EMU professors: Vote “no” on sellout contract!

Extend strike against destruction of health benefits! Unite with Michigan Medicine nurses, Seattle teachers and railway workers!

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Eastern Michigan University professors should overwhelmingly reject the concessions contract that the American Association of University Professors (EMU-AAUP) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) are seeking to impose on them. Late Sunday night, the AAUP announced it had reached a tentative agreement with the university and immediately called off the weeklong strike by 500 tenured and tenure track faculty at the school.

The union, backed by the AFT, which covers non-tenured faculty at the university, ended the strike without even presenting the terms of the deal to the rank and file, let alone allowing them to vote on it before returning to work. No date has as yet been announced for a ratification vote.

The completely undemocratic process—the consequences of which will have a massive impact on the incomes and working conditions of professors and their families for years to come—can only mean that the contract is a capitulation to the demands of the administration for a huge increase in out-of-pocket health care costs and a cut in real wages. The deal will moreover set the pattern for concessions to be imposed on the non-tenured faculty.

With complete cynicism, the union leadership declared the contract a “victory” as it ordered the strikers, who had broad support from students, university employees, and workers and youth in the Ann Arbor and Detroit area, back to class without even a fig leaf of democratic discussion.

As of Friday, the university had not budged on its proposed terms for compensation and health care coverage, while the union bargaining team had rolled over with at least three concessionary counteroffers until little separated the two parties but the duration of an agreement. A source close to the negotiations informed the *World Socialist Web Site* that the tentative agreement calls for a four-year contract, a concession to the university’s demand for a five-year instead of three-year deal.

The stage was set for the union betrayal by the events of last week. The university went to court asking for a temporary restraining order to shut down the strike. When the judge refused to ban the strike outright and instead set a hearing date of September 16 to consider enjoining the walkout, the union officials and Democratic politicians declared the decision a “victory” at a rally held last Friday at the university’s Ypsilanti campus.

The official theme of the rally was “Settle the damn contract,” without any specific contract demands having been laid out by union officials. “You will get a contract!” promised Anthony Feig, a member and past president of the Central Michigan University Faculty Association and a Democratic candidate for state representative. On Monday, Feig tweeted, “We settled the DAMN contract. So unbelievably grateful.”

The union and the Democrats brought in AFT President Randi Weingarten for a brief appearance. Weingarten (annual salary of $426,000) is on the Democratic National Committee and has spent the past two years shutting down educators’ strikes and protests and herding them into COVID-infested schools without any serious safety measures. (The AAUP has just

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merged with the much larger AFT, in an agreement that took effect August 1 and leaves the professors' organization as a nominally independent council within the AFT.)

In reality, the decision of the judge, a Democratic appointee with a long career in local politics, was a tactical move to give the union a few days to end the strike out of concern that government strikebreaking, enforced by the Democratic Whitmer administration, could backfire under conditions of a growing strike wave and the upcoming mid-term elections. The unions dutifully fulfilled their role as industrial police for the corporate ruling elite.

At the heart of the contract fight is the demand of the university that faculty members massively increase their out-of-pocket contribution to the cost of health insurance. The increase could amount to thousands of dollars a year, forcing many faculty to opt out of their current PPO plans and settle for cheaper and far poorer HMO plans.

"I know people who will have to get a second job," one professor on the picket line told the WSWS last week.

The EMU faculty are in a powerful position to win their fight. The first step is to decisively reject the tentative contract and broaden the struggle, reaching out to the 6,200 Michigan Medicine nurses in nearby Ann Arbor who voted by 96 percent to authorize a strike, as well as educators on strike in Seattle, UAW members on strike at CNH, striking nurses in Minnesota and California and railway workers preparing to launch the first nationwide rail strike in six decades.

The EMU professors must take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the union executives. They should form a rank-and-file committee to coordinate with other workers in struggle--U of M murses, Minnesota nurses, Kaiser Permanente strikers, Seattle teachers, rail workers--as part of a nationwide and international movement of workers against the universal assault on living standards and working conditions. They should take their lead from the campaign of Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman for UAW president. Lehman is running to abolish the union bureaucracy and return power to the rank-and-file as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

Demand a full week to read and discuss the contract! Reject any contract that includes concessions and fails to meet the demands of the rank and file! No increase in out-of-pocket health insurance costs! For a wage increase that surpasses the soaring inflation rate and a cost-of living escalator to increase wages along with rising prices!

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