

Day 1 at the Picket

Today, more than four years since we signed our last contract and three full years since we went on wildcat strike, we begin our open-ended strike across four academic-worker units on ten campuses. Depending on how things play out, this may end up one of the largest strikes in the history of California.

For grad workers, the universal goal is the end of rent burden — to be paid enough to live where we work, or COLA. As things stand at the bargaining table, there is some \$30k difference between UC's proposal for annual wages and our own. We are asking for \$54k as an annual base. They are proposing a 7% raise on current rates.

Anything within the realm of UC's position right now will lock in rent burden and its attendant miseries for the length of the contract we sign. Our proposal ends this immediately, and adjusts our salaries each year to keep our chins above rent burden. The huge gap between us and UC at the bargaining table is the difference between a life with or without abusive landlords, unsafe housing, cramped quarters, or houselessness. It's the difference between affording car repairs, computer repairs, books, medical expenses, and putting these off — the difference between working side hustles and taking on debt, and not having to.

Some may wonder why, on the eve of the strike, UC did not move another offer to see whether we'd blink at the last second, a one-time last-best-final offer, which, they might have warned, we'd never see again if we go through with the strike. Why aren't they panicking now that we are setting out on such a massive strike? Are they unafraid of us?

If this is so, it is because a short strike in our line of work, unlike those staffed by 'essential workers,' is inconvenient and annoying, but doesn't hit hard on the bottom line. UC feels that they have a window of time to let us blow off some steam, walk the picket, chant some chants, yell at a few cars, before we will accept reality — a slightly improved offer, but still a life deeply rent burdened.

What this obviously means is that we will need a sustained strike to win our demands. UC's apparent calmness tells us that we cannot expect to end rent burden in a week or so. After that point, we may see some signs of panic from our boss, or more likely intermediate strata of supervisors and faculty. This will likely take the form of retaliation — threatened or actual — before we see concessions.

The exhilarating sights and sounds on day one of our picket — that special energy and solidarity of academic workers, students, and staff — may give way to some more difficult trials before we are through. But we should feel proud of this moment, of the strength and scale of this strike, since the impetus and kernel of this potentially historic moment surely originated on this small campus three years ago. Let us soak up this enormous demonstration of our power on day one, in the knowledge that we will need to exercise it for quite some time yet. The open-ended quality of the strike opens a path for us to take this as far as necessary to end rent burden.

UC INSTAGRAM: @PAYUSMOREUCSC
WWW.PAYUSMOREUCSC.COM

Solidarity forever. See you at the picket tomorrow, and the day after.