

# “It’s literally nationwide, and we really have to stand with each other”: Striking New School part-time faculty speak out on the picket line

**Our reporters****18 November 2022**

The strike by over 1,600 part-time faculty at The New School in New York City is winning wide support from workers and students throughout the city and across the country. Striking workers, who are members of UAW Local 7902, are fighting for livable wages and better health care benefits amid record inflation in one of the most expensive cities in the world.

In walking out, New School workers have joined the 48,000 striking academic workers in the University of California (UC) system—creating the largest strike wave of academic workers in the US. More than 250 workers are also striking against Murdoch-owned HarperCollins publishers in New York City. All of these striking workers are part of the United Auto Workers union.

On Thursday, the picket at The New School and associated Parsons School of Design grew to around 200 workers and students, including full-time faculty who supported the strike. Striking workers and supporters spoke to reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* on the picket line. Many expressed support for Will Lehman’s campaign for UAW president as well as his socialist platform, with several saying they voted for him.

**Mia**, a striking Parsons part-time faculty member, has worked at The New School since 2019. She said, “We do not have a livable wage. A lot of the part-time faculty here work full-time other places because our wage is not substantial. We also don’t get paid for office hours or any of our grading or email correspondence with our students. Then there is a ‘strategy’ in how we get benefits, so we don’t get benefits every semester we teach. It’s a lot of rigmarole around how we can actually be stable and healthy teachers as we teach the students here. Our wage is literally nothing compared to what the students pay in tuition.”

Mia added, “We haven’t had a raise in over four years, so we’re asking for a 10 percent raise. We also didn’t receive any type of COVID pay. Our full-time faculty did receive a bonus, but we as part-timers, who are more than 82 percent of the

faculty, did not receive anything. We all worked in transition from in-class to online without any training, basically overnight. So we’re asking for compensation for that. We want an increase in our benefits as well. It’s an overall package that The New School hasn’t at all negotiated in a real way.”

The university is currently offering only a 3.5 percent wage increase this year and 2 percent increases in subsequent years.

Mia also spoke about having to work multiple jobs. “It’s very, very difficult. I teach here and I’ve been trying to get another job because the income that I have here doesn’t equate. The school takes so much time because we’re having to really care for our students. I also was an alumni here, so I graduated here and understand what the students have to endure and it takes a lot of care from us as professionals. But it also requires us to give up time that we’re not getting compensated for. As much as we try to negotiate and talk to the administration, nothing happens. Even the supplies we use to teach the classes, I have to pay for them myself. It’s just absolutely ridiculous.”

“It’s really important that we’re all collectively banding together to stand up for our rights. I know that Brooklyn Museum are in a fight too. It’s literally nation-wide and we really have to stand with each other. The more people that cross the picket line, the worse it is for all of us. It’s not one over the other. We all have to band together. We’re all standing together with the people in California, as well as everybody that’s on strike here in New York.”

The WSWS reporter discussed with her Will Lehman’s campaign for UAW president and the lawsuit he filed Thursday to force a 30-day extension of the voting deadline. This is due to huge numbers of workers not being informed about the elections and reports from workers that they never received a ballot.

“First of all, I’ll say that I did not know that the UAW was having an election, and as a member since 2019, that’s a problem,” Mia said. “So that alone speaks to the corruption that’s happening that even the members don’t even know

what's happening at the top."

"I want to make sure that we [the UAW] are really focusing on what we need as workers as well as having leadership that knows us as workers and that are also workers. We don't need more workers becoming administrators that don't care about what we do on a daily basis."

Mia ended with an appeal for other sections of workers to join their struggle. "If you really believe in what we're standing for and collectively making sure that we *all* have a livable wage, then strike with us."

**A part-time Parsons faculty member** on strike spoke about her relationship with students. "The students mean everything to us. We do everything we can and give all that we have for them continuously." Commenting on the overwhelming student support of the strike, she said, "I've never seen such solidarity and it's so refreshing. It just makes me want to cry for how proud I am of them for the support. I want to give a special thank you to all of my students and the students at this school for being so brave and so strong."

In addition to higher pay, the Parsons worker said she "would like to see the amount of semesters that teachers have to work to be kept on, to get a class, lower. Because it's a known habit that the university fires teachers before they reach that mark. And I'm probably going to get fired even though I've been working since 2019. And I'm completely and utterly devoted to Parson's cause, social justice at this university and my students. It's very heartbreaking."

Asked about what it's like paying the high living expenses in New York while working as a part-time faculty member, she said, "I live in a place with no heat. As a working artist who teaches part-time, I live in some very difficult conditions."

Our reporter raised the University of California strike and the call by Will Lehman to connect these two struggles. "Yes! Even having the students involved, bringing in that sort of connectivity and recognizing that the teachers don't want to have this separation between different faculty members or from the students. So this is in some ways exactly what The New School is supposed to stand for and we're grateful for that support."

She ended with an appeal to all UAW workers on strike. "Stand together and work hard and wait until you get what you need!"

**Aaron** has been a student worker for six years at The New School and came to the picket to support the strike. He is part of a bargaining unit of student-workers whose contract expires next year. "We do the same work but are arbitrarily divided up. Ideally, we would strike together," he said.

"When the pandemic began, The New School had a new president, Dwight McBride, and he used the pandemic as an excuse to get rid of 122 workers. We were at a point where we could have had a faculty vote of no confidence in the president but that slipped by."

Asked about uniting with the other workers of New York City

who are on strike and broader sections of the working class, Aaron responded, "It would be a good idea to have a general strike but we are not there yet. As for my unit, it is small and there is a lot of turnover among student-workers but workers are getting more politicized. We can build for that. I am more optimistic that we can strike."

Aaron said he had been following Will Lehman's campaign and voted for him. "I support rank and file in the labor movement. I voted in the UAW presidential election for Will Lehman because I want to support an internationalist and a socialist and we have to get rid of Ray Curry. I listened to Will's speech on needing international unity and liked his explanation of how capital has been restructured to make labor need a more global program. We need an actual socialist party in the US. I am happy we have an actual socialist running in the UAW."

**Sophia**, an undergraduate student at Parsons in her junior year, joined the picket to show her solidarity with striking adjunct professors. She said, "We have so many great professors who are part time. They have been trying to get a good contract for years. No one wanted this strike but desperate times call for desperate measures. We have to show solidarity, The New School wouldn't be The New School without the part-time faculty."

She continued, "Tuition is extremely expensive but where exactly is it going? The administration is incredibly well paid. The president has a luxury apartment. Is this where our tuition is going? It should be going to fund our part-time faculty, health care and other needs. But they are barely making a living wage. I have one professor who makes less in a week than his strike pay."

The New School president, Dwight McBride, lives in a \$15 million townhouse in Lower Manhattan that is paid for by the school and has a salary of over \$1 million.

**A striking faculty member** on the picket said, "I teach creative writing to graduate students who are writers. I have been teaching for 40 years and have been at The New School for 22 years. I am striking because we have to be paid justly. The program wouldn't exist without us and it couldn't continue without us. We should be paid a fair wage for the work we do. They need persuasion. That is why I am out here."

**A computer science student** who attends Eugene Lang College of Liberal Arts explained why he joined the picket line. "I am here to support our teachers. They do not pay them enough. They do not respect them. The tuition at The New School is expensive. This is a university that proclaims progressive values but they do not back them up."



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