

Wright State University administration issues call for scabs in bid to intimidate striking faculty

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As the strike by full-time faculty at Wright State University (WSU) in Dayton, Ohio heads toward a fourth week, it is already the second-longest faculty strike in US history at 18 days, surpassed only by the 29-day strike at Temple University in 1990. Faculty at the 18,000-student university continue to reject the university administration's latest offer, still based on the contract the administration imposed in early January.

This week, the administration posted advertisements on academic job boards for positions in over 80 subjects, in a transparent bid to intimidate striking faculty. According to the job ads, applicants are required to possess a doctoral or master's degree, and the university is even offering on-campus housing to those from outside the area. While the positions are described as "long-term," the job postings do not elaborate further. Adjunct positions typically have no protections or entail any long-term commitment.

On Monday, the university's board of trustees offered new contract terms. While the original deal called for a total pay freeze over the course of the three-year contract, the university offered a pay raise in the last two years of the new deal, but at the expense of a 20 percent cut in summer teaching pay.

According to the *Dayton Business Journal*, the administration's offer included returning some contract provisions concerning layoffs, workload and merit pay to the language of the 2014 contract. According to the American Association of University Professors-WSU (AAUP-WSU), faculty would still be forced to take a number of unpaid furlough days.

The university, however, has held fast to the demand that faculty accept deep cuts to their health care plan,

putting it on par with that of other university staff, and that they accept language which would allow the administration to change this plan every 60 days, if it chooses, with no recourse.

The faculty union had offered \$8 million in concessions by accepting the administration's demand that faculty be put on the same plan as staff, but insisted on negotiating over premiums, deductibles and out-of-pocket maximums.

The union called the administration's position on health care the "most objectionable aspect of their proposal." As AAUP-WSU chapter president Marty Kich noted, "They had jacked up deductibles and out of pocket maximums so high and abruptly that we thought some of these people will have to declare bankruptcy if they pay the maximum."

The administration is also trying to split faculty, demanding that the full faculty bargaining unit be allowed to vote on the university's proposal.

Cheryl Schrader, the university president, said, "I hope it is quickly approved by our faculty union members, and we can all move forward in the same direction. I join our trustees in asking the AAUP executive committee to put this proposal to a full and transparent vote of AAUP membership."

The administration claims over 80 percent of classes at WSU are still being staffed, and that 260 of the 560 unionized faculty are reporting to work, a number which Kich claims is an overestimate.

Indeed, the university has been forced to cancel a number of classes, including some of the more specialized upper-level classes that senior full-time faculty would normally teach, causing the administration to scramble to put together options for

students whose graduation might be imperiled by those cancellations.

Earlier in the week, the university notified a number of students that their course schedules were being changed due to the cancellation of some courses. Seth Bauguess, director of communications, had earlier described the intent of the email, saying, “Students will receive further information this week about the layered options they have to stay on track for graduation and course completion.” According to a WHIO television report, WSU officials have denied telling students they cannot guarantee that they will be able to graduate.

Late student enrollment at the school has also plummeted, with 225 fewer students compared to last year, a loss of nearly a third.

More than 30 Wright State students staged a two-day sit-in on Wednesday and Thursday in front of university President Schrader’s office. Students are asking for the administration to negotiate on health care and for reimbursements for time missed in the classroom. They are also calling for the board of trustees to resign so they can be replaced by people with backgrounds in education, as well as calling for both the board and Schrader to publicly apologize.

Despite letters of support from faculty at other colleges and universities, as well as pickets by faculty at Kent State University and the University of Akron in support, the faculty have remained isolated, with part-time faculty who teach the majority of classes staying on the job.

The AAUP-WSU is promoting the illusion that by pressuring public officials, including Republican governor Mike DeWine, it can force the university to back off its demands. There have been behind the scene maneuvers involving DeWine aimed at finding a formula for ending the action at the expense of faculty while providing a face saving fig leaf for the AAUP.

The strike has won broad public support. Local residents, businesses and churches have donated food to support strikers. Meanwhile, every day there have reportedly been scores of students on the picket line in support of faculty.

The way forward for faculty is to end the isolation of their struggle by first of all appealing to WSU adjuncts and staff to join in their strike as well as public school teachers, public service workers, manufacturing workers and other sections of the working class.

Faculty should form a rank-and-file strike committee to take the lead in expanding their strike, consciously linking their action to that of other sections of educators now coming into struggle such as teachers in Denver, Oakland, California and West Virginia.



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