

Statement of Mitch Abrams, International Youth and Students for Social Equality representative on the EMU student government

Defend the Eastern Michigan University part-time lecturers!

5 June 2017

The following is a statement by Mitch Abrams, International Youth and Students for Social Equality representative on the EMU student government:

Students of Eastern Michigan University (EMU) must come to the defense of the university's part-time lecturers who are facing severe attacks by the EMU administration. The administration's proposal for a new labor agreement includes a 25 percent pay cut for new part-time lecturers and attacks on job security.

The part-time lecturers—who are members of the EMU Federation of Teachers—have staged protests on campus this spring to voice their opposition to management's demands. Their current contract ends August 31 of this year.

A representative of the EMU part-time lecturers recently told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “Part-time lecturers [PTL] make up the largest single group of instructors at EMU, and every undergraduate student takes classes with PTLs. PTLs are highly qualified instructors with advanced degrees and/or years of experience in their respective fields. PTLs are also the lowest-paid instructional staff at EMU, they have no guarantee of employment from one semester to the next, and our classes can be canceled or given to other faculty up until the start of classes. This means a part-time lecturer might spend weeks preparing for a class and then lose the class, with zero compensation. Most PTLs hold office hours, even though we are not compensated for that time. Despite this, PTLs are a vital part of the campus community at EMU and we remain dedicated to our students' learning and success.”

The attacks on part-time lecturers at EMU are part of

a broader attack on the right to public education. The administration of Donald Trump and its education secretary Betsy DeVos—the right-wing religious zealot and billionaire advocate of child labor—plan to drastically accelerate the attacks of the Obama administration, whose Race to the Top program vastly intensified the pro-charter and for-profit educational business agenda of Bush's No Child Left Behind scheme.

The EMU board of regents is closely affiliated with the push for charter schools. Vice Chair Mary Treder Lang serves on the board for the Education Achievement Authority (EAA). EAA is a state-run system of “priority schools,” which from its inception sought to pave the way for privatization of so-called low-performing schools in Detroit and the destruction of teachers' wages, benefits and work conditions. After numerous scandals in the EAA, including bribery, theft and fraud, the EMU board of regents voted to sever its agreement to partner with the EAA in early 2016. This spelled the beginning of the end for EAA, but not for the push for privatization.

The implementation of a class-based education system was spearheaded by the Obama administration, who was supported in 2008 and 2012 by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). In 2016, the Detroit Federation of Teachers pushed through a sellout contract for its teachers, which included financial punishments for the militant teachers who staged sickouts in 2015 protesting the horrendous classroom conditions in several Detroit schools. There is no reason to believe that the AFT, the parent organization of the EMU Federation of Teachers, will fight for the

part-time lecturers in the current contract negotiations. That is because the AFT is politically aligned with the Democrats, which no less than Trump and Republicans, are the representatives of the banks and big business.

In a statement for my campaign for student senate, I proposed four demands, one of which was that “*Public education is a social right!*” The statement said, “Teachers and other education workers should receive a high wage and not be forced to pay for basic necessities for their students. Lecturers, bus drivers, student teachers, janitors and service workers on campus who have lost their jobs should have them fully restored.”

Over a quarter of the students who participated in the student government election this year cast ballots for my campaign. These were votes in defense of the basic rights of educators, including the right to receive a living wage for their work.

The chorus from corporate-controlled politicians is that there is “no money” to pay for public education services, health care, pensions, infrastructure, etc. Yet these same Democrats and Republicans find trillions of dollars to squander on imperialist war and the pumping up of the stock market. The capitalist class, not the working class, is the beneficiary of this spending.

The capitalist profit system has failed and throughout the world governments of every stripe are imposing austerity measures, destroying public education and other social rights, and preparing for even bloodier wars. Sick and tired of war, poverty and social inequality, the working class, in particular the newer generation, is looking for a political alternative.

That alternative is socialism and the reorganization of economic and political life to meet human need, not the private accumulation of wealth. This includes transformation of the major industries and financial institutions into publicly owned enterprises under the democratic control of the working class, which produces society’s wealth.

Just as the attack on the living conditions of part-time lecturers at EMU is part of a broader attack on the working class, the defense of these workers is possible only as part of a broader political mobilization of the working class to defend the social right to high-quality public education for all.

Join the IYSSE! No to imperialist war! Break with the two big-business parties, fight for the political

independence of the working class and for socialism!



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