Tech and researcher bargaining in full swing

Members send UC a clear message: fair pay and benefits are the top priority

Member participation has been the centerpiece at UPTE’s first three bargaining sessions with UC negotiators this spring, as hundreds of tech (TX) and researcher (RX) members have shown up to observe each meeting and testify about what’s at stake.

UPTE’s elected bargaining team is meeting with UC to negotiate a new contract to replace the one that expires in June of this year.

At the first negotiating session, held in Berkeley in early March, over 150 passionate and vocal members were on hand to support UPTE’s team, which has put the university on notice that members will no longer accept below-market wages and waivers that allow UC to unilaterally increase the cost of benefits.

Subsequent negotiating sessions at UCLA in mid-March and UC Davis in April drew similarly spirited crowds, as members sent a strong message that they are tired of below-market pay and the university’s tendency to chip away at their benefits.

Techs and researchers made presentations on how dramatically underpaid they are compared to those who do the same work outside UC. Several highlighted how UC’s health and safety practices do not meet industry standards.

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Organizing for fairness

UPTE members at UC Irvine gather to support their campus coworkers who are represented by AFSCME. From left: Belén Camba (Laboratory Assistant), Rosario Huntsman (Clinical Lab Technician), Gladyse Ramsey (Pharmacist), Michael Moore (UPTE staff), David Duffy (Computer Resource Specialist), Eric Davies (Computer Resource Specialist), Denise Barrick (Clinical Social Worker), Angie Gamillo (Child Life Specialist), and Sonia Palacio (Clinical Social Worker).

Celebrate May Day with an anti-war message

While US workers celebrate “Labor Day” in early September, other workers around in the world celebrate May 1, an historic date which commemorates 1886 labor struggles in Chicago for the eight-hour work day.

This year, on what is known as “International Workers’ Day” or simply as “May Day,” the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) will mark the date by stopping work at the ports to protest the continued US occupation of Iraq.

UPTE encourages all members to spend a moment learning about the history of May Day by perusing our special webpage at <www.upte.org/mayday.html>, which includes links to events around the state and the nation.

UC unions make progress on wages, pensions and benefits

UPTE is only one of many unions at the University of California. The UC unions, including UPTE, work closely as a coalition on issues of common concern, such as pensions, health care benefits and compensation issues.

The California Nurses Association (CNA) represents nurses at the UC medical centers and student health centers. CNA recently ratified a contract with raises that bring their members closer to market rates.

The union also achieved its main goal of ensuring that the university did not have the unilateral ability to increase benefits costs and start employee pension contributions. CNA will go back to the bargaining table in September to bargain over 2009 benefit, pension and wage issues. They’ll be bargaining on these issues right as UPTE nears the end of its own TX/RX negotiations.

The nurses also defeated a determined UC effort to set up a new plan for managing sick leave and vacation that would provide more vacation but force employees to use it when they were sick for short periods. This plan, known as personal time off or PTO, encourages workers to go to work sick so they don’t lose vacation, and is used by management as a poor substitute for adequate staffing.

Getting rid of UC’s health benefits “waiver”

Service and patient care technical workers, represented by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), are entering the last stages of bargaining. AFSCME members want a step pay system with adequate raises, especially for the lowest-paid employees.

Another primary goal - shared by other UC unions - is to deny UC its usual “health benefits waiver” and the accompanying ability to unilaterally set benefits and pension costs. AFSCME has ongoing campus mobilization actions to pressure the university to come to a fair agreement, and many UPTE members have supported these events to build better contracts for all UC workers.

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Working together for better results

UPTE is actively working with the other UC unions, especially on the benefits and pension issues that affect us all. As we witnessed last year, when we work together we can be successful. We held off a proposed 2% employee contribution to the pension fund and actually lowered the health benefits marginally, avoiding the double-digit increase that had been announced.

Like UPTE, both AFSCME and CUE are insisting that they will not allow UC to unilaterally set pension contributions and benefits during the life of any new contract (they are refusing to sign what is referred to as the "benefits waiver").

Unlike UPTE’s bargaining which is just beginning (see story, page 1), both AFSCME and CUE are nearing the end of the bargaining impasse process when they can go on strike and UC can impose a contract. Keep your eyes peeled for ways to support our sisters and brothers as their bargaining winds up.

Calling all stewards: learn arbitration skills!

Ever wanted to skillfully argue a legal case and win it, helping a coworker attain justice on the job?

Your chance is here: UPTE’s weeklong workshop on arbitration and unfair labor practice (ULP) training is happening on the weekend of May 17-18 in Oakland.

