UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA GRAD STUDENTS: TAKE THE STRUGGLE OUT OF THE HANDS OF THE UAW BUREAUCRACY!



BY WILL LEHMAN
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The overwhelming strike-authorization vote by 48,000 University of California academic workers is a powerful expression of class anger. Graduate student researchers, teaching assistants, postdocs and professional academic staff sustain teaching, research and the daily functioning of the UC system while surviving on wages and stipends that leave many at or near poverty in one of the most expensive states in the country.

In this struggle, UC workers are directly confronting Governor Gavin Newsom and the Democratic Party establishment, which controls every level of government in California. The Democrats insist there is no money to meet the most basic needs of workers and students. Yet they pour billions into corporate tax cuts and subsidies for Silicon Valley tech giants, Hollywood monopolies, energy conglomerates and the military industries.

California is home to more billionaires than any other state in the country. Many of these billionaires and corporate executives sit directly on the UC Board of Regents — overseeing a public university system subordinated to Wall Street and the war machine.

In May-June 2024, tens of thousands of UC academic workers launched a strike opposing the US-backed genocide in Gaza and the police repression of campus protests. The initiative came from below, not from the UAW apparatus. The UAW delayed action, then limited the walkout to a small fraction of campuses. Only under pressure from rank-and-file workers threatening wildcat action did it expand the strike.

When the UC administration obtained a court injunction declaring the strike “illegal,” the UAW bureaucracy immediately capitulated and shut it down.

At the time, the Biden administration was overseeing a nationwide crackdown on campus protests. Both Democrats and Republicans slandered anti-genocide protesters as “antisemitic” and threatened universities with funding cuts. The UAW leadership aligned itself politically with the Biden-Harris administration, even standing by as anti-genocide protesters were expelled from a UAW meeting endorsing Biden.

Now repression has escalated further. The Trump administration is detaining and deporting international students for their political beliefs, threatening universities with defunding unless they suppress dissent, and expanding ICE operations in major cities. In Minneapolis, federal agents murdered Renée Nicole Good and ICU nurse Alex Pretti in paramilitary immigration operations — part of the construction of the infrastructure for a police-military dictatorship.

And where is the UAW leadership? Silent on ICE operations in front of Detroit factories and neighborhoods just miles from its own headquarters. Silent as immigrants are terrorized. It promotes “America First” economic nationalism and trade war measures, echoing Trump’s lies that destroying workers’ jobs abroad will benefit American workers.

The function of the trade union bureaucracy is to contain working class struggles and subordinate them to the political framework of the two corporate parties.

The UAW's blocking of a strike by 3,700 graduate and professional student workers at the University of Pennsylvania on Tuesday, underscores the same pattern. After months of bargaining and a strike authorization vote, a last-minute tentative agreement was announced and the strike called off before the full contract language had even been presented to the membership.

I urge UC academic workers to establish democratically elected rank-and-file committees, independent of the UAW apparatus, with the authority to oversee bargaining, demand full transparency, and ensure that no strike is suspended without a full membership review and vote. Academic workers are part of a broader eruption of struggle — healthcare workers, teachers, logistics workers and manufacturing workers across California and nationally. The objective conditions exist for coordinated action. Through rank-and-file committees, workers can break the isolation imposed by the bureaucracy and develop unified action across campuses, industries and borders.

I am running for UAW president on a program of abolishing the apparatus, transferring power to the workers in the UAW, and on this basis launching a real struggle of the entire working class. The fight for decent wages and job security cannot be separated from the defense of immigrants, the defense of democratic rights and the fight against war. UC academic workers have taken an important step. The task now is to ensure that this strike mandate is not dissipated.

Build rank-and-file committees! Demand full democratic control! Link up with workers across the country and internationally. Take the struggle out of the hands of the bureaucracy and place it where it belongs — in the hands of the working class itself.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

Get involved with the rank-and-file campaign in the UAW elections.

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