

Strong opposition by striking Temple grad students to tentative agreement as voting begins

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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.

Temple University graduate students and research assistants have voiced strong opposition to the tentative agreement (TA) reached between the school and the Temple University Graduate Student Association (TUGSA) Local 6290 late last week.

Temple grads have been on strike for over three weeks for increases in basic pay from \$19,500 a year to \$32,800, better parental leave policies and healthcare insurance and other demands. The university has given a public offer to increase pay by 3 percent, bringing the base wage to little more than \$22,000 in one of the most expensive cities on the east coast.

The graduate students began voting on the TA Monday, and the process will continue into Tuesday. Many grad students have defied the TUGSA negotiating team's demand that no details of the contract be discussed publicly, voicing their displeasure with the offer in strong terms.

"Good luck trying to ratify that sh— sandwich," exclaimed one student. Another student said, "I did not go on strike to come out on the other side without a living wage," explained another. She added that the university seeks to "repeatedly devalue grad workers and underestimate what we are capable of. Trash."

"No parental leave increase, I noticed," observed another. "I know a worker that saw it and said it was garbage and everyone I talked to is going to vote [against]," an undergrad told the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The university has tried to intimidate strikers. Two weeks ago, Temple administrators canceled striking

workers' health benefits, leaving many to pay exorbitant medical fees out of pocket. This was followed by the reckless decision to remove tuition remission for those on strike. That placed the entire cost of tuition on the backs of the low-paid workers, meaning many would no longer be eligible to enroll at the school or work at it.

The university has hired scabs and reassigned uncertified faculty to teach undergraduates while the strike has continued. In a lengthy post on social media, a Temple student said that the school's "greed is ruining my education."

The student said, "We haven't learned anything" in their Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences class after the striking instructor was replaced by a scab. Instead, students are "paying thousands of dollars" to take "small quizzes ... asking if I like statistics or not."

Temple University, in collaboration with writers at the Philadelphia *Inquirer*, sought to present the mere announcement of the TA on Friday night as meaning the automatic end of the strike, in a bid to confuse and demoralize grad students.

The *Inquirer* was so eager to present the strike as finished that the newspaper ran its article 10 minutes before the university even announced the tentative agreement. This provoked outrage from the graduates, who demanded the newspaper retract its claims.

In addition to the university and capitalist media, the American Federation of Teachers, which TUGSA is affiliated with, joined in the efforts to force the strike's ending even though no students had voted or even seen the offer.

"While the details are not yet available, it's clear that the pressure our union put on the University both at the

table and in public will result in a more favorable contract for TUGSA members,” declared AFT-Pennsylvania president Arthur G. Steinberg. “You helped win better pay for teaching and research assistants and to end this strike,” he added, absurdly.

Grad students have received no strike pay despite being at picket lines for nearly a month. The AFT, whose president Randi Weingarten is one of the highest paid labor bureaucrats in the world, making over \$425,000 a year, spent \$0 on strike pay benefits for its membership in the previous 12-month reporting period, according to the union’s most recent LM-2 filing.

This is despite the fact that TUGSA members pay a 1.65 percent membership fee for representation. A striking grad student informed the WSWWS that, while the union and the AFT were seemingly transparent about the voting process, such was not the case with how the organizations spent their money.

Instead, they have been receiving support through a crowdfunding service which has also sought to offset the cost of medical care.

Graduate students must vote “no” on any sellout deal. However, it is necessary to draw the sharpest conclusions about the TUGSA negotiation team’s willingness to present such a contemptible offer before the membership. It is not a “coy tactic” to rebuke Temple but a signal that they are seeking to end the strike as soon as possible in the hope that the workers will be weakened to the point of accepting a poverty-level offer.

Instead, Temple strikers must form their own independent rank-and-file organizations in order to expand the strike and appeal to workers throughout the campus. This includes the full-time professionals in the AFT-affiliated Temple University Association of Professional, who have been kept at work due to “no strike” clauses in their contracts.



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