

# In an Historic Show of Labor Solidarity with Palestine, UAW Local 4811's Stand-up Strike Grows by 12,000

The academic workers at UCLA and UC Davis will join 2,000 already on strike at UC Santa Cruz.

HANNAH BOWLUS MAY 28, 2024



About 2,000 members of Local 4811 at UC Santa Cruz went on strike last week, the first of 10 UC campuses that may be involved in the Stand-Up Strike. UCLA and UC Davis will strike on Tuesday, May 28.

PHOTO BY JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES

TWELVE THOUSAND ACADEMIC WORKERS AT UCLA and UC Davis are poised to walk off the job Tuesday morning as part of an historic strike in solidarity with Palestine.

The workers—6,400 at the University of California, Los Angeles and 5,700 at the University of California, Davis—are members of United Auto Workers Local 4811, which represents 48,000 academic workers across the University of California (UC) system.

“We’re taking this ... unprecedented action because of the university’s serious, unfair labor practices (ULP), which really go to the heart of our rights for freedom of speech and protest, and the ability to take collective action,” Local 4811 President Rafael Jaime told *In These Times* ahead of Tuesday’s walkout.

The surge in the number of UC academic workers going on strike comes amid international outcry over an Israeli military attack this weekend targeting a refugee camp made up of tents housing displaced Palestinians in Rafah, a city in southern Gaza. At least 45 Palestinians were killed in the assault, including children, with many others injured. Fires caused by the assault engulfed the refugee camp, burning refugees sheltering there.

The ULP charges were filed earlier in May “in response to the university’s gross violation of our rights,” Jaime said.



Members of UAW Local 4811 at UC Santa Cruz went on strike on May 20, 2024.

PHOTO BY JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES

The ULP charge was first filed on May 3, according to the Local 4811 website, and was in response to events on May 1 and 2 when “police in riot gear arrested more than 200 peaceful student protesters and academic workers exercising their legal right to demonstrate against the death, destruction and human suffering directed at the people of Gaza.”

Local 4811 noted that “many of those arrested had spent the previous night seeking medical care or hospitalization after being physically attacked and maced by a group of anti-Palestinian counter-protesters” and added that “though UCLA and LAPD were on notice of the attacks, they deliberately failed to respond.”

The ULP charges that were filed were “against UCLA arising from the Administration’s conduct and actions take at their request.”

The charges would then be amended on May 10, May 17 and May 21 to add additional violations,

including those at other campuses across the UC system including UCSD and UCI.

UAW Local 4811 is modeling the walkout after the rolling Stand-Up Strike model that was made famous by the UAW and President Shawn Fain during the fall strike against Detroit's Big Three automakers. The strike officially began about a week ago when some 2,000 academic workers walked off the job at UC Santa Cruz.

“Obviously, it was not something we did lightly,” Jaime said about filing the ULP charges. He said that the university violated workers' rights “by allowing a violent mob to attack workers, to brutalize them, mace them, burn their skin with fireworks. And then the very next day sending in ... cops to violently suppress the peaceful protests using rubber bullets and flash-bang grenades.”

The UC-AFT, which represents 6,500 librarians and teaching faculty across the university system, also filed a ULP in May, writing in a news release that “charges include the university's failure to maintain safe working conditions, disregarding the free speech rights of its employees, and unilateral decision making regarding changes in their working conditions in responding to recent campus protests at UCLA and UCSD.”

“Several union members were arrested while attempting to protect their students against violent police responses to the encampments,” according to the news release, “and others denied access to their offices and forced to move their courses online on extremely short notice.”

Hannah Appel, a professor at UCLA, told *In These Times* that the strike and its justifications were historic and that the political and legal bases for the strike are yoked together.

