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SPREAD THE STRIKE!!!

By all appearances, UC's employment practices are more informed by the politics of the local landlord class than by any public mandate or educational principle. We see this in the UC's refusal to invest in, repair, and maintain its crumbling infrastructure, coupled with an expectation that rents will continue to rise, while the price of labor will continue to fall. It is no coincidence that, residing in Santa Cruz, the administration would seek to model its rule on the private power of slumlords. This strategy, which the university administration unilaterally adopts, characterizes their approach to collective bargaining in general—except, paradoxically, in our labor dispute around a COLA, where it defers accountability upwards to UCOP. In this light, we can readily see why the administration “refuses to negotiate” or renegotiate contracts with campus workers. Their waiting and stalling marks a deliberate abrogation of labor recognition and a reversion to an open-shop standard, in sync with longstanding business initiatives in California and elsewhere.

Infrastructure, they say, is anything you don't notice until it breaks. We might debate whether or not the university is in ruins, but we can surely agree that it is in disrepair. UC quenches its thirst for tuition dollars by ratcheting up enrollment numbers. An ever greater mass of students on our campus now crowds into a mixture of antiquated buildings and aging new ones whose shelf-life is diminished by underbid construction. A short campus stroll takes you from a decades-old bathroom facility to its fresh-looking but poorly constructed new counterpart. Constantly at risk of breaking down, both require regular upkeep well beyond the merely responsive and ad hoc repairs that one K7 worker described as “putting out fires.”

“I'm on strike because I care for the safety of our students and workers, unlike UCSC. The student population has grown by 27% yet our department is shrinking and we're the first to respond to student safety concerns like gas and water leaks.”

—Wyman Lee, HVAC mechanic.

Safety, not “Security”

The campus administration and police have been messaging about safety concerns on campus, vaguely implying that the strikes are a threat to campus “safety.” It is difficult to take this seriously when the student population has grown exponentially while the ranks of campus mechanics and carpenters have thinned, and when K7 workers are so overworked that they can only respond to breakdowns. Meanwhile preventative maintenance is deferred until a fully-staffed tomorrow that never arrives. The administration's vacuous concern for “safety” is more consistently understood as an insistence on “security.” Witness the exorbitant spending on campus police (half a million dollars spent on out-of-county police for every day that AFSCME strikes). These concerns seamlessly slide into a duplicitous effort to reassure the campus community that the university is indeed “safe” to enter during strikes (that the absence of K7 has no effect). In a further and even more insidious effort to undercut labor demands, it suggests that those striking might actively impair students' safety.

These “security” concerns posed by the strike also, and even more crucially, threaten the health of the Wall Street securities tied up in UC undergraduate debt: in YOUR debt. The K7 strike and the COLA grading strike do indeed threaten these securities, which are “safe” investments precisely because the UC Regents can raise the cost of your

tuition at any time. The University remains financially “secure” by holding undergraduates hostage to surging tuition and chronic, interest-bearing indebtedness. These strikes undermine that security; but they are actions that contribute to your safety in both the short and long term.

For a generation, the cost of attending UCSC has steadily increased at three to four times the rate of inflation, even while the quality of education has declined, along with the returns it is expected to bring (that is, your job prospects). This bizarre relation—a rising price on a devaluing outcome—finds a very material expression in the housing and infrastructure on campus. Just as we experience in town, the UC slumlord is charging more and more for housing and learning spaces that are becoming worse and worse.

Spread the Strike

This stopgap approach to administration reflects the same systemic disinvestment that is fueling resistance across the university. While a K7 skilled worker regularly hears statements of concern for “safety,” they know the reality of understaffed shops and crumbling infrastructure. Low-paid and unrepresented academic staff hear boilerplate expressions of dedication to student success and advancement, but their daily routines consist of mounting demands on their labor and fewer resources to adequately perform it. Lecturers read the same formal commitments to education that everyone else does, but they feel the weight of increasing class sizes and unpaid work alongside the stress of lacking basic job security. When we say “one struggle, one fight” we are not taking refuge in abstractions, but expressing the shared experience of our deteriorating conditions and our commitment to struggle against them in all their guises.

However much these conditions might affect us all, the struggle is not always evenly distributed. Right now, the indefinite strike of K7 workers protests the status quo while assuming enormous risks for themselves. The desperation that would make anyone assume such a risk only compounds this risk. Talking to workers on the picket line recalls testimonials from the graduate student COLA strike and so many more with which we are all familiar. Many K7 staff work multiple jobs while supporting families and live in low-income housing, struggling to survive one day to the next. These are precarious conditions under which to take employment risks. They are at the forefront of the struggle against UC austerity, and deserve continuous support from the entire community that depends on them.

Noon Rally, Friday Jan 17th Quarry Plaza

49 UCSC skilled craft workers (electricians, plumbers, carpenters, painters, HVAC specialists, locksmiths and power plant operators) have gone out on an open-ended strike.

They will be on strike until they win fair wages, an end to outsources and safer staffing levels.

Come out to support this Friday at Noon at Quarry Plaza. (you can also find them at the base of campus @ their picket line, every day until they win!)