

Temple University administration, corporate press and union bureaucrats falsely claim sellout agreement means “end” of grad student strike

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Are you a striking Temple grad student? Tell us what you think about the contract by filling out the form below. All submissions will remain anonymous.

On Friday evening, Temple University Graduate Students Association (TUGSA) Local 6290 and Temple University announced a tentative agreement (TA) in the ongoing strike by 750 graduate students. Graduate students make no more than \$20,000 a year and are demanding a 50 percent wage increase, health care for dependents and families and better parental and bereavement leave.

According to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, “The agreement includes wage increases in all four years of the contract and a one-time payment effective this month, according to an announcement on the university’s website.” The grad students “will retain free health insurance for themselves, the university said, but it made no mention of insurance for dependents, which the union was seeking. No details on the amount of the wage increases were available Friday night.”

A vote is expected over the next several days. The membership voted by 99 percent to call a strike on January 31.

As soon as the TA was announced, Temple’s administration, the corporate press and the union bureaucracy launched a concerted effort to frame the agreement as the “end” of the strike. Ken Kaiser, senior vice-president and chief operating officer at Temple, announced Friday night that the school was “pleased with the outcome and eager to welcome our students back to their teaching, research and studies.” He

thanked “the Temple University community for its patience and flexibility during these 17 days.”

As a matter of fact, Temple graduate students are still on strike and have not agreed to anything, much less even seen a full contract. This presentation of the TA as meaning the automatic end of the strike is designed to confuse and demoralize grad students and present the contract vote as a *fait accompli*.

The *Philadelphia Inquirer*, demonstrating the incestuous connections between Temple and the city’s Democratic Party-controlled political and business establishment, published an article declaring the “Temple graduate students’ strike ends, tentative agreement reached,” before the university’s own email went out.

This combined effort to present the strike as “finished” received immediate opposition from the striking workers on social media. Under the *Philadelphia Inquirer*’s Twitter profile, one person wrote, “Uncritically parroting a union busting disinformation email that hadn’t even been sent out yet?? Suspicious. Absolutely atrocious reporting. Can’t believe you propagandists call this journalism. This false reporting is jeopardizing workers and you clearly don’t care.”

Another worker said, “[C]urious how this article went out 1.) with inaccurate information (strike isn’t over until the proposal is voted on) and 2.) went out at least 10 minutes before Temple themselves made a statement on it.” Another striker wrote, “maybe wait to break a big story until you’ve heard from the people it’s about?”

Temple has resorted to thuggish and reckless attempts to intimidate the striking students. On February 8, the university announced that it was waiving the striking grads' tuition remission and health care benefits, threatening them with immediate destitution. They have also threatened to fire a significant portion of teaching assistants and researchers.

This attack only served to mobilize popular support for the striking workers. Last Wednesday, over 1,000 Temple students turned out in a public display of support, chanting slogans that denounced the university administration.

While few details of the TUGSA-Temple University TA have been released, there are already signs that the offer is a sellout. The lack of clear information regarding the fate of the demands on health care, working conditions and cost of living adjustments raises the possibility that they have been discarded or significantly watered down.

According to one grad student, the contract offer is "absolute sh—." Days before the agreement was reached, TUGSA negotiators said that the university's wage offers were nothing more than "just an incremental raise on a very low salary." At the outset, the university only offered a 3 percent raise, which would bring base pay to \$22,000, or a little more than half of what the city's living wage would be. It is unlikely that Temple has shifted substantially in regard to the grads' demands.

While TUGSA leadership has committed to remain on strike until the contract is voted on, the striking workers have been entirely isolated on the picket lines from other workers. This includes the Temple Association of University Professionals (TAUP), which, like TUGSA, is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). The TAUP's contract has forbidden its members from striking.

The TUGSA officialdom has obediently honored these divisions, while inviting a slew of Democratic Party operatives to make empty pledges of support and that they will "stand with" Temple strikers. Those Democrats that have commented on the new TA have treated the impending vote as a mere formality before the eventual contract ratification.

For its part, AFT Pennsylvania has joined the press and administration in declaring the strike over. The AFT state affiliate's Twitter account wrote,

"Congratulations TUGSA on coming to a tentative agreement with Temple University and ending your strike!" Echoing the same line, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) said, "Outstanding news this Friday evening! Congratulation [sic] and solidarity forever!"

Temple and the AFT's anxiety to close the deal with the graduates is no doubt influenced by the potential for a combined struggle of workers in this vital region of the East Coast. According to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, "After the deal with the graduate student union is complete, Temple will find itself back at the bargaining table very soon, this time with its much larger faculty union. Its contract expires in October."

The Temple University strike is at a crossroads. In order to take the offensive, an independent rank-and-file committee must be formed to take matters into their own hands. There must be no effort to end the strike until a full version of the offer has been given adequate time for study and vote among the members. In the likelihood that the offer is rejected, the strike must expand and be carried forward to all sections of workers and students throughout Temple University, the city of Philadelphia, schools and workplaces.



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