

Stop the sellout of the University of Illinois Chicago faculty strike! Expand the fight for free public education!

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality at the University of Illinois Chicago
22 January 2023

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The six-day strike by more than 900 tenure track and non-tenure-track professors at the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) was abruptly ended by UIC United Faculty union Sunday night after it announced a tentative agreement with administrators. The union ordered professors back to work before they have had a chance to read, let alone vote on the contract.

Faculty members struck to demand pay raises that keep up with inflation, a fairer appointment policy to improve job security and more funding for student mental health services. The union largely ignored these demands and agreed to a deal that would establish a minimum pay for non-tenure teachers of just \$60,000 per year and \$71,500 for tenure track faculty—rates well below the salaries other universities pay for similar positions.

In addition, the agreement only provides an annual raise of 5 percent for each year of the four-year contract. With a decades-high inflation rate, the deal would result in an annual cut in real wages. This will only increase the economic insecurity of faculty members who are facing higher living expenses and interest rates for mortgages, credit cards, student loans and other debts.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) calls on rank-and-file faculty members to reject this sellout agreement and expand their struggle to include all UIC workers and students, and far broader sections of the working class in Chicago and beyond.

Rank-and-file faculty members must take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the union bureaucrats who run the UIC United Faculty, the American Federation of Teachers and American Association of University Professors. Behind the backs of striking faculty, union officials have conspired with Governor JB Pritzker and the Democratic Party political machine to end the strike and impose a deal which is entirely within the budget-cutting framework of big business.

What is at stake is not only the living standards of faculty members but the very right to a high quality public education for working-class and middle-class youth, which is under attack by both corporate-controlled parties.

Faculty members must elect a rank-and-file committee to transfer decision-making power from the union bureaucracy to professors whose living standards and working conditions are at stake.

No contract should be accepted unless it includes the following demands:

- A 50 percent increase in minimum pay for all faculty and graduate workers to afford a decent standard of living in Chicago.
- Cost-of-living adjustments tied to inflation.
- End the NTT/TT tier system. Full employment for all!
- The elimination of fees and tuition for all students paid for by a massive increase in public education funding.
- Full healthcare coverage for all campus workers and their families.
- Guaranteed appointment and job security for nontenured and graduate workers.
- Mitigation measures for COVID and other diseases including air filtration, ventilation, and fully paid sick time off.

There will be enormous support for faculty members if they reject this sellout and continue their strike. Their walkout is part of a developing movement in the working class internationally, including large numbers of academic workers like the 48,000 University of California teaching assistants, student researchers and others who struck late last year.

Facing rising and unbearable living expenses, driven by the pandemic and the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, workers throughout the world are increasingly entering into struggle.

For workers at UIC to secure their needs, it is to this force they must turn: the working class, the great revolutionary force in society.

The IYSSE rejects the lie being told to students and staff that there is no money to meet these demands. All the money needed to fully fund public education already exists but it is being hoarded by the corporations and the financial aristocracy and squandered on preparations for a third world war.

The IYSSE calls on all UIC students, including graduate teaching assistants and campus workers, to support the faculty strike and expand it to include student's needs. Shut the university down until all demands are won!

The issues that confront the UIC faculty are by no means unique. Throughout the entire world, workers are combating ever deepening inequality and finding themselves unable to afford to live. Students take on enormous levels of debt while few job prospects following graduation offer a means to ever pay them

off.

UIC's administration has attempted to set students against their teachers. In emails sent out to students, UIC has claimed that faculty pay cannot be adjusted for inflation since UIC students' tuition is locked at the same price during their four years and would have to be raised if teachers' pay is increased.

This claim is a total lie. There is more than enough money for both teachers to live and for the cost of education on students to be made free.

UIC and the University of Illinois school system at large are run by highly paid directors and executives. UIC's Interim Chancellor Javier Reyes is paid well over \$500,000 per year, and Timothy L. Killeen, the president of the U of I system, takes home over \$881,500 per year.

