

# EVERYTHING IS A METAPHOR

## WHEN A PICKET BECOMES A SPECTACLE

Taking to the streets with hundreds of people can be a transformative thing. But to what ends?

*"Shut it Down!"* indeed.

With the sheer magnitude of self-aggrandizing rhetoric emanating from UAW bureaucrats, official social media accounts, and the endless email updates framing significant concessions as 'wins,' all gears seemed primed for ending the strike as quickly as possible with a mediocre contract. In this climate, everything is a metaphor, a spectacular copy of a copy that might have meant something once, if only symbolically.

Monday's "The Strike Continues" rally in Oakland was a grand exercise in patting ourselves on the back for...the simple act of being there. Mobilize! Right? In the early afternoon, over 1000 people gathered in Snow Park, the bulk of the crowd was graduate workers from UCB, with smaller contingents traveling from UCSF and UCD. Various supporters from other local unions and 'community groups' were also in attendance. Below the sea of identical, blue and white UAW ULP Strike placards (designed to look as boring as possible), the atmosphere was energetic and celebratory.

The rally was just as you might expect: largely inaudible and parroting feel-good, non-controversial talking points. Typical of the majority of graduate workers who see their labor as unique and special, much of the focus seemed to be on wanting to return to their oh-so-important vocations in teaching and research. "We shouldn't have to be here!" chastised those who seek to return the warm embrace of the University and its promise of class mobility. If only the UC came to the bargaining table in good faith, we would happily return back to our assigned roles in our beloved institution of colonial-capitalist accumulation.

***"What do we want? A Fair Contract!"***

Large segments of the crowd seemed to delight in these "rah rah rah" speeches and fiery slogans from the curated speaker lineup of union leadership and selected graduate workers. Also invited to express their support and share in the spectacle were local labor 'leaders,' including the Oakland Education Association's Keith Brown, and Oakland's police-friendly 'progressive' mayor-elect Sheng Thao. All were welcome to partake in this carnival of self-congratulation.

Typical of our esteemed leadership's penchant for top-down management and mediated dissent, the crowd was instructed to follow their truck and many were handed a union-approved list of non-threatening chants. *"We're gonna go over there and get really loud!"*. As the march snaked down Harrison, our yellow-vested saviors and dedicated brigades of bicycle warriors made sure to keep us safe from actually disrupting much of anything.

Turning the corner down 12th street down to Franklin, the crowd began to swarm into the intersection, briefly blocking traffic. As UAW leadership worked diligently to set up for the next rally in front of UCOP, the crowd boomed:

***"If we don't get it, Shut it Down!"***

After about ten minutes of vigorous chanting, we were instructed to leave the intersection to listen to the (again inaudible) speakers placating the crowd with symbolic platitudes. The perimeter was secure. Approximately one half of the 1100 block of Franklin Avenue was "shut down"... for, all in all, about twenty-five minutes. Emboldened by the fiery metaphors, the march miraculously--and 'safely'--blocked both sides of Harrison on the short march back to Snow Park. After yet another short rally, the now-drained crowd began to drift away, heading back to their overcrowded and over-priced housing units in rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods across the Bay Area and beyond.

***"One day longer, one day stronger!" "We'll be back!"***

I'm not here to litigate the motivations of attendees. Or talk shit just for the sake of talking shit. I'm aware that some find these things meaningful if only collectively as catharsis. But I have questions as to what the fuck we're actually fighting for. Because if all you want is a "fair work environment" and a better paycheck, then say that.

As I write this, UAW 2865 is in bargaining, and the UC will potentially bring a wage proposal to the table. And the postdocs and academic researchers have already reached a tentative agreement. Despite the constant cries of "shutting it down," whatever substandard agreement is reached will likely be celebrated as winning a "COLA." And maybe that's just what this whole thing has been about. Behind the lip-service paid to the "optional" "social justice" demands, lies a majority that seeks little more than to regain access to the professional career trajectories they were promised. The tenured faculty, adjunct lecturers, and highly paid industry scientists of tomorrow taking back their rightful place.

So sure. Call me a cynic. Or a hater. But I'm tired of being gaslit into unquestioning support for whatever the fuck *this* is. As much as their cronies protest that this is not a "wildcat strike" or a "2020 style riot," those of us that dwell in the cracks of the University, *from below and to the left*, have deeper commitments, illegible to those who read *The Wretched of the Earth* as a metaphor rather than a threat.

A moment of brightness: unknown comrades taped up a banner "No COLA, No Contract," and "UCOPs Off Campus," in front of the UCOP building, replete with imagery of a molotov cocktail emblazoned with "COLA." A metaphor not so easily recuperated. Echoes of #Cola4all and deeper and more expansive abolitionist and anti-colonial horizons might persist beneath the surface of this spectacle after all! As our comrades at UCD and UCSB have shown us, the spirit of the wildcat lives on; ***our only task, then, is to act.***

So, before this brief moment of possibility has been eclipsed, let's push things along as far as we can, with the homies we trust. Beyond empty metaphors and symbolism, ***let's really shut this whole fuckin thing down, together.*** Or, at the very least, steal, sabotage, and take care of each other in ways that disrupt the colonial land-grant, real estate corporation, that is the UC.

**Link up: [abolishtheUC@protonmail](mailto:abolishtheUC@protonmail) | [@abolishtheUC](https://www.instagram.com/abolishtheUC)**

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