skyrocketing housing costs.

The UC system has emerged as a major battlefield of the class struggle, with the UC administrators moving aggressively to attack wages and living standards and rip up the free speech rights of students protesting the genocide against Gaza. Tens of thousands of graduate students and other academic workers have struck repeatedly since 2019.

Healthcare in general has also been a focal point of the class struggle, including an ongoing Kaiser Permanente mental health workers’ strike and walkouts at CVS and Rite Aid pharmacies. This will continue in the coming period as the new administration, staffed with anti-vax ignoramuses like Robert F. Kennedy Jr., is planning massive assaults on the healthcare system and even health science in general.

Kaiser Permanente mental health workers have been on strike for five weeks throughout Southern

California. Striking workers at **Irvine Kaiser Permanente** expressed strong support for the UC strike. Commenting on the upcoming struggle against Trump, Yazmin, an associate clinical social worker, commented: “This [strike] is only the beginning and we have to come together because this is where it starts. We are mighty. When we come together collectively, that’s when we have power. We’re going to be resistant in every way.”

At **UC Los Angeles**, Denise, a nurse at the UCLA Medical Center picketing in support of her brothers and sisters, relayed her concerns about a second Trump presidency: “What worries me most with this incoming administration is the fate of my patients. With the cuts that Trump is proposing, I feel like a lot of them are going to miss essential care. I’m hoping that there are a lot of lawsuits, but I realize we’re going to have to fight too. We can’t wait for anyone to do it for us.”

She also expressed concerns about RFK Jr.’s appointment to head the Department of Health and Human Services. “I know Trump isn’t the least bit committed to public health. In fact, I think he wants to do away with it, and this RFK Jr. is proof of it,” she said. “The man has no real-world medical experience or training, and he’s there to save money at the expense of people’s health or even their very lives.”

Instead of organizing a determined fight linking up with workers across the University of California system and the country, union officials have restricted the UC strike to a mere two days, framing it as a narrow Unfair Labor Practices (ULP) strike. In deliberately isolating these struggles, they are preparing the field for Trump’s devastating policies.

In 2019, AFSCME organized a series of toothless one-day strikes before ultimately signing contracts that failed to meet workers’ demands.

To mobilize the working class against the new government, the WSWS calls on UC workers to “develop new structures to transfer power from the pro-corporate union apparatus to the rank-and-file.

“A rank-and-file committee, composed of workers and not union officials or Democratic Party operatives, must be built to give workers the power to countermand decisions that violate their will and provide the means to link up with workers across the UC system, the healthcare industry and around the world.”

Rank-and-file committees must also challenge the

anti-immigrant policies championed by figures like Trump and facilitated by the Democratic Party.

Denise was critical about the limitations imposed on the strike. “I wish more of us were out and this strike needs to last more than two days.”

At **UC Berkeley**, food service worker Serena spoke for many who are moving to the left. “I am extremely disappointed in the Democratic Party. I question my support moving forward because effectively American politics is just continuing to shift right.”

Another worker, Finn, said, “Both parties are so compromised, their interests are really just, you know, finance, insurance, real estate, so compromised that neither can represent the people at all. Everyone knows I hate the Republicans, I don’t need to defend that, but I hate the Democrats with all my heart.”

Another worker commented, “They’re trying to raise our healthcare premiums from 9 to 11 percent, and the fact is that the deans of the university are receiving a housing stipend to help them with their housing while the front-line workers, the ones doing the work every day or out here every day, are left to struggle and to scrape by.” About Trump’s election, he said, “There will be a lot more people active once they start to see the policies in play.”

To win this fight, UC workers must organize their power independent of the union apparatus and the Democrats, who are bending over backwards to declare their willingness to “work with” Trump.

This is not just an economic fight; it is a political battle against the entire capitalist system that prioritizes profits over human lives. Only through conscious, collective action can workers secure their rights and lay the foundation for a socialist future.

The fight for fair wages and working conditions is inseparable from the broader fight against war, dictatorship and for social equality, democratic rights and an end to capitalist exploitation.



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