

University of Michigan president seeks court injunction to force graduate student instructors back to work

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The University of Michigan is responding with a new round of threats and intimidation to the overwhelming vote Sunday by graduate students to extend their strike.

On Monday, UM President Mark Schlissel sought a restraining order and court injunction to break the strike against the university's reckless reopening of campus and in-person classes amidst the coronavirus pandemic. In a video statement to "the campus community," Schlissel said that the university can no longer allow the "profound disruption to the education we've promised our undergraduate students."

What contemptible hypocrisy! It is the university's own policies that will cause not only a "profound disruption" to the education of students but to their lives and the lives of their families and "the campus community" at large.

Schlissel went on: "We want our great classes to continue, our students to learn without interference and we don't want anyone to feel threatened simply for wanting to go to class." Again, the "threat" comes from the fact that undergraduate students, graduate students and faculty are exposed to the coronavirus with the initiation of in-person classes.

"Going to the court," Schlissel claimed, "was our only choice after learning the strike would continue. We'd much rather our classes be in session while we work out our differences."

The rest of Schlissel's video response was dominated by the usual hollow phrases and platitudes about welcoming the "opportunity to discuss the issues" and being "committed to addressing them," all the while feigning that their main concern is the students' education.

The action by the university administration is a direct

threat to the striking students and workers. For all the talk about "wanting to talk things out," Schlissel has a clear position on the strike: End it or face fines and expulsion.

The striking graduate students began this struggle out of a concern for their own lives and the lives of their fellow students, university workers, and the community. The support they have received since launching the strike reveals the broadly felt sentiment among workers and youth throughout the region and across the country.

Behind the administration's response stand political forces that are acting on behalf of the ruling class. The drive to reopen schools for in-person learning is a reckless, homicidal campaign which prioritizes profit over life. It is part of the broader back-to-work campaign, spearheaded by the Trump administration but supported by the entire political establishment.

Despite the statements of support offered by the Democrats, such as former UAW President Bob King and Representative Rashida Tlaib, their real response to the striking students is expressed in the actions of Schlissel and the Board of Regents.

The university is dominated by highly connected Democratic Party operatives with close ties to the corporate interests that determine UM policy.

Regent Jordan B. Acker, the vice chair of the Board of Regents, worked for the Michigan Democratic Party as the Deputy Communications Director before moving to Washington to work as a communications aide to the House Judiciary Committee. Acker served as an associate in the White House Office of Presidential Personnel and was then appointed by President Obama in March 2011 to be an attorney-adviser to Secretary

Janet Napolitano at the Department of Homeland Security.

Regent Denise Ilitch is chair of the Board of Regents and president of Ilitch Enterprises, LLC. Regent Paul W. Brown is a managing partner of eLab Ventures, a venture capital firm headquartered in Michigan with offices in Silicon Valley. One could continue this exercise for every member of the board.

With seven weeks left until the US election, the main concern of the Democratic Party is to suppress growing opposition in the working class and the Trump administration behind their own right-wing campaign. Indeed, Biden's wife Jill is in the midst of a multiweek "Back to School Tour" that will stop in 10 major cities to promote her husband's campaign to "reopen safely."

As for the trade unions, they are working to isolate the strike at UM to facilitate its defeat. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the parent organization of the GEO, has done nothing to mobilize broader support, despite widespread sympathy among teachers and opposition to the back-to-school campaign.

At the University of Michigan alone, the AFT includes the Lecturers' Employee Organization, AFT Michigan 6244, consisting of non-tenure-track faculty on all three campuses, Ann Arbor, Dearborn and Flint. It also includes the United Physician Assistants of Michigan Medicine (UPAMM), consisting of physician assistants at the University of Michigan hospital. However, the AFT has not called out the LEO and UPAMM to support the graduate students.

Detroit Public School teachers voted by a margin of 91 percent to 9 percent to authorize a "safety strike" to block plans by the district to start in-person teaching. The Detroit Federation of Teachers, part of the AFT, ignored the mandate and agreed to a reopening scheme with in-person learning. The strike vote and the setting up of rank-and-file safety committee, independent of the DFT, makes clear that there is overwhelming opposition among teachers to the reopening of schools.

The opposition of educators, parents and students to the unsafe reopening of schools and the new wave of budget cuts must be freed from the stranglehold of the AFT and the entire corporate-controlled union apparatus.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the student and youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), condemns the

threats from the university. The fight, not only against the unsafe reopening at UM but the policy of the ruling class as a whole in response to the pandemic, requires the mobilization of the working class against the Democratic and Republican parties and the capitalist system.

It is not to the Democrats and the union executives that students should turn, but to teachers, auto workers, service workers, health care workers and the entire working class.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality in the US is holding a national online meeting Thursday, at 8 PM EDT to organize students against the reckless reopening of schools. We urge students and youth to register for the event today.



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