

Columbia graduate workers: Organize opposition to the UAW strike “pause”!

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (US)
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Late Friday evening, the Bargaining Committee (BC) for the United Auto Worker (UAW)-affiliated Graduate Workers of Columbia (GWC) announced that it had agreed to a “pause” in the strike at Columbia University behind the backs of graduate students.

The BC agreed to this “pause” in exchange for contract mediation from a “neutral” third party. The call for third party arbitration is a hallmark of a UAW sellout. After over two years of struggle for a contract with significant pay raises and health and child care, the GWC-UAW is sending graduate workers back to work on Monday without a contract and without a single demand having been met.

The decision of the BC is in clear and direct violation of the will of the 3,000 rank-and-file members.

In Thursday’s contract bargaining session, Columbia University’s lead lawyer, Bernie Plum, repeated the line that “significant changes” need to be made to the GWC’s demands if they want a deal. Plum then offered to bring in a federal or private mediator in exchange for a pause in the strike, while stating that concessions by Columbia are not likely to happen before a mediator is brought in.

Two GWC meetings following this proposal revealed immense hostility from the rank-and-file to accepting this rotten deal. Many strikers noted the proposal from CU to move to mediation came just as the strike was nearing the grading season in which graduate workers would wield enormous power by withholding grades.

In other words, the UAW in collaboration with CU is moving to “pause” the strike precisely when it would have the deepest impact.

Graduate workers demanded that the BC commit to not responding to Columbia without first consulting the unit. According to multiple sources, a vote at yesterday’s GWC general meeting showed that only

6.2 percent of striking graduate workers supported the university’s proposal.

Despite the overwhelming opposition, a late night GWC email, sent at 10:10 p.m. on Friday, announced that the BC voted seven-to-three in favor of pausing the strike.

The rank-and-file members are infuriated at the decision. Many have indicated to the WSWs that they are determined to keep fighting.

There is a growing mood of hostility towards the BC, which, at every turn, has attempted to push through concessions behind the backs of the rank-and-file. At the end of the second week of the strike, an attempt by the BC to put forward a concessionary contract proposal was thwarted only because of fierce opposition from members who sounded the alarm and organized a petition.

The move to pause the strike and introduce third party mediation into the struggle is in preparation for a complete sellout by the UAW of the strike.

Everything now depends on graduate workers organizing to broaden the strike and mobilize the broadest support in the working class.

Form an independent strike committee! The strike cannot be left in the hands of the UAW and its operatives in the bargaining committee.

The UAW is not a workers organization. It is an arm of corporate management and a labor police force, controlled by wealthy executives who subsist on the exploitation of the workers they claim to represent.

Despite its whopping \$790 million strike fund, the UAW has isolated the striking graduate students and granted the workers a measly \$275 a week in strike pay while Columbia University is withholding all pay to starve the graduate workers into submission. Moreover, the UAW has made clear, as it does in every strike, that

it has no intention of mobilizing the industrial workers behind the students, or even other UAW members on their own campus or neighboring campuses.

Over the past several years, as graduate student workers became unionized, struggles were systematically sold out, one after another. The subordination of the 2019 graduate student strike at the University of California Santa Cruz to the UAW resulted not only in a sellout deal but also the victimization and firing of several strikers.

Graduate workers need their own organizations of struggle, controlled by the rank and file. The IYSSE calls on workers to form a strike committee, completely independent of the UAW and both political parties of the ruling class.

Expand the strike into the working class! While the development of an independent strike committee would mark a major step forward, it is not enough to advance the struggle of CU workers.

The strike must be immediately expanded. Firstly, it must link up with graduate workers' struggle at New York University (NYU), who are part of the same amalgamated UAW Local 2110! Another strike is being voted upon this upcoming week at Illinois State University.

More importantly, it must be expanded into the working class. Graduate students should organize delegations to be dispatched to workplaces and factories in New York and beyond to explain your struggle to autoworkers, teachers, transit workers, hospital workers, retail workers and other sections of the working class.

The struggle of CU graduate workers is the same struggle as workers everywhere who are all fighting against "COVID-19 austerity," that is, the implementation of ferocious austerity measures against the working class to pay back the trillions of dollars that the Democrats and Republicans handed over to corporate America and Wall Street at the start of the pandemic.

The fact that the CU strike has been met with a virtual media blackout is a stark indication that the ruling class sees immense potential for this strike to spark a much broader struggle.

The struggle at Columbia University can only succeed if graduate students recognize this potential as well and consciously fight to develop their struggle into

a broader industrial and political mobilization of the entire working class. Contact the IYSSE today to discuss these demands. We will provide all possible assistance to those determined to fight the union shutdown of the strike.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact