

Eastern Michigan University part-time lecturers face 25 percent pay cut

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The Eastern Michigan University administration is attempting to cut the pay for new part-time lecturers by 25 percent and eliminate promotions and job security for current employees. Part-time lecturers have demonstrated against these demands, which management is seeking in current talks for a new labor agreement, according to the Eastern Michigan University Federation of Teachers (EMU-FT). The lecturers' current contract expires on August 31.

Protesters demonstrated outside a board of regents meeting on April 21, followed by a May Day rally on campus and another demonstration on May 15 against attacks on lecturers' living standards. The pay cuts would give department heads financial incentive to replace current lecturers with newer, poorly paid ones.

This attack only highlights the penury educators already confront. The median salary for part-time faculty is \$15,000, according to the union. According to another EMU-FT spokesperson, speaking on National Public Radio affiliate WEMU, the benefits offered to the part-time lecturers in the current contract proposal "remained the same, which is no health care and no retirement."

This in line with part-time faculty throughout the country. In a national survey of part-time/adjunct faculty published by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in 2010, half of part-time faculty at four-year public universities reported they earn less than \$15,000 annually.

The proposed 25 percent pay cut is to be applied to the \$1,200 per credit that lecturers currently receive. This payment method is typical for part-time faculty, who often devote much of their personal time to preparing for instructional time. This can involve grading, planning for lessons, and other work that is not adequately compensated by the per-credit payment

system.

The AFT survey reported that nearly half of four-year public university part-time faculty are not satisfied with their job security. From semester to semester, many of these instructors do not know how many courses they will be paid to teach, if any, until just weeks before the semester begins. If full-time faculty members do not have a full course load to teach, then courses may be reassigned from the part-time faculty at the last minute.

To eke out a living, most part-time faculty members take on multiple jobs. The AFT survey reports that more than one-in-four survey respondents worked multiple teaching jobs and more than one-in-three worked additional non-teaching jobs.

The national trend for health care and retirement is also in line with the conditions at EMU. Across the board, only 28 percent of the AFT survey respondents reported they had employer-provided health care plans. Only 39 percent said they have a retirement plan through their employer, and an even smaller subset—25 percent of survey respondents—have plans to which their employer contributes.

The growth of this layer of poorly-paid educators can be linked to the cuts to higher education following the 2008 economic collapse. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reports that from 2008 to 2016, the state of Michigan cut its funding for higher education by over 20 percent. This is the middle of the road. Arizona and Illinois both cut funding for higher education by over 50 percent.

In 2014, several major news outlets ran exposés on the case of Mary-Faith Cerasoli, a homeless professor who taught courses at multiple colleges in the state of New York. Cerasoli was able to draw attention to the conditions facing adjunct professors when her five-day hunger strike went viral on social media.

However, three years later, attacks on the living standards of part-time faculty continue to accelerate.

These cuts represent the ramping up of attacks on the living conditions of the working class during the Obama administration. The Trump administration will oversee an acceleration of these attacks. Recently, Betsy DeVos suggested scrapping the Higher Education Act, enacted under the Lyndon Johnson administration to expand access to college for middle- and working-class youth.

To this extent, the attacks on the living standards of part-time faculty are part of a broader counter-revolution being waged by the ruling class to claw back the social benefits won by the working class through past struggles. The working class must respond with their own revolutionary program to defend living conditions as well as the right to education and culture.

While lecturers and grad students at Yale and other universities have looked to the unions to oppose these conditions, the fact is the AFT, the United Auto Workers, Unite and other unions are allied with the Democratic Party and have blocked any united struggle by teachers and other sections of the working class against austerity and the diversion of ever greater public resources to the super-rich and the Pentagon. One only has to look at Detroit and the treacherous role of the Detroit Federation of Teachers to see the dead end of the unions and their collusion in the bipartisan destruction of public education.

Mitch Abrams, who represents the International Youth and Students for Social Equality at Eastern Michigan University in the student senate, has issued a statement to the workers and students of EMU:

“Students on campus must defend the part-time faculty as part of a general turn to the working class, the only force capable of mounting an effective defense of public education, which is really what’s under attack here. The EMU administration just raised tuition again, and is planning a \$35 million athletic facilities expansion, but can’t pay its faculty above a poverty wage, or offer them any semblance of job security?”

“The administration is opportunistically using the arch-reactionary program of the Trump administration, which just proposed over \$10 billion in cuts to education funding, as cover to dictate their own draconian 25 percent wage cut. It can still find money for the six-digit salaries of top administrators. Even

more significantly, the entire political establishment—Democrats and Republicans alike—declares there is no money for essential services like education, health care and pensions, while it squanders trillions on criminal wars, bank bailouts and corporate tax cuts, which only benefit the financial oligarchy. This entire campus community of faculty, students, and staff must come to the defense of our teachers and public education!”



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