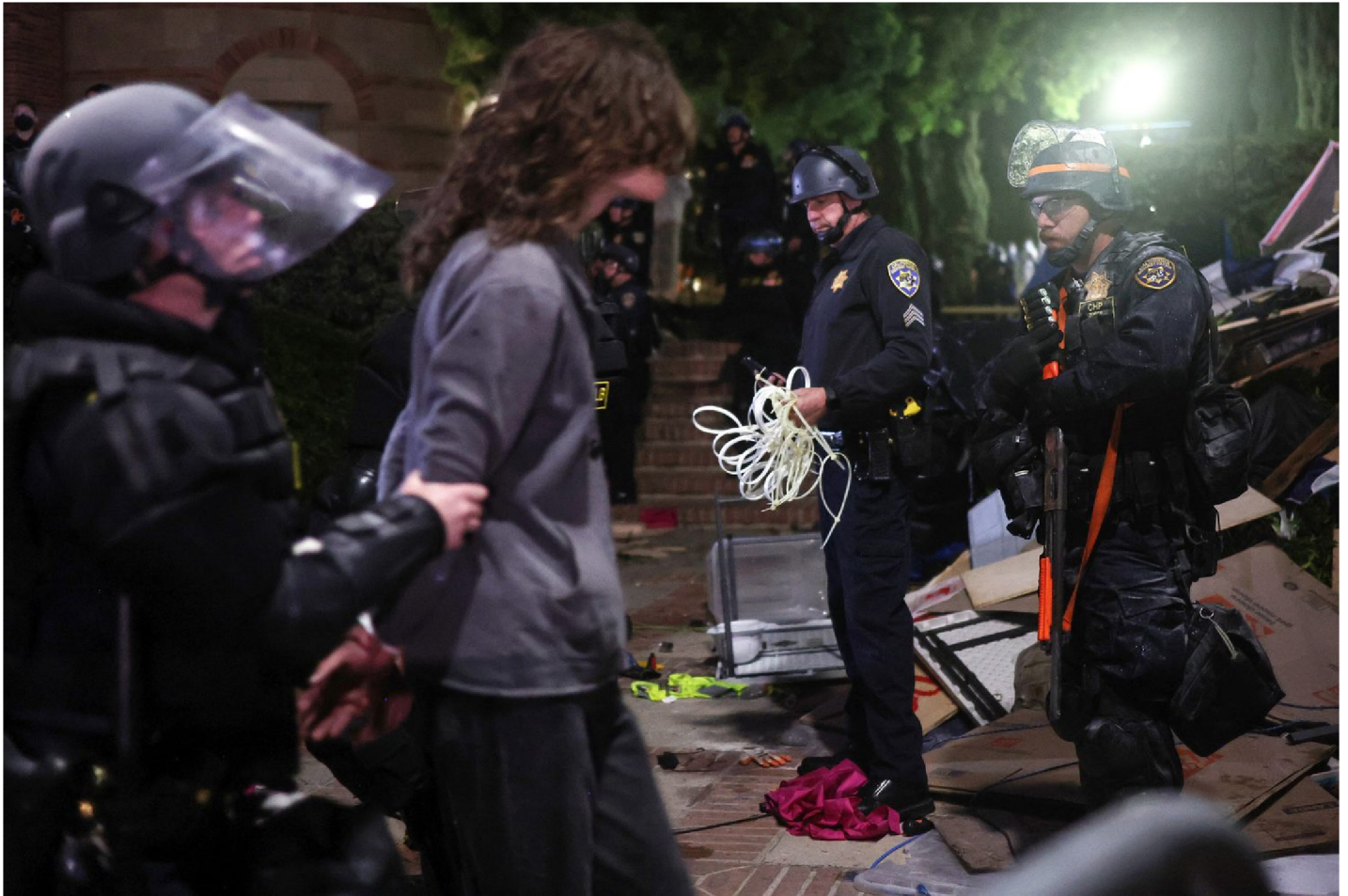
“Being beat up by mobs at your place of work; being beat up by the cops at your place of work when you are expressing pro-Palestinian speech, are unequivocally unfair labor practices,” Appel said. “If, in the United States, we're not allowed to participate in pro-Palestinian speech on campus, then those can become unfair labor practices, and can deepen and build the power of the Palestinian solidarity movement.”

UC administration has maintained that the strike is illegal and unsuccessfully tried to get a state labor board to immediately stop it. The UC has also threatened striking workers with “corrective action.”

UCLA law professor Noah Zatz wrote in an opinion article for UCLA's student newspaper, *The Daily Bruin*, that those attempts by UC administrators' to halt the strike are unfounded. Requests for comment from UCLA and UC administration were not returned.

“Although the UC's letter expresses mystification at what any of this has to do with employment, the connection should be obvious: the UC is a workplace,” Zatz wrote. “Many people demonstrating at the

encampment on our campus, who were then subject to violence by the UC, were UC employees, whether undergraduate, graduate, staff or faculty workers—including UAW Local 4811 members.”



