

UAW reaches tentative agreement with the New School, calls off strike

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ACT-UAW Local 7902's bargaining committee for part-time faculty at The New School University in New York City announced Sunday it has reached a tentative agreement with the university's administration. Even though educators have not yet had a chance to read, discuss or even vote on the agreement, the union has called off the strike and ordered the 1,600 adjunct professors back to work immediately to begin grading as the end of the semester approaches.

In a joint statement with The New School announcing the agreement, the union wrote, "The union leadership will unanimously recommend this agreement to its members, and it will now go to part-time faculty union members for a ratification vote over the next few days. In the meantime, the union has ended the strike and all university classes and events will resume as scheduled effective immediately."

The full details of the five-year contract, negotiated with assistance of a mediator, have not been released publicly, but initial reports indicate that the contract contains a 13 percent raise in the first year and that health insurance benefits will remain unchanged. The university had planned major cuts to adjuncts' health care plan and offered an insulting 1.8 percent annual raise as a part of a "final offer." Last week the university cut off workers pay and suspended their health care.

For an adjunct making the top pay of \$5,753 per semester, the 13 percent raise means they will see an increase of less than \$750 over the course of the four-month semester. This will leave adjuncts with a monthly salary of about \$1,600. The average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in New York City is over \$4,000 per month.

The New School adjunct professors who make up 87 percent of the school's teaching staff have not received

a raise in four years. Since then, the cost of living has increased by nearly 19 percent, meaning that in terms of real purchasing power the new agreement leaves New School teachers with a pay cut when compared to their pay at the time the last contract was signed.

So far, no additional specifics of the contract have been publicly released. When speaking with workers on the picket lines over the course of the three-week strike, adjuncts told WSWS reporters that they were also demanding changes to The New School's hiring practices that see part-time teachers routinely fired after teaching nine consecutive semesters, since after 10 semesters, part-time faculty become eligible for full-time positions. Many veteran teachers on strike reported that the university had fired them and then re-hired them one semester later to avoid granting them full-time rights.

The announcement by the UAW shutting down the strike comes at the very moment where teachers are in their most powerful position to win their demands for a living wage.

There has been immense pressure on The New School to reach an agreement before the semester ends and students' grades need to be submitted. Grading is one of the most critical components of the labor that part-time faculty provide to the University. Without the adjuncts, the university administration has no way to evaluate the performance and assign credit to students.

Without grades, students essentially would not receive the services they had paid for and potentially be eligible for refunds on their tuition, which averages over \$25,000 per semester. Despite the disruption to regular school life, there has been an outpouring of support for adjuncts from students, who have joined their teachers on the picket line every day of the strike.

Last Thursday, student supporters of the strike began

an occupation of the New School's University Center after the Administration announced they were cutting the pay and health benefits of striking teachers. While occupying the building, the students discussed the strike and issued a list of their own demands.

In a statement in which they declared their full support for their teachers, they called for a self-grading policy for graduating students so they would not have a delay in their graduation, extensions of all deadlines, tuition refunds for the lost instruction time and a freeze on any tuition increases in the future, as well as the resignation of the university's President Douglas McBride. Among other demands, they also called for the Board of Trustees to be disbanded and replaced by a body run by the school's faculty and students, and for more financial assistance to students.

Similarly, the full-time faculty issued a statement that they were opposed to withholding pay for strikers. The university had also threatened to withhold the pay of full-time faculty who had refused to cross the picket line during the strike.

The full-time faculty union, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), had called a for a no-confidence vote in McBride for his handling of the strike.

All these factors combined with massive support from broad layers of the working class in New York and nationally, including the strike by tens of thousands of academic workers at the University of California, place the strike at its most powerful moment.

It is for precisely this reason that the UAW has rushed to conclude the strike. Already the UAW is claiming the contract is a major victory and should be accepted and teachers return to work without discussing or even being given time to read the new agreement.

It should be noted that when the university began withholding pay from the strikers, they became eligible for strike pay from the UAW. The prospect of having to pay out from the massive UAW strike fund, which serves in effect as a slush fund for the UAW apparatus, provided an added incentive for the union to rush the strike to an end by pushing through a concession contract even in face of the fact that the university had begun buckling under the impact of the strike.

Similarly, in the strike by graduate student workers at the University of California, the UAW is working to suppress opposition to the bargaining committee

dropping the strikers' main demand for a cost-of-living adjustment to be written into the contract. In addition, the UAW is dividing the workers and has agreed to send 12,000 postdoctoral workers back to work even though 36,000 teaching assistants, student researchers and other still do not have a contract. Essentially, the UAW has agreed to encourage scabbing against its own members.

In New York, the UAW also did its level best to isolate The New School strikers at a time of enormous discontent in the working class in New York City, the US and around the world.

One expression of this was the fact that the union for New School graduate students, SENS-UAW, also a part of Local 7902, had signed a no-strike clause in their last contract, despite their support for part-time faculty.

The UAW has done nothing to link the struggle at The New School with the fight of other sections of workers in the New York City area such as publishing workers at HarperCollins, members of UAW Local 2110, who have been on strike since November 10, also fighting for a living wage. Over 70,000 K-12 educators, members of the United Federation of Teachers, have been working without a contract since September as New York Democratic Mayor Eric Adams and the Democratic-run city council make massive budget cuts to the city's schools. Tens of thousands of other city workers are also working without a contract.

Opposition to the contract and the peremptory return to work will unquestionably emerge among the New School's faculty. The seething opposition by academic workers to the rotten UAW apparatus was shown when Will Lehman, the socialist Mack Trucks worker who ran for the presidency of the UAW, won 14.4 percent of the votes cast in Local 7902, despite widespread voter suppression. To consolidate and advance this opposition, the *World Socialist Web Site* encourages New School faculty to organize a rank-and-file committee independent of the UAW apparatus to map out a strategy to defeat this sellout contract and expand the strike.



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