

New York City educators must defend striking Columbia University student-workers

New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
2 December 2021

The New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee met on Sunday, November 21, and commissioned the following statement.

The New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee calls on working people in New York City to support the strike of Columbia University student-workers. K-12 teachers, paraprofessionals, and school staff, students and parents, in particular, must see the monthlong strike by student teaching and research assistants as their own. Graduate and undergraduate workers, adjuncts at NYU and CUNY, the New School and all other institutions of higher education must also unite to act now to defend the Columbia students.

The Columbia graduate student-workers are fighting for higher wages, dental and vision coverage, as well as neutral arbitration in cases of harassment and discrimination. The annual income for these workers ranges between \$29,000 and \$41,000.

The struggle has pitted 3,000 of these student education workers against a giant university apparatus that keeps its workers in poverty without significant benefits. Endowed with over \$14 billion, Columbia University is refusing to make even the most minimal concessions. At the start of the fall semester, Columbia deferred its lump-sum payments for graduate stipends to semimonthly payments to make strikers more dependent on the university.

The administration speaks for the whole ruling class: It will not yield an inch to the needs of workers. It has opened Columbia to face-to-face instruction while the COVID-19 pandemic evolves into ever more deadly variants. As with the rest of academia, it seeks to casualize labor in higher education and to pay its workers poverty wages where it can. The university also plays an outsized role in the American military-intelligence apparatus. Columbia University is, in other

words, an institution deeply hostile to the working class.

Educators cannot tolerate its anti-worker policies in the most expensive city in America and in the midst of a worldwide pandemic.

But, as with K-12 educators, the Columbia student-workers face a second enemy: The organization which sits on and regulates this strike in the interests of its well-paid functionaries, and in the interests of the university and the political establishment itself, the so-called union, in this case, United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 2110. The union is now in the second week of mediation, a maneuver aimed at pressuring the rank and file into accepting major concessions and abandoning the strike.

This strike is part of a global wave of worker militancy. The unions, however, have sought to sabotage a developing strike movement among hundreds of thousands of workers. Recently, the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts (IATSE) announced the passage of an agreement for 60,000 film production workers it supposedly represents despite a majority vote against it. The Alliance of Health Care Unions called off a planned strike of 32,000 health care workers at Kaiser Permanente based on an agreement that provides raises well below inflation and maintains unsafe staffing levels.

The Harvard Graduate Students Union–UAW has now pushed through a contract that decreases student-worker pay by 1.2 percent. Most notably, UAW officials intimidated and threatened the 10,000 striking John Deere workers into passing a contract proposal that was effectively the same as the one that had already been voted down the previous week.

When it comes to the so-called unions in New York City, educators rightly despise the role that the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) has played in opening school buildings to instruction for hundreds of thousands of unvaccinated students this fall. The UFT has sided with the administration of Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio, the Department of Education and the Democratic Party as a whole, in opening schools with inadequate ventilation, little if any social distancing and minimal testing during the Delta wave of the pandemic.

Thousands of New York City school children have gotten sick as a result. The DOE has persecuted parents who have chosen to keep their children at home by giving their names to the Administration for Children's Services for child neglect. With the oncoming spread of the Omicron variant during the cold winter months, the UFT has prepared New York City's population for a disaster.

That is why the Columbia strike is so important for educators and that is why it must be expanded. The student-workers have dared to fight back, and the rest of the city's education workforce must join them!

The New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee calls for the following program of action:

- A mobilization of tens of thousands of Department of Education workers to join the picket lines at Columbia.
- Job actions to demand a settlement of the Columbia strike with an immediate pay raise of 40 percent, with full vision and dental services to be paid by the university.
- The immediate shutting of all New York City universities and public, charter and private schools to prevent the spread of the pandemic.
- Full income for workers, students and parents who must remain at home.

To make the first step forward, we say to our brothers and sisters at Columbia: You must win the strike by throwing off the chains of the UAW and forming an independent strike committee made up of the rank and file that will consciously appeal to other education workers at universities and schools across the city.

We call on undergraduate and graduate students at Columbia, NYU (New York University) and the CUNY (City University of New York) system, and students in public high schools to join the International Youth and Students for Social Equality to coordinate

student actions in support of the Columbia strike and against the spread of COVID-19.

We call on K-12 educators to join the New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee and form committees of action at the building and district levels to prepare a strike for the dual purpose of supporting the Columbia student-workers and stopping the spread of the virus.

We call on all workers in New York City to go on the offensive in a struggle for wages, benefits, affordable housing and decent medical care. New York City's 91 billionaires must pay for the crisis brought on by the pandemic, not the working class!

We must develop a program to eliminate COVID-19 in conjunction with other workers around the world. For that, we ask all workers in New York City—including our brothers and sisters on the picket lines at Columbia—to become involved in the Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The tasks are urgent. The attack by Columbia on its workers must be beaten back. The working class itself must now remove all obstacles to its health and safety and decent standard of living: For that, the powerful New York City working class must act independently of the rotten politicians of both parties and their servants in the trade unions.



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