



United Campus Workers of Mississippi Communication Workers of America Local 3565

June 2020 Newsletter

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Introduction

In an effort to keep our members and supporters informed, this newsletter collects information on current actions by United Campus Workers of Mississippi (UCW-MS). It includes statements, reports, letters, and announcements as well as information about how you can take action to support the union.

In our next newsletter we will provide an update on our Fair Pay Campaign. Many of you may have been involved in that campaign, from contributing to the discussions that helped launch it, to designing materials for it, to signing petitions and carrying out other actions in support of the campaign. The contents in this issue represent a refocusing of that work based on the spread of COVID-19 across the US and the world, and based on the changes that our institutions have implemented in response to the pandemic.

Since mid-March our work has focused on creating and expanding mutual aid efforts meant to support workers—from students and graduate students to staff and faculty. We have also developed materials circulated online that maintain the values expressed in our Fair Pay Campaign—giving voice to the issues of all workers—particularly workers commonly overlooked by university administrators; calling for greater transparency in decisions regarding our lives and safety; and demanding that we be the ones making these decisions.

We invite you to read through these materials, to support the various calls to action and calls for information linked in different sections, and to attend the monthly meeting on Thursday, June 25.

Statement On the Need to Dismantle the Racism that Plagues Our Communities

Below we reprint a recent statement from the Executive Board of our parent union, Communication Workers of America (CWA).

Friday, May 29, 2020

As we reach a tragic milestone of 100,000 deaths due to COVID-19, we find ourselves confronting the other plague that has been rampaging through our communities since long before the pandemic: Racism. Compounding the devastation of a global pandemic, which has disproportionately impacted Black communities, Black people in America continue to face threats, brutality, and death for going out jogging. For being poor. For sleeping in their own bed. For watching birds in a park. For being Black.

The murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and the blatant display of racism in the Central Park incident with Christian Cooper demonstrate, again, this grim reality. These names are not the first, and without a profound change in ourselves and this country, they will not be the last.

The CWA Executive Board is committed to moving beyond an endless string of reaction statements and demonstrating our continued commitment to justice for Black people through our organizing, representation, political, and movement building work. We commit to creating dedicated spaces for open dialogue on race for our members and leaders to determine outcomes and clear steps the union must take to fight racism in the union, within the industries we represent and the community at-large.

There is no in-between. There is no neutral option. The only real way to dismantle racism and build the working-class power we seek is for every worker to take on the struggle for justice for Black people in this country as their own and to embrace the actions that "an injury to one is an injury to all" demands of us.

It is not enough to punish the perpetrators who have taken these Black lives. It is not enough to simply identify a "few bad apples" to fire or prosecute—a course of action which our deeply flawed legal system makes difficult to pursue. We must also do the hard, transformational work of rooting out racism in America's consciousness and the institutions that uphold it.

This work is necessary because these incidents did not happen in isolation. They happened in the context of 400 years of structural and systematic anti-Black racism. They happened in the context of centuries of stolen labor; economic pillaging by corporate America of Black communities; underfunding of public schools and services; over-criminalization and incarceration of Black bodies; the use of police as military-like forces in poor, Black and Brown neighborhoods; outsourcing of good, union jobs; persistence of food deserts in urban areas; the treatment of addiction as a crime rather than a disease; the fractured, profit-driven health care system; and the "surgical precision" of Black voter disenfranchisement.

The only pathway to a just society for all is deep, structural change. Justice for Black people is inextricably linked to justice for all working people—including White people. The bosses, the rich, and the corporate executives have known this fact and have used race as one of the most effective and destructive ways to divide workers. Unions have a duty to fight for power, dignity and the right to live for every working-class person in every place. Our fight and the issues we care about do not stop when workers punch out for the day and leave the garage, call center, office, or plant.

We will never build enough power as working people if an entire community is living under the threat of death and subject to discrimination based on the color of their skin. We will never build enough power if an entire community has its neck under an oppressor's knee.

If we are to make progress, we must listen to the experiences and stories of Black CWA members, Black workers, and the Black community. We must join together—every one of us—to dismantle this system of oppression. This means every White union member, Black union member, Latino union member and every ally, must fight and organize for Black lives. Thoughts and prayers aren't enough. No amount of statements and press releases will bring back the lives lost and remedy the suffering our communities have to bear. We must move to action.

