

# Clerical workers union and New York University extend contract expiration date

**Alan Whyte****16 November 2017**

The clerical workers union at New York University (NYU) has made an agreement with the school to postpone the contract expiration date until the end of November. Concurrent with the extension management has issued demand for draconian cutbacks in health benefits.

The current six-year UCATS contract covering about 1,400 staff workers expired October 31. The staff works in all schools and divisions of NYU except the School of Medicine.

According to UCATS website, on November 2 NYU proposed to increase workers' monthly healthcare premiums, reduce two health plan options that about 30 percent of the workers depend on, and in addition, impose on the workers very high deductibles before the workers can even use the health benefits.

UCATS reports that the university has not made a wage proposal or responded to the union's wage proposal, although the union's wage demands have not been made public. Indeed, UCATS has not released much information on the status of the negotiations. However, what information has surfaced indicates the university is determined to impose a concession contract.

Most of the clerical and technical workers are also graduate students, which means that whatever benefits they receive through free tuition count as income and therefore significantly increases employees' tax burden.

In 1988, the workers conducted a three-week strike against NYU. The main issues involved cost of living, job security, family and childcare leave, as well as opposition to hostile administrative actions by the university against the clerical and technical workers.

The *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed a number of NYU clerical workers who participated in a recent

rally protesting NYU management's refusal to provide staff a living wage and decent benefit package.

Edwin, a worker at NYU for 17 and one-half years, described the situation facing staff. "Wages are too low for living in New York. Lots of people are barely making it because of paying for the commute or having to pay for healthcare.

"I'm making \$42,000 a year and our wages go up by 2 to 2.75 percent every year, but living expenses have basically doubled in the last few years.

"You can see workers are struggling. You have condos going up everywhere, even in places like Harlem that used to be affordable. We just keep getting pushed out farther and farther."

James Singleton, who has worked at NYU for 11 years, said, "The university keeps giving us more work and the cost of living is going up, but not our wages. I just want to be paid for the work I'm doing.

"They are always raising the tuition here and the university has the money. You can tell they just don't want to give us sick days or any days off. The higher-ups just make all the decisions and I am out here protesting on my lunch break."

Barbara Newsome who has worked at NYU for over 25 years said, "With every contract they are just taking more and more from the workers.

"Many of us are well educated and have Masters' degrees and PhDs. A lot of us have student loan debt or have to pay medical bills. You have a lot of people that are paying \$1,500 to \$2,000 even with insurance for an operation.

"This situation is bigger than Trump. Whether it is a Democrat or a Republican, there are take-backs all the time. The cost of housing is going up. Jobs are being cut. It is like the heart of the country is not beating."

The other unions at NYU, one for graduate student

workers and the other for adjunct teachers, have separate contract expiration dates, which the unions have engineered in order to keep staff divided.

At the same time the entire “strategy” of the union is based on its orientation to Democratic Party politicians, bitter enemies of the working class.

The utterly reactionary character of the AFT was demonstrated by the secret meeting between AFT President Randi Weingarten, a member of the Democratic National Committee and an ally of Hillary Clinton, with then-White House chief strategist and neo-fascist Steve Bannon in April.

In the wake of Clinton’s defeat in last year’s presidential contest, a large section of the union bureaucracy, seeking to defend their own privileged economic positions, have sought an alliance with Trump based on support for his ultra-nationalist America First agenda promoting trade war and militarism. The effect of this program is to line workers up behind “their” US employers and pit them in a competitive struggle against their brother workers overseas. The logic of this leads to ever worse conditions for all workers.

UCAT workers urgently need new forms of organization independent of the pro-capitalist AFT that will unite their struggles with other campus workers and with students, who are paying exorbitant tuition fees and accumulating huge student debts. This must be combined with a political strategy to mobilize workers in a common struggle around socialist demands, including for free college tuition and free high quality universal health care for all.



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