

New York educators call for support to striking Columbia grad workers

**The New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
18 March 2021**

The New York Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee stands in solidarity with the Columbia University graduate student-worker strikers. We pledge to do everything in our power to mobilize educators and broader sections of workers to support your struggle.

Your fight for health care, a living wage and freedom from victimization by the university administration is familiar to educators everywhere. We are all struggling against powerful corporate and political forces denying us the right to live decently and safely.

The university president and Columbia University Board of Trustees are resisting your just demands and are made up of Wall Street executives, real estate moguls and the former head of the Federal Reserve of New York, who have all gotten even richer as grad students and tens of millions of working class people struggle from paycheck to paycheck, if they even get one.

Your strike is particularly important because it occurs at a time when the Democratic Party, with the full backing of the American Federation of Teachers and other unions, is now opening schools to in-person instruction before the pandemic has been suppressed, including state universities, which have become major vectors of the disease. Mayor de Blasio and the rest of the Democratic Party in New York, following the lead of the Biden administration, are seeking to open nonessential businesses and schools as quickly as possible.

On Thursday, New York City public high school teachers, who do not have exemptions for remote teaching, and next Monday, high school students signed up for blended learning, are expected to join the thousands of Pre-K through middle schoolers already attending in-person. Only 10 percent of the city's

population has received two doses of the vaccine, leaving the citywide community far below levels needed for so-called herd immunity.

On Wednesday, the Situation Room of the New York Department of Education reported over 218 schools closed, along with 784 classrooms in other buildings, because of COVID infections. Citywide the positivity rate fluctuates at around seven percent, with some neighborhoods close to 11 and 12 percent. Alarmingly, 51 percent of new COVID cases have been found to be of the highly communicable and more lethal B.1.1.7 and B.1.526 variants.

The rush to reopen schools has nothing to do with helping students. Instead, it is entirely driven by the corporations, which want children back in school so their parents can be sent back to unsafe workplaces to produce profit. The same politicians that are feigning concerns over the academic and emotional needs of young people have spent decades slashing school funding, raising tuition rates and gutting essential public health and mental health services.

If grad students stand firm and beat back Columbia University, it will encourage educators, nurses, transit workers, Amazon, gig workers and others to launch a counteroffensive against the reopening of schools and nonessential businesses. Both grad student-workers and public school staff must work together to wage this fight and save lives against Wall Street and its political servants in both corporate-controlled parties.

The outbreak of the Columbia struggle reflects a broader resurgence of the class struggle against the capitalist system, which sacrifices every aspect of life, including human life itself, to corporate profit. This includes the recent six-day strike by 1,400 produce workers at the Hunts Point Market in the Bronx, as well as the tuition strike at Columbia by more than 1,100

undergraduate and graduate students demanding decreased tuition costs and increased financial aid. Across the world, from Oakland, California to Sao Paulo, Brazil, teachers are opposing the murderous rush to reopen schools.

The New York Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee calls on all New York City workers and, in particular, K-12 educators to support the strike by Columbia University graduate teaching and research assistants!

Rank-and-file teachers and other workers should send delegations to the Columbia picket lines and organize demonstrations in their support. These actions should be the prelude for the preparation of a general strike throughout the city to defend the working class and fight the pandemic profiteers who have enriched themselves while 2.6 million people, including nearly 550,000 in the US, have perished from the deadly disease.

To accomplish this, workers will need to form rank-and-file workplace and neighborhood committees throughout the city. We formed the New York Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee because of the treacherous role the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) played and continues to play in the resumption of in-person classes.

Over the last year, the UFT has opposed and worked to isolate teachers and parents who have based themselves on science and the public health needs of the population. Instead the union sided with the mayor and the corporate interests he serves and even violated the few meager standards to open schools the union made with the city. This has been the case across the country, including with unions led by so-called “left” leaders like the Chicago Teachers Union, which collaborated with Chicago’s Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot to open schools last month against widespread opposition among educators.

The experience workers have had with the notoriously corrupt United Auto Workers (UAW) has been no less bitter. The auto factories in Michigan, Ohio and other states were only closed last spring because of a wave of wildcat strikes by rank-and-file workers in opposition to the UAW, which kept the factories open despite the spread of infections and deaths in the factories.

After a two-month closure—that saved countless

lives—the UAW forced workers back into the plants and has helped the auto bosses impose brutal schedules to make up production, including a 12-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week schedule for skilled trades workers in some factories.

If the Columbia strike is to be won, graduate student-workers must take the conduct of the fight out of the hands of the UAW and the Democratic Party by building a rank-and-file strike committee to expand the struggle. This committee should appeal to the multimillioned working class of New York City and to workers throughout the US and internationally. We urge graduate student-educators and researchers to join the New York Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee and expand the national and international network of committees fighting to protect lives, stop austerity and put an end to social inequality.



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