

## Students stand in solidarity with striking workers

*"I need a COLA because I pay 57% of my income in rent living 20 minutes outside of town. In my previous home I was subject to 5 years of stachybotrys poisoning due to a criminally negligent landlord and having no affordable alternatives. I go into debt every month while skipping meals and going to the OPERS food pantry three times a week despite being in the 2nd highest tier of pay among graduate students."* (anonymous graduate student testimony, 12/31/19)

*"Your message shares you will be exercising your constitutionally protected rights of free speech and assembly. Peaceful dissent, protest and assembly is your right and we want to ensure and protect your ability to safely exercise that right. It is equally important to know these rights are subject to restrictions based on time, place, and manner [sic] rules."* (EVC Lori Kletzer, "Grad Students' Demand Increased Pay Due Driven by SC Housing Costs" email, 12/5/19)

In this current struggle against an increasingly stalwart UC administration, AFSCME workers in the K7 bargaining unit have taken an important leap in calling for an "open-ended" strike. This indefinite action—courageous and risky in equal measure—is a significant departure from the routinized day-long strikes that are called, often weeks in advance, by unions under siege all over this country. Up against the intransigence and stringency of management, whether in the private sector or in relation to a nominally public institution like ours, workers face a series of tough choices. Whether to act defensively, often under the leadership of union bureaucracies who, while sympathetic to the plight of their memberships, have distinct interests bound up with business running more or less as usual; or whether to take matters into their own hands by engaging in wildcat actions, strikes, and various other workplace stoppages and escalations. When caught between unresponsive union representation and an employer interested in managing the acceleration rather than the resolution of already deep grievances (all the while assuring us they are safeguarding our "rights"), how should workers be expected to respond?

We are facing a very similar predicament as unionized graduate student-workers at UCSC (as "criminally negligent" a landlord as the one mentioned above). Our statewide union, the leadership of the UAW, ratified a dubious 2018 contract under even more dubious circumstances, removing our ability to formally withhold labor with a no-strike clause. This was a blunt repudiation of the very notion of rank and file activity in the union. Our membership at UCSC voted against this contract (83% of us wanted it scrapped, and the union bargaining team was itself profoundly divided over its passing). It was approved anyway, causing a minor scandal, but only a small blip in a history of bad deals foisted on workers by their apparent leaders. Now that a large portion of our membership is not only demanding

that new terms be introduced to our contract, and our wage package in particular (a COLA), we are moving in general to organize the union from below, because we do not accept its organization from above.

What do we want? An alternative to a union that concedes much more to the administration than it grants to its workers. We are struggling for a militant union where rank and file workers determine the character and content of their contracts, have a direct say over the quality of their working conditions, and are organized enough to act upon any actual or potential incursions to their hard-won victories. Your struggle in K7, barely 50 workers against a juggernaut university system (largest employer in the 6th largest economy

in the world), has been exemplary in this respect, and has inspired many among us to forge deeper networks of organization and mutual support.

Striking is a major way to accomplish building these links and organizing ourselves for the next round of admin-led counterattacks. Strikes withhold labor as an instrument of class power, and this is especially the case in integral positions like yours. We as workers know the value of our work and the need for it—the innumerable staffing cuts the university regularly impose only reinforce this, and have the effect of making you work longer, harder, and faster. Many of you in K7 have worked at UCSC for years, far exceeding the regular turnover cycles of the student body, and you have firsthand experience with the consequences of the administration's relentless efforts at cost-cutting and speed-ups. Many of you, as Santa

Cruz county locals, or commuters coming from even greater distances, are also more than familiar with the appalling housing market and general diminishing standards of living for most working people in this town. This inescapable reality comprises the backdrop to our entire struggle here, in a place where "survival" has come to be nearly indistinguishable from working oneself to death, either through overtime or second or third jobs.

Under such conditions, militant rank and file action increasingly looks less like desperate radicalism and more like common sense. Your demand for a "secure future for all" powerfully calls into question the future the administration offers us, framing your situation as presently insecure, unacceptable, and ultimately indefensible. The political lines have been drawn. Workers cannot win a future worth having by remaining on the defensive, waiting for solutions to trickle down from the top.

**For this reason, we continue to support your open-ended strike for an open-ended future.**



### 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!)