Teachers will include a half-dozen of UPTE’s most experienced stewards, who have argued arbitrations and ULPs, as well as a professional arbitrator, who will give his input into strategies and tactics.

You don’t have to be a lawyer to successfully argue workplace cases, you simply have to be smart, committed, and know the ground rules. Contact your local if you are interested in attending; funding is available for travel and accommodations.
Union demanding fairness for employees
UC-managed Livermore National Lab lays off hundreds of employees

On April 15th, the Lawrence Livermore National Lab (LLNL) announced the first layoff of career employees in 35 years. By late May, some 535 will receive layoff notices because of budget shortfalls due to declining federal funding. These new layoffs bring the total layoffs to 900 in recent months.

Congressmember Jerry McNerney (D-Livermore) said that the cuts will have “serious consequences” and threaten the lab’s “long tradition of innovation in the public interest, from early developments in nuclear weapons safety and performance to more recent work in hydrogen fuel storage technology.”

LLNL is managed by a public/private partnership that includes the University of California, and many of the lab’s workers are members of UPTE Local 11 (also known as the Society of Professionals, Scientists and Engineers). “The local is working to support colleagues who are unwilling victims of the unfair layoff process,” said Sue Byers, UPTE’s Livermore president, by “offering opportunities, both inside and outside of LLNL,” and by working to make management “more civilized” and supportive of the lab’s staff.

Whether at Livermore, who voted for UPTE representation last summer, have begun bargaining over the effects of the layoffs on some 20 employees who were let go between the privatization of the lab last October and our recognition. The union has demanded fair severance, preferential rehire, retraining and job placement.

Skilled trades workers at Livermore, who voted for UPTE representation last summer, have begun bargaining over the effects of the layoffs on some 20 employees who were let go between the privatization of the lab last October and our recognition. The union has demanded fair severance, preferential rehire, retraining and job placement.

The skilled trades group includes electricians, carpenters, plumbers, painters, mechanics, locksmiths and welders, among others.

Because management only agreed to give two instead of three rank-and-file union representatives release time from their jobs to participate in bargaining, the union proposed to bargain at 5:00 am. To management’s surprise, 30 members showed up at that early hour to ensure that their voices would be heard.

To learn more about the local’s activities, check out <www.spse.org>.

Slicing up the budget at Riverside

UPTE’s bargaining team needs the support of every member to make progress at the table on the array of issues at stake this year. Union members at UC Riverside did their part last month by organizing a “Let them eat cake” event that was both educational and delicious.

A six-foot-tall inflatable cake called attention to a real sheet cake complete with UPTE logo, made by the skilled hand of Mien Van de Ven, a staff research associate in Botany and Plant Sciences. “The University of California is one of the nation’s wealthiest institutions, with $22.4 billion in net assets in 2007, an increase of 18% over the past two years,” read the flyer members passed out with slices of cake, “yet UC continues to pay staff wages which are more than 25% below market and, in addition, employees are facing decreased health care benefits and retiree benefits.”

Imperial attitude not welcome

“The university is saying, in essence, ‘let them eat cake,’ just as out-of-touch rulers in the past have done,” said Ruby Miller, a staff research associate at Riverside. “Only about 20% of UC’s budget comes from the state, but when the budget suffers, UC uses that as an excuse to keep wages low in spite of the fact that most grants have 5% annual wage escalators built into them.”

Riverside members Loren Altamirano, and Caroline DeVan, both laboratory assistants, helped organize the action. The cake and informative flyer were shared with passersby, many of whom signed on in support of UPTE’s bargaining goals.

Former 99 gives UPTE vote of confidence

UPTE got a pleasant surprise in the mail recently when a former UC administrative professional, Blue Walcer, MPH, sent a financial donation toward the union’s work.

Walcer, who directs a cancer education program for medically underserved patients at San Francisco General Hospital, had worked as an administrative professional in UC’s “99 unit” for four years before his position was switched to funding from the city and county of San Francisco in February.

Dismal pay for great work

Walcer wrote to UPTE that his time as a 99 on UCSF’s payroll was “unbelievably frustrating and demoralizing.” Even though he had won several employee performance awards and the program he directed had won numerous national awards, his salary at UCSF had remained “dismally disparate” to what city and county employees in comparable positions earned.

“As an Analyst III [at UC], I made $60K per year,” wrote Walcer, while with the city and county, “I will make $85K annually for the same exact work! Salaries for professional staff at UC seem arbitrary and illogical. This lack of parity and disrespect is unconscionable.”

Walcer said he wished the union the best in obtaining union representation for the thousands of administrative professionals at UC who suffer from similar conditions.