Report on the Campus Worker Solidarity Fund

Working people's organizations across the country and world are developing funds to support one another as they face compounding economic, political, climate-related, and public health crises. Mutual aid networks have a long history in U.S. social movements. For instance, when thousands of textile workers went on general strike in 1934, they relied upon local allies for food and medicine. The Black Panther Party's breakfast program for children and families facing food insecurity is another prime example of mutual aid. More recently, mutual aid networks have been vital responders during natural disasters connected to climate change.

As legal scholar and activist Dean Spade [explained](#) recently, "The term 'mutual aid' basically just means when people band together to meet immediate survival needs, usually because of a shared understanding that the systems in place aren't coming to meet them, or certainly not fast enough, if at all, and that we can do it together right now."

The Campus Worker Solidarity Fund organized in the aftermath of the pandemic as many of our community members faced hardship, sickness, lay-offs, and uncertainty. Campus workers pooled their resources to assist those in need, not as charity, but as a gesture of solidarity that our current system is failing the needs of working people in the United States.

Supporting Campus Workers

From April 17 to May 26, 2020, United Campus Workers of Mississippi raised \$26,180 in mutual aid to alleviate the burdens of people in our communities resulting from the pandemic crisis. Thanks to everyone who donated to and helped publicize our mutual aid fund. In an effort to be transparent, we detail below how the Campus Worker Solidarity Fund Committee allocated funds.

The committee redistributed \$25,092.50 in small emergency grants (\$200 maximum) to 128 workers at the University of Mississippi and the University of Southern Mississippi and their families on a first-come, first-serve basis. The fund is now closed to donations and new requests. The remaining funds are in the process of being distributed. Workers at the University of Mississippi received 82% of the fund; workers at the University of Southern Mississippi received 18% of the fund.

UCW-MS helped a range of campus workers: full- and part-time staff, graduate workers, undergraduate student-workers, and private contract workers. The fund was distributed to these self-identified groups

according to the following percentages: full-time staff, 20.8%; part-time staff, 9.6%; graduate workers, 11.2%; undergraduate student-workers, 40%; Aramark and Sodexo workers, 18.4%.

Beyond the Solidarity Fund

In addition to managing the mutual aid fund, the Campus Worker Solidarity Fund Committee also worked to ensure members of the University of Mississippi community could access the Food Bank in Kinard Hall. In order to organize the food bank and facilitate access to supplies, the committee designed an online order form and distributed it to people who requested relief. Since April 24, the committee has filled orders at the food bank twice a week and provided home delivery when requested. In the first four weeks, from April 24 to May 22, the committee filled 77 orders, distributing 1,619 pounds of food and supplies. These resources have gone to university staff, graduate workers, undergraduate student-workers, and private contract workers.



UCW member Anne Twitty fills and packs food bank orders. Photos by UCW member Andrea Morales.

If you seek food relief and would like to place an order with the University of Mississippi Food Bank, please use [this order form](#).

The committee also helped student workers apply for CARES Act relief funds. Pressure from the union encouraged the University of Mississippi to clarify and better publicize its procedures to students who were applying for CARES Act funds.

Because the UCW-MS believes that all universities need to be transparent about how these funds are distributed, we are collecting stories about students' experiences applying for support from the CARES Act and Rebel Relief (at the University of Mississippi) Funds. UCW-MS calls on university administrators to be transparent about how these funds are managed and used. We also call on university administrators to publicize how the CARES Act funds allotted to support our institutions are being spent.

If you are a student at Mississippi public university who has applied for CARES Act funds or struggled with your application, we would love to hear from you about your experience. Please share your experience with us through [this Google form](#).

Finally, the committee worked closely with the LOU Mutual Aid Network to help community members acquire household goods and toiletries. If you seek or can offer aid with housing, travel, child care, or various other aspects of daily life, we encourage you to [use the Lafayette-Oxford-University Mutual Aid Network Spreadsheet](#).

UCW-MS extends our deepest gratitude to our members who served on the Campus Worker Solidarity Fund Committee: Jessie Wilkerson, Cam Calisch, Bailey Paul, Bezaleel Jupiter, Mike Forster, Anne Twitty, Hooper Schultz, and Jarod Roll.

UCW-MS IS COLLECTING TESTIMONIALS FROM GRADUATES AND UNDERGRADUATES AT MISSISSIPPI COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES



SHARE YOUR CARES ACT EXPERIENCE

DID YOU RECEIVE THE HELP YOU NEEDED TO COMPLETE AN APPLICATION?

DID YOUR INSTITUTION COMMUNICATE CLEARLY ABOUT THE STATUS OF YOUR APPLICATION AFTER YOU APPLIED?

WERE YOU SUCCESSFUL IN OBTAINING FUNDS?