This, however, is pocket change compared to the enormous amounts controlled by the billionaires and corporations in Illinois. Illinois' wealthiest 15 individuals—including billionaire Governor J. B. Pritzker—have a collective wealth of over \$82 billion. If Ken Griffin, who is in the process of moving his hedge fund Citadel to Florida, is included, another \$30 billion is added to the total.

In the period from March 18, 2020 to April 12, 2021, as workers and students were reeling from the mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic and thousands were dying each day, America's billionaires increased their wealth by over \$1.6 trillion.

Workers and students are told that there is no money for education, health care, jobs and other social needs. But at the drop of a hat, the US Congress authorized \$50 billion for the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine. There is never any hesitation to provide the banks, corporations and the Pentagon with unlimited resources. But when teachers need their pay to keep up with the cost of living, we are told students must foot the bill.

The IYSSE calls for an injection of billions of dollars into public education to provide substantial pay increases to educators, relieve the debt of current and former students, and eliminate the costs for all incoming and future students. There is plenty of money in society to accomplish this task, but capitalism stands in the way.

The strike by UIC faculty is a powerful opportunity to unite the campus around these issues and mount a fightback against austerity. But what is required is a clear political program and strategy that is independent of the capitalist political system, in this case, the Democratic Party and their allies in the trade union bureaucracy.

UIC faculty must look to the lessons of recent strikes by educators around the country, in Chicago, and at UIC's campus itself. If matters are left in the hands of bureaucrats like AFT President Randi Weingarten, who is paid over \$500,000 per year from workers' dues, then they will face a sellout.

In December, after a three-week strike by adjunct faculty at the New School in New York City, the United Auto Workers (UAW) that represented the adjuncts pushed through an agreement that gave teaches a pay of just \$1,600 per month in the most expensive city in the world. The UAW was only able to accomplish this by lying to the striking adjuncts, announcing a tentative agreement and ordering teachers back to work before an agreement had actually been reached and teachers had a chance to review the terms. The maneuver allowed the university to bring the professors

back just in time for final grading, at the very moment the strike was most powerful.

Similarly, the six-week strike by academic workers at the University of California ended in a major betrayal. In this case, the union bargaining team, also affiliated with the UAW, conceded workers' main demand for a cost of living adjustment (COLA) and agreed to a base pay of just \$34,000 per year for the lowest-paid graduate students.

Hundreds of the California academic workers have signed petitions calling for a repeal of the agreement that was passed by antidemocratic methods.

Last year, UIC's graduate students went on strike to demand a living wage. The Graduate Educators Organization (GEO), affiliated with the AFT, agreed to a contract with a minimum pay of just \$24,200 per year by 2025. In addition, the GEO agreed to a "no strike" clause preventing their members from raising protests against conditions. The GEO is now ordering its members to cross the picket line and continue working while the UIC faculty strike continues. This is scabbing and should be opposed by all workers and students at UIC. Graduate students should join the strike and take up a renewed fight for a living wage.

UIC faculty, graduate workers, and students must take the organization of the strike into their own hands. The IYSSE calls for the formation of a rank-and-file strike committee to expand the strike into a direct offensive against the Democratic Party's austerity plans.

The strike is placing faculty in a political struggle against the Democratic Party, which has long dominated politics in Illinois and Chicago. Where they are in power, this party of Wall Street and war has been just as responsible as the Republicans for attacks on public education, social services, and workers' living standards.

Faculty at UIC should appeal to all campus workers and students to join their fight and shut down the campus. But the success of the struggle depends upon a far broader mobilization of the working class throughout Chicago and beyond, in a common political struggle against inequality and the capitalist two-party system.

The IYSSE is confident in the ability for UIC faculty to win this fight. UIC's workers hold all the power by providing the labor that is the function of the university itself. We will provide faculty and students every assistance in our ability to organize this struggle. We urge everyone to join this fight, contact us today and join the IYSSE.



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