

# Oppose Eastern Michigan University's privatization schemes!

IYSSE at Eastern Michigan University  
5 March 2019

In early February 2019, Eastern Michigan University (EMU) in Ypsilanti, Michigan, announced that it is considering privatizing its housing services. If the plan goes through, campus housing will become the third on-campus institution to be privatized in the past three years following dining services in 2016 and parking services in 2018.

Eastern Michigan University's Chief Financial Officer, Michael Valdes, has noted that privatization is just one of the possibilities being examined by the university, though it appears to be the most likely.

Conditions in many of the residence halls on campus have deteriorated significantly in recent years. During the 2017-18 academic year, Hill Hall, which has since closed, suffered from chronic lack of heating and hot water. Such conditions create dangerous situations for students living in dorms in a region where temperatures often drop below freezing. This winter in particular has seen temperatures as low as -15 degrees Fahrenheit. The issue became such a problem during the latest cold snap that on January 4, the Residence Life Office was compelled to send residents an email alerting them that the Physical Plant was overwhelmed by work orders regarding low room temperatures.

According to school newspaper the *Eastern Echo*, students have cited a wide range of concerns beyond heating and hot water, such as burst pipes, flooding, power outages and accessibility.

That the housing services at EMU are desperately underfunded is undisputed. But how this will be addressed is a contentious issue. The university administration is attempting to use the poor state of housing to further transform the public institution into a tool for extracting private profit at the expense of students and staff.

This strategy has proven lucrative in recent history.

The privatization of food services with Chartwells, a private food service company, included \$18 million in initial capital funding and a signing bonus of \$5 million.

Privatizing the parking services just last year led to a 35-year, \$55 million-dollar deal with LAZ Parking, making EMU the first university in Michigan to monetize its parking through a public-private partnership.

The effects of these measures are already being felt by students.

The new parking services, for example, has produced a disaster for students. For vehicles which are illegally parked, the new LAZ Parking policy dictates they be issued a ticket every four hours. The company has also done away with grace periods for the beginning of the new semester. Students have also complained about the appeals process. It appears that LAZ Parking is doing everything in its power to wring as much money as possible from students.

The role of the university and the academics' unions in the face of cuts to state funding for education at EMU and more broadly has been to facilitate the attacks.

In early 2018, the President of the University James M. Smith announced that approximately 60 staff positions would be cut to make up for shortfalls in enrollment. At a protest in front of Welch Hall, the EMU-American Association of University Professors (EMU-AAUP), along with Democratic gubernatorial candidates Abdul El-Sayed and Bill Cobbs, spoke in favor of cutting the university football team to save money, instead of layoffs and further privatization.

Shortly after that protest, Smith announced that four university sports teams would be cut. In a subsequent town hall style meeting, in a demagogic ploy, the EMU-

AAUP and the EMU Federation of Teachers spoke against the cutting of those sports teams. The EMU-AAUP neither explained nor acknowledged the obvious contradiction, that just a week earlier they had been in full support of defunding the football team.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at EMU rejects the unions' arguments. Free, high-quality public education should be a social right, not a privilege. This right should include such things as sports, parking, high-quality living facilities, and dining.

The IYSSE also rejects the university's argument, which echoes that of the entire ruling establishment, that there is simply no money. The resources exist in society to pay for all basic needs and much more. This money, however, is either used by the ruling elite for war, or hoarded in the bank accounts of the billionaires.

The privatization efforts launched by the administration at EMU are not a local issue but must be understood as part of a global attack on public education.

A recent book, *The State, Business and Education*, reviewed by the *World Socialist Web Site*, exposed a worldwide process of the privatization of public education which outlines the various schemes used to privatize education from Public Private Partnerships (PPP), voucher schemes, for-profit fee-based basic education and other forms of government support for the private sector. The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, USAID, and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development are implicated in funding plots to privatize schools on a global basis.

In the United States, the Obama administration used the Great Recession of 2008 as a pretext to advance this process. While an endless stream of money was flowing into the coffers of the major banks, the plan to replace public schools with for-profit charter schools advanced relentlessly. By 2016, the latest date available, 25 of the 50 US states were still spending less per pupil than they did before the Great Recession, leaving a \$19 billion shortfall. The number of public-school employees today is 170,000 below pre-2008 levels, even though student enrollment has risen 1.5 million, and in 38 states, the average annual salary of teachers is lower than it was in 2009.

This year has seen mass opposition to these attacks

on education. Throughout 2018 and the beginning of 2019, public education workers led by teachers have engaged in mass struggles throughout the world. Of the more than 485,000 workers who staged walkouts across the US in 2018, about 378,000 were teachers from Arizona, Oklahoma, West Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Colorado. Similar struggles were waged, and are still being waged, in the United States, and around the world. Brazil, Mexico, Germany, Portugal, France, the Netherlands, Morocco, Zimbabwe, and India have all seen major strikes involving teachers in 2018 and 2019.

Each of these struggles, including the fight against privatization efforts at EMU, is a fight over the same fundamental issue: the allocation of society's resources to fund education. This includes money for materials, building infrastructure, student housing, tuition, parking, food services, nurses, counsellors and a decent wage for educators and staff, among others.

In order to achieve a society in which high quality public education is a social right for all requires the mobilization of the working class as an independent political force, opposed to the Democrats and Republicans and the entire capitalist state, to fight for socialism.

To join the IYSSE at EMU in this fight contact us at [iysse@wsws.org](mailto:iysse@wsws.org) today.



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