COMPLETE OUR SURVEY AT [HTTPS://UCWMS.ORG/CARES-ACT](https://ucwms.org/cares-act)

Letter to the Mississippi Institutes of Higher Learning Board of Trustees Following COVID-19

Following the COVID-19 outbreak in the US, University of Mississippi members of UCW-MS issued this open letter supporting campus workers.

April 29, 2020

Mr. Hal Parker, President
The Board of Trustees
Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning

Dear Mr. Parker,

Recognizing the extraordinary challenges presented the Institutions of Higher Learning by the Covid-19 crisis, the United Campus Workers of Mississippi (Local #3565 of the Communication Workers of America) calls upon board trustees and chief institutional officers to prioritize the welfare of all system employees--student employees, staff, and faculty--in their deliberations and decision-making. Specifically, the UCW Mississippi calls upon IHL to ensure:

1. Access to appropriate protective equipment for essential campus employees unable to work remotely.
2. Full transparency regarding financial and other administrative decisions affecting campus employees.
3. Continued pay and benefits, including paid sick leave, for all full and part-time employees during the current and any subsequent period of physical distancing.
4. A moratorium on layoffs, furloughs, or outsourcing of services in response to the Covid-19 crisis.
5. Participation of elected employee representatives in decision-making about any lasting modifications of working conditions, pay and benefits.
6. Safe on-campus accommodation for faculty and staff unable to work effectively from home.
7. A published process by which campus employees may raise health and safety concerns, without fear of retribution.

The United Campus Workers of Mississippi looks forward to your response and the opening of fruitful dialog concerning the welfare of Mississippi higher education employees.

Sincerely,

Steering Committee,
United Campus Workers of Mississippi

Editor's Note: We received no response from the IHL.

Open Letter in Support of University of Mississippi Graduate Students Following COVID-19

Following the COVID-19 outbreak in the US, University of Mississippi members of UCW-MS issued this open letter supporting graduate student-workers. Please [sign the petition](#) to show support for graduate students at UMiss and throughout Mississippi.

April 29, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented upheaval for everyone here at the University of Mississippi, including undergraduate and graduate students, staff, faculty, and administrators. Graduate students at the University of Mississippi are confronting many problems, including:

- Reduced or no access to resources they need to complete their research, including archives, libraries, and labs
- Reduced or no access to external employment to supplement stipends
- Reduced or no academic job offerings as institutions of higher learning across the country announce hiring freezes for both the upcoming academic year (2020-2021) and the next (2021-2022)
- Increased teaching demands as graduate student instructors, like adjunct and faculty instructors, scramble to transition to online teaching.

In light of these tremendous pressures, we ask that the University of Mississippi:

- Ensure that the extension of time-to-degree clocks for all graduate students by one year is carried out by all departments
- Extend funding for all graduate students for an additional year
- Provide official assurance, in writing, that teaching assignments, administrative and research appointments, stipends, and health insurance will continue to remain in place for the Summer of 2020 as well as for the 2020-2021 academic year and beyond
- Expand support for international graduate students that includes full summer funding, assistance in the process of renewing or extending visas, and free legal support on issues related to immigration, work access, etc.

Announcements

Join the Union

UCW-MS is expanding! Over spring 2020, the union has recruited members from the University of Southern Mississippi and Mississippi State University. If you are a campus worker at either institution or at any other public institution in Mississippi and are interested in getting involved in joining the union, then we urge you to do so [by going to our website and singing up](#).

If you want to know more about the union, then we encourage you to [email us](#). Currently, we hold monthly open meetings via Zoom. These meetings take place at 6 pm CST on the last Thursday of the month.

Nominate Yourself for the Steering Committee, Due June 12

If you are already a member, and you are interested in helping to keep the union organized, we urge you to consider nominating yourself to the UCW-MS Steering Committee. To do so, [please complete this self nomination form by June 12](#). We strive to make the union leadership represent the membership body, including institutional locations (Oxford, Hattiesburg, Starkville, Jackson, etc.) as well as titles and ranks (e.g., student-worker, graduate research or teaching assistant, staff, faculty, etc.).

Attend the June 11 Social Event and the June 25 Meeting

On Thursday, June 11 at 6 pm, we will hold an online social via Zoom. We will send the Zoom information out to members through our LISTSERV. If you are not on the LISTSERV, please email us and we will add you to it. Our email address is ucwmississippi@gmail.com. Our next business meeting is at 6 pm CST on Thursday, June 25. The Zoom information for this meeting will also be emailed to the union LISTSERV prior to the meeting. Please keep an eye out for it and attend.