



USC Grad Student Union Files Unfair Labor Practice Charge Against University over Arrests

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As protests continue on campuses across North America, we go to the University of Southern California, where the union representing about 3,000 graduate student workers at USC has filed an unfair labor practice charge against the school to end campus militarization and drop charges against students and faculty. The “rampant violence that they inflicted on our workers” violates the National Labor Relations Act, says Margaret Davis, president of UAW Local 872. “It was a clear act of retaliation because people were engaging in pro-Palestinian free speech, which they have a right to.”

Transcript

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AMY GOODMAN: This is *Democracy Now!* I’m Amy Goodman, with Juan González.

Today is May Day. As we continue our coverage of Palestine solidarity protests on campuses nationwide, we go to USC, University of Southern California, where graduate student workers and some 3,000 research assistants, teaching assistants and

assistant lecturers recently won their first-ever union contract. This week, the union filed an unfair labor practice charge to end campus militarization and to drop charges against students and faculty taking part in the protests.

We're joined in Los Angeles by Margaret Davis, president of the UAW Local 872, sociology Ph.D. candidate, teaching assistant at USC.

Welcome to *Democracy Now!* Can you talk about the unfair labor practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board that your union has filed against the university, and the six violations you allege must be resolved, as well as your union victory?

MARGARET DAVIS: Yeah, absolutely. So, we filed an unfair labor practice with the university within the last week because of, you know, the rampant violence that they inflicted on our workers while they were engaging in peaceful protest, and we think that's a violation of the National Labor Relations Act, because it unilaterally changes workplace policies by bringing in, you know, the Los Angeles Police Department to summon workers from their workplace. They also instituted a number of new workplace practices in requiring that people show IDs to enter campus and closing entrances to campuses that are closest to our Metro stations on campus. And we also think that it was a clear act of retaliation because people were engaging in pro-Palestinian free speech, which they have a right to. So, we think that these are clear violations of the National Labor Relations Act.

And, you know, this is just one way that we can enforce our protections that we won in our, yeah, first-ever union contract for research assistants, teaching assistants and assistant lecturers at the University of Southern California. That was a huge victory for us and for the labor movement in Southern California overall. You know, we really began that process a few years ago, when I entered

my Ph.D. It was in 2020, and so it was a time when people were really coming to realize how precarious our condition was as workers in this really crazy world historical moment. And so, there were a lot of conversations on campus about, you know, the low wages that we experience, how difficult in particular it is for parents at our university to exist as workers, and how harassment and discrimination was most targeted towards international student workers on our campus.

And so we really began to organize and partnered with UAW. We had hundreds of one-to-one conversations with co-workers on campus to really collectivize and form a strong organizing committee that was representative across campus, and, yeah, as of last semester, won our first union contract, that guarantees for the first time in USC's history annual wage increases every year, that guarantees stronger protections against harassment and discrimination, institutes child care, independent healthcare funds for parents. And so, we see the enforcement of those rights and those improved benefits as certainly connected to the fight that's on the ground now to free Palestine and end the genocide in Gaza.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And, Margaret, you were on campus last week when over 93 USC students and community members, including five members of your union, were arrested. Can you talk about what you witnessed and how students in class are dealing with the encampment?

MARGARET DAVIS: Yeah, absolutely. So, I was there on Wednesday. And, you know, the encampment is organized by a really talented group of coalition partners who are really showing their power right now. They are in negotiations with the university, and they're showing that these direct actions are working, in the face of very significant challenges.

On the ground Wednesday, you know, what was a very peaceful and joyous and, you know, showing-a-lot-of-resistance protest in the face of really, like, challenging and horrific things going on in Gaza was met with intense police violence. And so, you know, I witnessed not only, like, my colleagues and fellow union members being beaten and arrested by the Los Angeles Police Department, but, you know, our union also was very active in making sure that we could get our members out to that if they wanted to. And so, we were actually holding a monthly membership meeting that day and moved it to be close to the encampment so that folks could participate in that, if they wanted to and they wanted to participate in our union meeting. And so, you know, the union was actively endorsing this, and we have been doing so since October, putting out statements for, you know, an end to the genocide in Gaza. And it was really wild to see what happened on campus as a result of people expressing their rights.

And it was also a really telling moment for what, you know, building the collective power of our union has accomplished. We were able to institute really quick jail support measures for our own union members who were arrested. We were able to be there for them at the end of the night, when they had really experienced something quite horrific. And so, it was, you know, a really challenging moment, but the solidarity and direct action of the encampment is really working and putting pressure on the university —

AMY GOODMAN: Margaret Davis —

MARGARET DAVIS: — to meet with them and come to a negotiation.

AMY GOODMAN: — we want to thank you so much for being with us, Ph.D. candidate, president of UAW Local 872 at the University of Southern California. And the national UAW, United Auto Workers, has called for a ceasefire in Gaza. Also, the mainstage graduation

has been canceled at USC, after USC canceled the valedictory address of the valedictorian, Asna Tabassum, and then canceled the speeches of the honorary people who are receiving degrees.

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