

University of California 2-day strike ends without resolution to core issues

Our correspondents
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The two-day strike by nearly 40,000 University of California workers concluded Thursday, leaving all the fundamental political and economic grievances of thousands of workers completely unaddressed.

The strike, which involved custodians, janitors, healthcare workers, and technicians, highlighted the appalling conditions faced by UC employees and the determination of workers to fight. The union bureaucrats from the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 3299 and University Professional and Technical Employees (UPTTE-CWA) Local 9119 limited the strike in advance to only two days.

This is a replay of the union's actions in 2019, when a series of short-term strikes ended with a sellout agreement that failed to address workers' needs.

Workers at UC—many of whom are immigrants—endure crushing workloads, stagnant wages, and skyrocketing living costs in one of the wealthiest states in the US. Meanwhile, the UC system enjoys a multi-billion-dollar endowment and continues to rake in profits.

Nevertheless, the strike is a preview of the eruption of the class struggle under the Trump administration. Workers, with healthcare and immigrant workers in the front rank, will be thrust into struggle against Trump's program for dictatorship, which includes mass deportations and the evisceration of public health.

For workers to fight back, however, requires a struggle against the pro-corporate union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party. The Democrats, concerned only with continuing the wars in Gaza and Ukraine, try to lull the public to sleep and wish Trump "success" in his policies. The union bureaucracy, by limiting and suppressing strikes on behalf of management, acts against the only social force on which the fight against

dictatorship can be based.

For this reason, the WSWS urges UC workers to form rank-and-file committees 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."

On the picket lines, workers articulated economic grievances as well as pressing political issues, including the rising threat of authoritarianism, the plight of immigrants, and the broader societal impact of growing inequality and war spending.

At **UC San Francisco**, the WSWS spoke to a nurse case manager who said she is typically responsible for about 20 patients, from admission to discharge. "When you have short staffing, it causes patients to stay in the hospital longer. There's risk of infection for staying longer, delays in care, insurance denial, and patients might get medical bills for hundreds of thousands of dollars."

Due to unfilled job positions, the UC is saving millions of dollars: "We asked for critical data in regards to staffing vacancies and the University of California has not given us any data for 18 months. We don't know what they're hiding."

"Just this week I had a patient in the emergency department for four days," she said. Due to short staffing, patients stay "in hallways in their most vulnerable time in their life, out in public where tons of people are walking past them," also raising the danger of the spread of infections.

"They're paying their chancellors and CEOs double-digit pay increases of 30 percent. UC San Diego Chancellor [Pradeep] Khosla had a 78 percent increase. We are losing our talented staff and the amount of work has been increasing, [as well as] the complexity of the

patients.”

Two sanitary workers at **UC San Diego** told the WSWs that the genocide in Gaza makes them “sick to my stomach,” as does Trump’s proposed mass deportations. The Republicans “say they will stop war, but they want to start war with other people,” referring in particular to China.

Another worker, a phone center technician, reiterated demands for full-time staffing, higher pay and restoration of bonuses. “All the executives received a 4.5 percent pay raise this year, they have purchased more hospitals, and they have also raised our parking costs! For an eight-hour work day, we have to pay \$6.50, [that] really does add up. This is all just corporate greed and its unfair.”

Under Trump, she said that she is “very concerned” about healthcare costs for her, her colleagues and the population. She scoffed at the proposed appointments of Dr. Oz for the National Institute of Health and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as Secretary of Health and Human Services.

“I’m also really concerned about scheduled abortions and for the future of women having the right to choose whether or not they get one. Many times, it is a dire situation and of medical necessity. What will happen to all those people? I think there are more protections here in California, but I also worry about the rest of the US.”

Marilyn, a custodian at **UC Irvine**, said, “During the pandemic, we worked risking our lives. We were recognized as heroes, but we didn’t get anything for that. Now we are fighting over \$25 an hour, and we are also paying more for health insurance.” She continued: “When adding all expenses, my husband and I need to work two jobs to support a family of four kids. The reality is that often three or four families have to live together to save on rent.”

Marilyn is an immigrant. “I came from Mexico in the 90s. I was ‘illegal.’ I’ve been in California 34 years and worked two or three jobs most of the time so that my kids could have a better life. I’m worried about the new president, we need to be ready, to be resilient and confront everything they do to us. It’s really sad to see families being separated, even when the kids didn’t even come as ‘illegal.’”

She expressed dissatisfaction with the fact the strike was limited to two days. “I don’t know what happened with two days. Some people said it should be a week,

others a month.”

The strike’s conclusion without any concrete gains underscores the need for workers to build their own organizations to transfer power from the union apparatus to the rank and file, as a first step towards mobilizing for a fight to defend the rights of the working class everywhere.

UC workers must form independent, rank-and-file committees to take control of their struggle. These committees can unite with other sections of the working class—including Kaiser Permanente workers and others engaged in simultaneous battles—and fight for a broader, politically conscious movement against the capitalist system itself.

The threat of fascism, police dragnets and war imposes on workers the urgent need to prepare for an all-out confrontation with the political forces oppressing them, not just the Democratic and Republican parties, but also a union bureaucracy that tries to suppress the class struggle. Only through the independent organization of rank-and-file committees can UC workers turn their anger into meaningful action.



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