

# Court grants injunction against Central Michigan University faculty strike

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A judge in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan on Monday ordered striking Central Michigan University (CMU) faculty back to work. Some 600 instructors had walked out that morning against concessions demanded by the school's administration.

An Isabella County circuit court judge ordered the faculty to return to the job, pending a court hearing Friday morning. The university administration claims the work stoppage is prohibited by the Michigan Public Employment Relations Act, which makes it illegal for public employees to strike. A lawyer for the university asserted in court Monday that the tenured faculty's "refusal to teach classes would cause irreparable damage to the university and its students," according to the Mt. Pleasant *Morning Sun*.

The CMU Faculty Association (FA) argues that the walkout is a protest against unfair labor practices, a protected activity.

The union immediately announced its compliance with the reactionary court ruling. "We will obey the court order and return to work tomorrow," FA president Laura Frey told the media. "But this does not end the issue. The faculty remains strong and committed to securing a fair and equitable contract for members."

The faculty members' old contract expired June 30. The two sides met last week for the first time since mid-July. At that point, talks broke off and a fact finder was brought in. On August 15, 97 percent of the attending faculty members voted to authorize any action necessary "to cause the administration to bargain in good faith." This was the first work stoppage organized by the Faculty Association in its 42-year history.

The university has offered a 0 percent pay increase this year and is reportedly demanding that faculty members pay 10 to 15 percent of their health insurance

costs. Republican governor Rick Snyder and the Michigan legislature cut all university funding by 15 percent earlier this year.

CMU's 439 fixed-term [temporary] faculty, who belong to a separate union, and 591 graduate assistants were told by the unions to cross picket-lines Monday.

The strike attracted considerable support from students at the largely working class campus, approximately 120 miles northwest of Detroit.

On Sunday evening, some 125 students marched from the CMU campus to the local high school where the faculty were meeting to express their support.

*Central Michigan Life*, in its report on the rally, noted that Waterford, Michigan sophomore Tom Jackson "carried an 'I (heart) my faculty' sign and said the Arab Spring uprising inspired him to get involved with the rally. 'When people rise up against oppression, they can have revolutions,' Jackson said. 'If people only realize how much power they have, they have the power to change any aspect of society.'"

On Monday morning, students joined the faculty picket lines. The *Saginaw News* cited the comment of Crysta Heckman, a Pinconning, Michigan senior, who said all three of her classes had professors in the Faculty Association. "The faculty has supported me for the last four and a half years," the chemistry and biology student told the newspaper. "It's my turn to support them."

Graduate student Elizabeth Podufaly-Bauer, who taught two classes Monday morning, told the *Detroit Free Press*, "They [the faculty] are not going to be bullied into giving up their money for [Ross'] pet project. ... We support them 100 percent."

At a Monday morning press conference, CMU president George E. Ross issued a provocative statement. Among other comments, he told the striking

faculty, “Shame on you for not teaching.”

The *Free Press* described the ensuing scene: “[F]lanked by a police officer and public relations staff, CMU President George Ross left a news conference and slowly walked across a sun-splashed campus, trailed by a couple hundred students and faculty chanting, ‘Negotiate now.’ He didn’t look at any of the protesters, even as volumes rose and rose. The chants lasted until he went into his office.”

One fixed-term faculty member who spoke to the WSWS noted there was considerable support for the strike among colleagues and students. Many fixed-term faculty members were “upset that they had to cross picket lines” and couldn’t understand why the entire campus had not been shut down by the combined efforts of the university staff.

Predictably, the media and the political establishment in Michigan have launched a campaign to brand the CMU staff as greedy and selfish. The *Free Press* cites the ignorant comments of State Rep. Bob Genetski (Republican-Saugatuck), the chairman of the higher education appropriations subcommittee, who said he was “really disappointed” in the strike. “He said he heard from people Sunday night who said they think professors shouldn’t be exempt from the pain the rest of Michigan was suffering. ‘There’s not a lot of sympathy for universities out there,’ Genetski said.”

The newspaper also commented, “The strike was being closely watched by universities across the state because it could foreshadow next year, when faculty contracts at several other Michigan universities—including Wayne State University and Oakland University—are set to expire.”



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