There has been heavy repression and violence against students, academic workers, and others at UCLA since a student encampment started there.

PHOTO BY MARIO TAMA/GETTY IMAGES

This strike by Local 4811 is the latest—and one of the most dramatic—escalations surrounding what Jaime and others have described as a long-running effort by UC administration to crack down on dissent, especially surrounding students and academic workers protesting on campuses.

“While the events of the past few weeks are the most egregious acts by the university to crack down on dissent, it is part of a long pattern of the university misusing its power to silence workers and students protesting on campus,” Jaime said.

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“Last year, the university threatened around 50 UAW members with dismissal for participating in a peaceful protest after UCSD tried to deny workers the raises owed to them under the contract,” Jaime said. “Then, when a group of members at UCSD chalked a building to protest the university’s failure to respect the contract, the university sent campus police to their homes and had them arrested.”

In an opinion article for *In These Times* in July 2023 related to the arrests of Local 4811 members for using washable chalk to draw on a building, Jaime wrote that the UC had failed to live up to its agreements that ended union’s strike in 2022 and that those arrested workers “have basically been told that chalking a building makes you a felon. It doesn’t matter how silly the idea is or how absurd their justification is for the arrests. UC’s point is apparently to signal that if workers continue to confront them with their broken promises, they can expect jail time, a steep fine, or both.”



A protest in support of Palestine at UCLA on May 23, 2024. Some of those in the rally carried signs reading "UAW Rank & File Workers for Palestine."

Appel is working with other faculty to organize colleagues to honor the strike and not pick up any non-union labor in place of the striking workers. “There are new forms of faculty organizing that this administrative debacle has brought into being,” Appel said.

In a public statement, Appel also said that she was “proud of my students for their courageous activism. I am angered by my employer’s violent repression and weaponization of antisemitism. UC, cure the ULP, grant amnesty, and move on disclosure and divestment.”

“Until you do,” Appel said, “no grades.”

One Local 4811 member, Ethan Friedland, said that “We at UCLA have decided to respond, to say not our labor” and that “the union is our tool to stand with Palestinians.”

“Our employer has demonstrated that they don’t care what the undergraduates want, they don’t care what the faculty want, they don’t care what their workers want,” Friedland said.

Another professor at UCLA, Robin D.G. Kelley, who is also a member of the Task Force on Anti-Palestinian, Anti-Muslim, and Anti-Arab Racism, said that the militarization of college campuses has greatly increased and that he has seen “the growing power of trustees and donors who have come out of the woodwork with threats that violate basic civil rights law and labor law.”

“No one should be attacked, arrested, threatened for demanding an end to the genocidal war in Gaza,” Kelley said according to a public statement. “We all deserve a safe work place and administration that protects academic freedom and refuses complicity in genocide.”



A sign reading "UC Labor for Palestine" at a rally for striking academic workers at UC Santa Cruz on May 20, 2024.

PHOTO BY JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES

Many students, faculty and other academic workers who have supported and participated in the student protests across the country have also described and decried the increased privatization and militarization of universities and point to the violent police responses to the encampments as a clear and horrifying example.


“The university has increasingly become a space of donor interests and corporate interests,” University of Chicago Professor Eman Abdelhadi said during an *In These Times* roundtable with students and faculty about the encampments.

“It’s an entity that has basically decided that faculty, staff, students are all just there to be there and are not part of the governance of the institution—are not really stakeholders,” Abdelhadi said.

Within the UC system and across the nation, UCLA in particular has become a site—along with universities like Columbia in New York—of the student protest movement that has drawn a large




amount of attention and press, largely due to the assaults on student protesters by both police and by vicious and violent mobs that attacked students with relative impunity.

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The strike, especially at UCLA, also represents new and forceful energy behind the student movement

and the larger antiwar movement in solidarity with Palestine.

Thousands of organizers and activists in support of Palestine gathered in Detroit for a national conference in support of Palestine over the Memorial Day weekend, and during a panel titled the “Role of Labor Unions in the Palestinian Struggle,” the panelists and a packed room broke out into a chant about the strike:

“UC UC hear our call,” they chanted, “4811 will strike you all.”

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