While many UC administrative professionals are voluntary members of UPTE and are active in the union, there is not yet a collective bargaining agreement for the unit. For that to happen, a majority of 99s would have to vote for UPTE as their exclusive representative.

Organizing activities for such an election are ongoing. Administrative professionals who would like to help make it happen are invited to contact their UPTE local, or UPTE’s vice president, Lisa Kermish, herself an administrative analyst at UC Berkeley. She can be reached at (510) 704-UPTE or lkermish@yahoo.com.

Check out UPTE’s new, improved website

UPTE’s website has undergone a major facelift. We invite you to check it out. You’ll find lots of useful information, including the latest bargaining updates, our contracts, legislative updates, recent and archived publications, useful links for stewards, and much more. The location is <www.upte.org>.

You may also sign up for UPTE’s Web Forum, where members can post any union or workplace question and comment on others’ posts. There is simple sign in for that too. A majority of 99s would have to vote for UPTE as their exclusive representative.
New, even higher-paid UC president

UC has a new head to replace outgoing president Robert C. Dynes, who resigned under pressure after years of out-of-control executive compensation and secrecy drew fire from state legislators.

Dynes’ salary of $405,000, however, looks puny compared to the new guy’s.

Mark G. Yudof, currently head of the University of Texas, is due to take office on June 16. His annual base salary will be $591,084 – a whopping 46% increase over Dynes’ salary. Like so many others in the UC administration, he’s been granted an “exception to policy” so that he can receive “supplemental” pension funding of $228,000 in 2008-09 and “varying somewhat each year thereafter,” according to UC’s press release.

Yudof will also receive an automobile allowance of $8,916 per year, university-provided housing, and a package of other perks including relocation assistance and low-interest mortgage loans.

Organizing for better health and safety

Each year, thousands of workers are killed and millions more are injured because of their jobs.

Labor and community activists have marked Workers’ Memorial Day every April 28 since 1989 to remember the past and work for change in the future. The date was chosen because it is the anniversary of the establishment of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the day of a similar remembrance in Canada.

This year, activists also gathered at the National Labor College near Washington, DC, to break ground on a garden-style national memorial for those who have lost their lives at work.

The memorial will also honor the legacy of Mother Jones, the self-described “hell-raiser” who organized workers and fought for their health and safety during most of her 100-year life. Mother Jones, who died in 1930, is famous for her saying, “Pray for the dead, but fight like hell for the living.”

The AFL-CIO’s annual Death on the Job report shows just how far we still have to go. In 2006, more than 4,1 million workers were injured and 5,840 workers were killed due to job hazards. Another 50,000 to 60,000 died due to occupational diseases.

Under the Bush Administration, regulatory activity at the Occupational Safety and Health Administration has ground to a halt. Important standards, such as one on employer payment for personal protective equipment, have been withdrawn or delayed.

More information is available on the AFL-CIO’s website at www.aflcio.org/issues/safety/memorial.

Contracted food service workers win UC Davis jobs

After nearly a year of organizing, hundreds of contracted food service workers at UC Davis will finally become university employees.

The agreement comes after an intense campaign of demonstrations and civil disobedience arrests, and supported by hundreds of students, workers and community activists.

UC had been using the workers in its residential and retail food service operations on campus through contract Sodexho, Inc. A report from a faculty group issued in February showed that the contracted workers made less money and got fewer benefits than UC employees.

UCSF union members and their supporters held a “bread and roses” action on April 3, the eve of the anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to honor his life’s work of non-violent civil disobedience in the cause of economic and social justice.

Dr. King was in Memphis supporting an AFSCME sanitation workers’ strike when he was killed by an assassin in 1968. “We want bread and roses too” was originally a slogan in the 1912 Lawrence, Massachusetts, textile strike by the Industrial Workers of the World, and is now taken up by workers around the globe.

The San Francisco action was sponsored by AFSCME, which represents service and patient care workers at the UC campuses systemwide, to demand fair wages and benefits as well as dignity on the job. Some 500 people participated, and 40 were arrested in planned civil disobedience, including UPTE’s Berkeley president, Tanya Smith, as well as Nino Maida, an UPTE steward at UCSF.

“Unionists who had previously taken part in AFSCME’s civil disobedience training sat in the street in a huge circle,” explained Maida. “Union monitors blocked off the traffic and kept us safe. We were given a rose and bread was broken with us by a coalition of religious leaders, some of whom were arrested with us.”

A similar demonstration was held the same day in Los Angeles, where some 400 people marched from the UCLA campus to the intersection of Westwood and Wilsshire. Dozens there were arrested as well, to publicize their demands for fair treatment from UC.

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In the news

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