

# Michigan: Oakland University seeks court order to break professors' strike

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Striking professors at Oakland University, in suburban Detroit, have been placed under court order to continue negotiations with the school administration, pending a Wednesday morning hearing before the Oakland County Circuit Court. Classes were suspended on Tuesday, while professors resumed picketing.

The university has filed a complaint with the court calling the six-day action by 600 full and part-time faculty members an "illegal strike" and is hoping Judge Edward Sosnick will force the professors back to work under the Michigan State law that prohibits public employees from striking.

The university administration is demanding teachers take a wage freeze, a two-tiered health benefit and other cuts after provocatively handing the president, Dr. Gary Russi, a \$100,000 pay increase, a 40 percent raise. His wage will increase from \$250,000 to \$350,000, an action most of the strikers and students viewed as characteristic of the administration's arrogance.

A spirited rally was called Tuesday by the teachers and was joined by hundreds of students who were equally passionate in defense of the faculty's demands. Many were especially outraged by the behavior of the corporate-minded administration that is sitting on \$14 million budget surplus from last year while attacking the teachers and raising tuition annually. The mood among both students and faculty was angry, as both sought to give voice to their growing concern over attacks on the right to an education. Over the last week, student support for the strike has grown noticeably.

Many students supporting the teachers raised opposition to the continuous tuition increases, which

include a 9 percent hike this year.

The union, a local chapter of the American Association of University Professors, called the job action last Wednesday following months of failed negotiations.

The university plans to create a new category of teachers, to comprise 20 percent of the workforce, with no possibility of tenure or job security. The strikers are also opposing the demand for a two-tiered health plan and an end to official input into class sizes and working conditions.

Joel Russell, president of the AAUP, said the union would not hold up ratification over the wage issue, but emphasized the right of teachers to determine academic standards. "The main or primary issue that made everything break down last night," Russell told the WSWS, "was the insistence by this administration that we give up the ability to enforce agreements they have made with us for the last ten years, with respect to our rights to enforce the Constitution of the Senate and our schools to give the faculty the primary responsibility to set the academic standards of the institution."

The WSWS spoke to teachers and students supporting the strike rallying outside the OU Administration building. One student, Heather Sterner, pointed to the fundamental issues at stake, saying, "It's very simple. I'm here to support the striking faculty who are the main defenders of education. They are fighting for higher education, not higher profits. It's because of them that we are where we are and I hope they are successful."

"I am here to give the striking teachers the support

they need,” said Jaime, a senior in Medical Laboratory Science. “They are good hard-working people. I am opposed to the fact that OU wants to cut things like health care. They put the faculty at risk and it’s not good for the students or the university. I have a sister that is going to school here as well, and I feel this fight is for her too.”

Amanda added that she is very disappointed with the administration. “They wanted to increase tuition 11 percent at one point, but then adjusted the increase to 9 percent. They have been evasive and refused to explain where the money is going. That is why I am here with the faculty. They are taking a stand and I am glad they are doing it.”

A senior majoring in nursing and anthropology, Raluca Szabo, pointed out, “I am here because the teachers are defending us. The administration is demanding that the professors take pay cuts while the president of the university gets a massive increase. It’s ridiculous. The professors are the only ones speaking for us.”

Ryan Dawley, a music major, said he particularly sympathizes with the teachers because he plans to become an educator, “I am 100 percent behind the faculty. I think that what the administration is doing is unfair. There should be the striving for a happy medium, but that is not what the administration wants.”

Karen Allen, a professor of social work, told the WSWs that it was unfortunate that the administration does not work with the staff to create an environment that maximizes learning. She was upset about the proposal to eliminate the input of teachers on the issue of class sizes. ““Would you rather have your students taught by bureaucrats or by scholars?” as my son put it. This is a very hard working faculty. We go out of our way to do everything we can to work with the students so that they can be successful. This year I added eight students to my class, above the requirement. And in response, the students work hard. There is a reason these students are here supporting us.”



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