

Reject the AFT's rush to vote on sellout contract at University of Michigan!

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality at UM
17 September 2020

This statement was addressed to striking University of Michigan (UM) graduate students and published on September 16 in advance of a meeting held by the Graduate Employees' Organization (GEO) at which the union effectively browbeat students into accepting a sellout contract that ended their strike. During the meeting, the IYSSE at UM disseminated the statement on social media and fought for graduate students to reject the sellout contract.

An emergency meeting of the Graduate Employee Organization (GEO) has been called tonight, and striking University of Michigan (UM) graduate students are being told to vote on a new contract and end the strike without having seen the agreement before the meeting or having had sufficient time to study and discuss it.

It is no coincidence that the effort to browbeat GEO members to end their strike occurs less than 24 hours after David Hecker, the president of the American Federation of Teachers-Michigan (AFT-Michigan), inserted himself in the negotiations with the university.

Anything that the AFT has had a hand in will only be a miserable betrayal of everything GEO members have fought for over the last week. Grad students have taken a courageous stand—defying threats of court injunctions and other retaliation—in order to fight the reckless reopening of the university and the dangerous conditions facing both instructors, assistants and students.

The AFT in Michigan and nationally has facilitated the opening of public schools and suppressed strikes and other actions by teachers fighting to protect their lives. This includes New York City, the largest school district in the US, and Detroit, which has already seen a new outbreak of COVID-19 cases in its schools.

At no point during the GEO strike, even after the

university filed for an injunction, did the AFT do anything to support the strike. Instead, they instructed the AFT-affiliated unions on the campus, Lecturers Employee Organization (LEO) and the United Physician Assistants of Michigan Medicine (UPAMM) to keep their members at work. Far from mobilizing public school teachers in joint action, the AFT wants to shut down the UM strike as soon as possible before it encourages public school teachers to strike too.

The AFT is an integral part of the Democratic Party, which controls the university administration and the state of Michigan. AFT President Randi Weingarten is a leading member of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and was one of the DNC's chief hitmen against the Bernie Sanders campaign in 2016, according to documents released by WikiLeaks.

Joe Biden and the Democrats, no less than Donald Trump and the Republicans, support the homicidal policy of opening up schools and colleges even if it means doubling the number of COVID-19 deaths, which now stand at 200,000. After passing the CARES Act, which handed over \$3 trillion to Wall Street, their chief concern was herding workers back into the factories and other workplaces to produce the profits to pay this historic corporate bailout. That meant getting young people out of the homes and back into schools and colleges.

There have already been outbreaks of infections at universities and colleges across the country. But this has not stopped the madness, which is entirely driven by corporate concerns. The effort to shut down the GEO takes place right after the Big Ten announced the resumption of football games next month. UM's football program, the richest of the Big Ten, brings in \$122 million a year. Adding insult to injury, college athletes who are being put in harm's way will be tested

daily, while UM President Mark Schlissel claims there are not enough resources to regularly test students and graduate workers.

What has been revealed so clearly through the graduate student worker strike is that the issues involved in this struggle affect all faculty, staff, students and workers. That is why the strike has garnered immense support from residential advisors, lecturers and other faculty issued statements of support, and many joined the picket lines. The university dining hall staff, construction workers and local autoworkers also offered statements and actions in support of the strike.

But opposition to the unsafe opening goes far beyond UM. There have been significant protests at Iowa State University, the University of Iowa, San Diego State University, University of California—San Diego, the University of Wisconsin and other universities. On Monday, 4,000 University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) service workers walked out on strike to demand safe staffing levels and decent wages, joining 800 nurses who began a strike last Saturday at the UIC medical center.

Millions more are opposed to Trump's fascistic politics, police killings, wars, the devastation of the environment and the social inequality caused by capitalism. There is enormous potential to build a powerful political movement of the working class and develop the fight for socialism and genuine social equality.

Now is not the time to back down! The struggle can and must be broadened. Workers and students throughout the university should establish a campus-wide strike committee, bringing together broad sections of students, staff, faculty and workers, to carry out joint strikes and to oppose any efforts to use court injunctions and threats to intimidate and silence the GEO strikers.

Hecker and the other AFT officials should be removed from any talks. All negotiations with the university must be live-streamed and GEO members given 48 hours to review and discuss any contract.

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



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact