

New School instructors rally to end three years of wage freezes

Our reporters

19 September 2022

Without a new contract for more than three years, part-time faculty at New York City's New School rallied last week to demand a deal to counteract years of wage freezes and budget cuts.

An estimated 150 to 200 adjunct professors and students at the New School gathered outside the University Center last Wednesday as part of the demonstration to demand fair pay. As Jazz faculty—who have been without a new contract for nearly as long—played live music, workers and students held signs reading, “Teaching conditions are learning conditions.” One sign read, “Part-time faculty: 87% of the teaching [staff], 13% of the budget.”

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at New York University (NYU), which neighbors the New School, intervened at the rally, speaking to workers and students and distributed 150 copies of UAW presidential candidate Will Lehman's letter to university employees.

One adjunct instructor at the rally told the IYSSE, “We're not being compensated for the extra work that we've been performing during the pandemic. We haven't even had a raise. I make \$4,500 for a three-credit course.

“We don't get paid for grading or emailing students; we're only getting paid per contact hour. For instance, a three-credit course has 45 contact hours per semester, but I would say I'm working double or three times as much. The students suffer as a result. I would definitely put more into the course if I got paid more, and this would actually be necessary for the students.”

The instructor added that one of her colleagues made twice as much as she did (\$9,000) for a three-credit course because of seniority.

Nell, an undergraduate who attended the rally to support her instructors, said, “I think it's essential for

people to have enough money to survive. It is ironic that the New School, which presents itself as very progressive, does not pay 87 percent of its instructors a livable wage.”

Nadia and Max, both undergraduates in the Fine Arts program, also came to support the adjunct professors. Nadia said, “Most of the best professors I've had here are part-time faculty. They're making the school what it is.”

Max added, “I know so many teachers who are going out of their way and are paying out of their own pockets to facilitate an environment that students can actually work in. I know many who are spending basically 24 hours every day in the craft shops that are also part-time.

“Most have second jobs because they can't afford to live on just teaching, but the New School is even marketing the fact that many professors are also working actively in the arts, even though the reality is that they have to. They do not even get maternity leave.”

Nadia said, “There's overwhelming support for the teachers among the student body. There's strong disdain for the administration but a strong bond by students with the teachers, the custodial staff, and really all the workers.”

Angie, a student of Communication Design at the New School's Parsons School of Design, said, “I go to school here, and I love my professors to death. They're incredibly talented individuals and really care for education and future generations. I think that's the kindest thing to do for another human being—to pass on your knowledge.

“I'm actually doing homework right now on my phone, but I'm here because I want to show them that they deserve a livable wage and health care. They must

be rewarded for their commitment to education. It's a no-brainer for me to be here and show our respect and support.”

The New School's overwhelming reliance on part-time instructors translates into lower pay, fewer benefits and higher job insecurity for adjuncts compared to their full professor counterparts.

Part-time faculty at the New School can be paid as low as \$23,000 for teaching six courses. These wages are below the poverty level anywhere in the country but even more so in New York City, where the cost of living is extremely high. With wages frozen for three years and counting, soaring inflation has meant a significant decline in already inadequate living standards.

The attacks on faculty at the New School extend well beyond frozen contractual terms. The administration responded to the pandemic with the imposition of massive austerity on its workforce, including furloughs for 260 staff, layoffs for over 100 clerical and administrative workers, wage freezes for all faculty making below \$75,000 and wage cuts for those above that threshold. The university also merged departments and cut faculty through buyouts to save costs.

Course cancellations over the past two years have further slashed the incomes of part-time faculty. Meanwhile, the university unilaterally imposed health care changes making it far more costly to visit a doctor during a public health catastrophe.

The New School's pandemic recovery plan was signed off twice by the United Auto Workers (UAW) union, which covers adjunct faculty at the New School. The plan formally concluded at the end of the 2021-22 academic year but reactivated the old contract's terms through November of this year.

For the past three months, the union and the university have been meeting to discuss the terms of a new deal. With eight bargaining sessions concluded, the administration has dug in its heels, pressing for an indefinite extension of the old contract, in other words, continuing to massively cut wages after factoring in inflation.

With the urgent need for a genuine struggle, the UAW is continuing its long-standing strategy of isolating individual contract battles and strikes, even when they involve the same locals. A few blocks from the New School, adjuncts at New York University—also

covered by UAW Local 7902—saw their contract expire at the end of last month, only to be extended for 30 days through the end of September.

This enforced isolation has been replicated by the UAW at other work locations. Will Lehman, a socialist autoworker running for UAW president, described this process in a recent letter to academic workers in the UAW. “When workers in the UAW go on strike—always after rejecting contracts that the UAW apparatus sought to ram through—we are isolated and strung out on poverty-level strike pay. When graduate students in the UAW went on strike at Harvard, Columbia and NYU in 2021, the UAW did nothing to even inform autoworkers, let alone mobilize us to support you. The same is true when auto and other manufacturing workers go on strike.”

The IYSSE at NYU encourages workers and students at the New School to join Lehman's campaign aimed at breaking the stranglehold of the bureaucratic union apparatus and return power to the rank and file. Lehman calls for creating rank-and-file committees in every workplace to assert the authority of workers to unify across plants, industries and countries, and to fight against the subordination of all to profit.

To learn more about Will Lehman's campaign, visit WillforUAWPresident.org.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact