

No COLA, No Contract!

At 6pm last night, the UAW 2865 bargaining team held a pre-bargaining caucus to discuss their decision of the previous night to drop COLA as an integral demand across subsequent years of the contract. For now, this means retaining the \$54k initial adjustment, but then reverting to static percentage-based increases for each year thereafter. Those who have lived through the duration of the last contract in a town like Santa Cruz, where rents soared 67% since 2018, can sniff the peril. As a point of fact, the bargaining team's proposal was "packaged" with another article about rents in campus housing, which preserved their legal right to reintroduce COLA -- should the team suddenly develop the political will to respond to the persistent call of rank and file.

If recent encounters with the team are any indication, however, we might expect them to brush off this "minority" of workers pushing a "fringe" position in the name of a silent majority of tens of thousands of workers, whom our esteemed representatives supposedly consult (or intuit) between caucuses. Our reps are so secure in their deeper knowledge of what is reasonable, realistic, and right that the caucus was set up to preclude membership's reconsideration of their decision, summarily ending the bargaining call later that evening. Yet, the team's confidence was surely shaken when the pre-bargaining caucus—a Zoom room capped at 500—filled within minutes, and hundreds more members packed into an overflow. What they all witnessed was a dismally choreographed plan to flood the stack with a dozen sycophants off the top, in many cases reading scripted defences of the decision to strike COLA from the contract language. The fiery response from the packed meeting inaugurated a slogan that is gaining ground: No COLA? No Contract! It's safe to say that our union local has never seen such intense and vocal backlash. In a setting like this, renewed appeals to a "silent majority" can only gesture to silence.

Beyond doubt, the swirl of frustration and anger demonstrates a definite base for the COLA demand and an enormous capacity for mobilization. The urgent question is how this might be channeled into strategic resolve. We are seeing calls for a no-vote campaign,

or even a wildcat strike. It is not hard to see why attention turns to these alternatives, even as we remain on strike without a contract to vote down. At this moment, both these calls are premature and concede too much to our bargaining team, crediting them with more control over the direction of the current strike than they in fact possess. The bargaining team and the thin staff layer at UAW—who make several times the base TA wage—are not the union. It is not up to them whether the COLA demand is dropped. It will be dropped only if and when the rank and file relinquishes it. The organizing challenges, then, are to deepen and widen the commitment to the demand, and to develop a strategic orientation of patience and resolve that is sorely lacking in our bargaining team. In the case of our strike, power is wielded against the boss cumulatively, and that power builds as the strike unfolds and disrupts over time.

It is critical to recognize the dynamics of our strike during this abbreviated holiday week. This is a vulnerable period in which concessions might be made rapidly, if the team thinks it can sneak them by membership. It is a time when pickets might dwindle, and rallies might lack the energy of the first week. This is precisely the time to take action at the level of our departments, to find collective expressions of commitment to the COLA demand and the long-haul strike needed to win it, and to link these tactics across departments and campuses. We must return from the long weekend still on strike, and with widespread resolve to take this through finals and, if necessary, beyond.

