

UAW blocks strike by New York University adjuncts despite 94 percent authorization vote

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The United Auto Workers continues to drag out contract talks with New York University (NYU) despite an overwhelming strike vote by adjunct faculty last month.

No strike date has been set for more than 2,500 members of Adjuncts Come Together-United Auto Workers (ACT-UAW), AFL-CIO, local 7902, despite a 94 percent strike authorization vote February 10. These part-time instructors, who teach a majority of the courses at the university, have been working without a new contract since the previous six-year deal ended on August 31, 2016.

Negotiations have been ongoing since July of last year. The issues involve wages, including equality of pay across different departments, compensation for cancelled courses, greater reimbursement for the extra hours and technical requirements for online classes, health benefits, and more contributions for annuity retirement plans (adjuncts have no pensions).

NYU has been intransigent in its opposition to adjuncts' demands despite the fact the university has an endowment of about \$3.5 billion, a figure that has tripled since 2000.

On top of that, with a planned 2.7 percent increase for this school year, the 50,000 students at NYU will each be paying tuition and fees totaling almost \$50,000 per year. Including room and board, books and travel, students can end up paying as much as \$75,000 per year. NYU pays working students a derisory \$12 per hour, which is scheduled to rise to \$15 per hour in the 2018-2019 school year.

NYU has been expanding, and built a campus in Abu Dhabi for \$1 billion in 2007. A report detailed the use of workers employed under virtual slave labor conditions. Workers went on strike there in 2013 against low wages, intolerable working conditions (like

10 sleeping together in small windowless rooms), drinking polluted water, being poisoned by open sewers and rotting piles of garbage. The response of the government was to arrest hundreds, beat dozens and provoked migrants from different countries to attack each other. Former president John Sexton's response was to defend the Abu Dhabi government's efforts to jail journalists and accuse critics of cultural insensitivity.

But the university certainly knows how to spend lavishly for those who run the institution. Between \$1.1 million and \$2.2 million is being spent to renovate the residence of its newly installed president, Andrew Hamilton. His Greenwich Village penthouse duplex apartment has four bedrooms, four-and-a-half bathrooms and an expansive rooftop terrace.

In 2013, NYU gave former President John Sexton and other administrators extremely favorable terms for loans for vacation homes in the Hamptons. NYU also gave Sexton a favorable \$1 million loan for his Fire Island beach house. He also received a \$2.5 million payout in 2015 and an annual pension of \$800,000.

Sexton, with a salary of \$1,242,636 a year had the highest base pay of any university president in the US. However, when including total compensation, he was not the highest paid administrator on campus. With total compensation included, seven other individuals at NYU made more than Sexton in 2013. The dean and CEO of the medical school, Robert Grossman, was at the top of the list with a total remuneration in 2013 of \$4,744,184.

The conditions facing NYU adjuncts are part of a broader trend. Adjunct faculty now make up a majority of higher education instructors nationwide. In 2009, they comprised almost two thirds of university instructors, whereas in 1969, the number was about one-

fifth. The typical adjunct earns about \$20,000 to \$25,000 per year, a small fraction of the pay received by a full time professor.

The casualization of work is a worldwide phenomenon. Contingent workers now make up 40 percent of the US workforce, according to the Government Accountability Office. Ninety-five percent of all new jobs created during the Obama administration were part-time and temporary. In the European Union, more than half of all new jobs created since 2010 have been temporary.

Under these conditions the UAW and other faculty unions function as little more than cheap labor contractors. The role played by the UAW in the auto factories is little different, as demonstrated by the recent layoffs announced by General Motors. Of the 1,300 workers laid off last week by General Motors at its Detroit-Hamtramck assembly plant, a large portion were temporary workers who were lured with phony promises of full-time permanent employment by both GM and the UAW.

As a result of the betrayals of the UAW, auto industry profits are soaring, with GM raking in \$9.4 billion in global profits in 2016.

After overseeing the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs in the auto industry over the past three decades, the UAW has sought to offset the massive shrinking of its dues base by organizing workers in the service industries, including adjunct faculty. Under conditions where part-time adjunct teachers at NYU were making only \$2,000-\$3,000 per class with no health benefits, it succeeded in organizing NYU adjunct faculty in 2002. It has also organized graduate teaching assistants at the university. However, poverty wages persist.



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