# University of California Academic Workers Union Authorizes Strike Over Campus Free Speech Disputes



On May 15, 2024, the union representing 48,000 academic workers across the University of California system authorized a strike over grievances related to campus protests and free speech. The vote passed with 79% support among members of U.A.W. Local 4811, addressing issues stemming from university responses to recent pro-Palestinian demonstrations.

This authorization follows an incident at UCLA where counterprotesters attacked a pro-Palestinian encampment without police intervention. Riot police dismantled the encampment the following day, leading to over 200 arrests. Union members have alleged that university administrations unlawfully altered free speech policies, discriminated against pro-Palestinian expressions, and failed to protect the safety of demonstrators.

Union President Rafael Jaime emphasized that the union's next steps would target selective campuses to achieve the greatest impact, mimicking the "stand-up" strike strategy used by the United Auto Workers during recent negotiations in the auto industry.

The strike authorization is criticized by university officials who argue that such a move introduces nonlabor issues into labor agreements, potentially setting a risky precedent. While some UC campuses, like U.C. Berkeley, have negotiated terms with protesters, others face ongoing tensions. The conflict highlights broader national discussions on free speech, safety, and labor rights within academic institutions.