# New School makes “final offer” to striking part-time faculty in New York City

**Sandy English**
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At a bargaining session on Sunday with UAW Local 7902, The New School’s administration gave 1,600 striking workers an insulting contract proposal, which it called its “last, best, and final” offer.

The proposal includes a 7 percent raise in the first year and 2.5 percent raises in each of the next four years. After not seeing a wage increase in four years, workers will receive what amounts to an annual wage increase of only 1.8 percent. With inflation currently running at 6 percent, this would be a sharp cut in real wages, which would further impoverish the striking educators.

The New School offered no compensation for out-of-class hours worked, including advising students and class preparation. The New School’s health care proposals include cutting the Mannes School of Music faculty from participation in a medical plan. Other workers will have to pay premiums that could rise as much as 10 percent each year, along with other out-of-pocket expenses that can be unilaterally raised by the university at any time. The New School will also retain the power to terminate workers after they have taught nine semesters.

The UAW apparatus has made it clear it has no intention of fighting this ultimatum. The union’s negotiation update complains that the university’s 1.8 percent raise proposal is “far less than the 2% to 3% raises that other union employees at the university such as Librarians and Making Center Techs won in their contracts.” This is a signal of how low the UAW bargainers have set the bar for an “acceptable” contract. Strikers should take this as a serious warning.

The UAW has kept other workers in its local on the job during the adjuncts strike, including members of the graduate student’s union, SENS-UAW, which signed a non-strike agreement with the school.

If the outcome of this strike is going to be different from the sellout deals signed by the UAW at Columbia, New York University and others, rank-and-file workers must take the struggle into their own hands. This requires establishing a rank-and-file strike committee to outline the demands, including doubling starting wages, cost-of-living adjustments and job protections, which any contract must have before it is ratified.

At the same time, this committee should break through the isolation imposed on the strike by the UAW bureaucracy, and actively link up with other sections of workers, including UAW members at HarperCollins and the 48,000 who are on strike at the University of California. Lines of communication must be developed in order to coordinate joint actions.

All negotiations must be live-streamed and workers given the full contract—not bogus “highlights”—and a full week to study and discuss it before any vote.

Instead of waging a real fight, UAW Local 7902 officials are tweeting messages of support from Democratic Party politicians, like Crystal Hudson, a member of the Progressive Caucus in the City Council. These are no friends of striking workers; they are their enemies. Hudson was among the 44 members of the City Council who voted in June for sweeping cuts to education, which have resulted in the excessing of hundreds of K-12 educators and the slashing of scores of essential programs.

New School workers are in a direct fight against the Democratic Party, which controls city politics, and the powerful corporate and financial interests they speak for. The board of trustees of the private university is a rogues’ gallery of corporate and financial parasites. It includes former directing managers and top officers from private equity companies like Lazard, Deutsche Bank, Grosvenor Capital Management, Apollo Investment Corporation, along with Fortune 500 companies like Avon Products and Duracell.

This gang of multimillionaires, which also includes New School President Dwight McBride, are telling striking workers their demands for living wages to feed and shelter their families are impossibly high!

Educators online have reacted angrily to the school’s proposals. One tweeted, “It’s really just…disappointing and sad and gross. I want not only to be paid for the work that I

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do but also I want to be respected. I love my students and I want to be in the classroom. I want pay parity with and for all of my colleagues."

Will Lehman, the socialist Mack Trucks worker who is running for UAW president, visited the picket lines on Saturday to encourage workers to create their own committees to expand the strike.

Nikola, a PhD student in Political Science who joined the picket on Monday, told WSWS reporters, "The New School is not ready to come close to the demands of the part-time faculty. The university sells itself as having progressive values and being for social justice. In reality, they are for the upper layers of management, including the army of lawyers that they have. This is a class struggle. We are advantaged in the sense that we do work that we love, but in terms of making a living, the wages are terrible for the part-time faculty. An economist has calculated that out of every dollar that the school earns, 67 cents go to the administration.

"New York City is so sharply unequal between the rich and poor. I stand with the faculty."

Shireen, a part-time faculty teacher in visual arts who voted for Will Lehman, said, "It is heartbreaking to see how focused the school is on numbers and not on the humanity of the faculty and the students. Look at all the students out here to support us. They feel the effect of what the school is doing just as we do. We all oppose the corporatization of the educational system."

Aiden, a second-year student in architecture who had come out to support the strike, said, "They need to pay our teachers. I can't believe they have gone this far against their own teachers and students. My teachers are fabulous. They do a lot of jobs besides teaching. They go the extra mile. It is very good to see the coming together of all these teachers and students in struggle."

Lexion Neill, a fourth-year student in graphic design, added, "The faculty has been underpaid for as long as I have been here. I am glad to be out here to support the struggle. I came to this school because this is the faculty that I wanted. Student tuition is very high, and I don't know where this money goes. The New School is not as progressive as it claims to be."

Aria, a student worker who is active in the grad student UAW local, SENSE-UAW, said student workers were not allowed to strike but had effectively canceled their classes. Like many other workers, he had received his ballot for the UAW election late. Upon hearing about the lawsuit by Will Lehman against the UAW and the monitor to guarantee the right of all members to vote, he said, "Of course, I support the lawsuit."

He added, "The UAW is such a bureaucratic organization. Of course, there is the corruption, but the bureaucracy is also completely inefficient and disconnected from the rank and file. It makes it difficult even for units at a local level to work closely together. We also see now with the different academic strikes going on that it is the rank and file of the unions which is acting in solidarity on social media. We're trying to make connections between the East Coast and West Coast. It's not the stewards who are doing this, but the members themselves.

"I think in this political moment the question of the unions is particularly important. It's not just about labor rights but about saving democracy. But instead of playing a critical role in safeguarding labor rights and democracy the union themselves are becoming a counterforce.

"The structure of the unions is alienating the rank and file. If you look at the union dues in the UAW, for instance, about 30 percent goes to the locals but the rest goes to Solidarity House, to pay the salaries of officials like Ray Curry. Members should feel like they have control over where their dues are going."

Marika, who teaches shoemaking in evening classes, told the WSWS, "I'm teaching at three different schools. I have no job security, no health insurance, nothing. The administration is making huge amounts of money but instructors make nothing. When I commute or have to travel somewhere for my job, I have to pay for it. I do it all because I love the students, I love my job, but over time it just adds up. It's not right.

"I know that the administration walked out of the negotiations. It sucks. They're offering nothing significant. The cost of living has gone up so much. Lines at food pantries in my neighborhood have gotten so long. I've joined a co-op to get my groceries and I know I'm not alone. You have to do four jobs to make a living. I agree it's not just here at The New School or in academia. It's everywhere; it's like the corporate world is taking over. I think it's great that so many workers are now deciding to go on strike. If you just complain, nothing will change."

*For more information and to get involved in Will Lehman's campaign, visit https://willforuawpresident.org.*

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