

From a retired AFL-CIO bureaucrat to a “who’s who” of the Philadelphia financial elite

Who runs Temple University: A look at the university’s Board of Trustees

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For over a month, 750 Temple University graduate teaching assistants and research assistants have been on strike. They are demanding an increase from their average current rate of pay of \$19,500 a year to a base wage of \$32,800, affordable healthcare for their dependents, improved parental and bereavement leave, and improvements in work assignments and the amount of work.

Temple has responded ruthlessly to the strike. On February 8, just over a week into the walkout, the university announced an end to healthcare coverage and tuition waivers (costing about \$20,000 on an annual basis) for those on strike. The university also announced that tuition for the Spring semester would be due by March 8 for the strikers.

Temple’s graduate and research assistants, whose work is fundamental to the functioning of the university, are engaged not only in a struggle against Temple, but against the Democratic Party, which controls state and local politics, has heavy influence on Temple’s Board of Trustees, and has strong ties with the union which purportedly represents the striking workers.

Pennsylvania’s governor is Democrat Josh Shapiro, and the Democrats are the majority party in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. Philadelphia, where Temple is located, is overwhelmingly dominated by Democrats, from the mayor to a 14-3 majority on the city council.

The state has had a Democratic governor for 16 of the last 20 years. State funding for public higher education institutions such as Temple has declined by over 34 percent in the period 2007-2017, the fourth sharpest decline of any state, according to the Center on Budget Policies and Priorities. This has led to the state providing only 10 percent of all funding for Temple in 2019, down from 65 percent in 2011.

The university has been forced to offset these declines, delivered by the Democratic Party, by both gouging its students through cuts to education and hikes in tuition and service fee increases, and as the strike has shown, by impoverishing university workers.

Temple’s Board of Trustees has a strong Democratic Party presence, along with an assortment of wealthy individuals in banking, finance, communications, insurance and real estate. A few biographies of Board members will suffice to show the close ties of Temple’s leadership with the Democratic Party and the financial elite.

The trade union bureaucracy

Board member Patrick Eiding recently retired as President of the Philadelphia Council AFL-CIO, where he served as Philadelphia’s top labor bureaucrat from January 2002 until January 2023. Eiding was reappointed to the Board by then-Governor Tom Wolf, a Democrat, in 2020.

For years, Eiding served as the secretary-treasurer for the Philadelphia

Building & Construction Trades Council. Last November, John Dougherty, the top union official for the council, was sentenced for embezzling funds and workers’ dues money as well as having corrupt relations with city officials.

Eiding’s only public statement on the strike came one day after it was launched. According to *The Temple Times*, on February 1 Eiding stated at the end of a Board of Trustees meeting, “Do we see any end to this discussion? I had tried to find some help on both sides and wasn’t able to get anything back, but it’s kind of getting to a point where I think it’s not a good thing for Temple or for anybody else involved.” Of course, Eiding’s muted concerns haven’t caused him to utter a word in defense of the university workers.

As head of the city’s AFL-CIO council, Eiding hosted the misnamed “Workers’ Presidential Summit” in 2019, inviting all the Democratic contenders for US President to the event. Announcing the event, Eiding stated that “Pennsylvania’s working families will begin to decide who, as the Democratic nominee for President, is best suited to bring about the changes necessary to deliver more union jobs and greater equality to our state and to our nation.”

In 2019 while campaigning for president, Joe Biden issued a statement declaring that he “is as proud to call Patrick Eiding a friend as his campaign is to call Philadelphia home,” as part of his effort to promote state relations with the corrupt trade union apparatus and contain working class anger.

No part of the AFL, or the parent union of the striking graduate students, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), has offered any meaningful assistance to the struggle. The strike has been intentionally isolated, though it is crystal clear that a defeat of the graduate student workers will set the stage for new attacks on other sections of the university workforce, and on educators everywhere.

The Democratic Party operatives

The isolation of TUGSA by the AFL and the AFT is an expression of the total subordination of the unions to the Democratic Party—which is also abundantly represented on the Temple Board of Trustees.

Christine M. Tartaglione has been a Democratic state senator since 1995, serving as a delegate to the 2000 Democratic National Convention. She currently is a member of the Labor and Industry Committee in the Pennsylvania Senate, but has not seen fit to issue any statement on the strike.

On March 1 she tweeted, “We are fighting not just for healthcare equity, reproductive justice, and to end maternal mortality, but for all marginalized Pennsylvanians.” For Senator Tartaglione, “marginalized Pennsylvanians” do not include graduate teaching assistants scraping by

on \$19,000 a year, nor does “healthcare equity” include providing affordable dependent coverage for them.

John Street is the former Democratic mayor of Philadelphia, serving from 2000-2008. As mayor, Street played a leading role in the largest attack on public education in Philadelphia’s history, agreeing in 2001 to the full privatization of 60 of the city’s then-264 public schools.

Leonard Barrack served as the national finance chairman for the Democratic National Committee from 1998 to 2004. Barrack also has his own private foundation, the Barrack Foundation.

In 2015, the Foundation provided \$36,000 to the American Israel Education Fund, the non-profit affiliated with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). AIPAC is a right-wing lobbying organization which unreservedly supports Israel’s apartheid regime against the Palestinians and has enormous influence over Republican and Democratic politicians alike. In the same year, his foundation gave \$250,000 to American Friends of LIBI, which provides direct support to Israeli soldiers.

In 2015, Nelson Diaz ran unsuccessfully for the Democratic nomination for mayor of Philadelphia. Diaz has long-standing ties to the Democrats, dating to his time as a special assistant to Vice President Walter Mondale, in 1977. In 1993, Bill Clinton appointed him general counsel to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. Also, from 2001 to 2004 he worked for the aforementioned Mayor Street as Philadelphia’s solicitor.

Big business

Mitchell Morgan, chair of the Temple Board of Trustees, is the founder and CEO of Morgan Properties. According to the company website, it is the third largest multifamily property owner in the country, owning over 350 apartment communities and over 95,000 units in 19 states, with \$16 billion in assets. Temple’s Morgan Hall, a 1,250-bed, 27-story residence hall, is named after him.

Phillip Richards is the vice chair of Temple’s Board. He is also the executive chairman and founder of the affiliated companies that comprise North Star Resource Group, a finance company. According to the company web site, Richards’ company administers assets exceeding \$10 billion.

The vice chairman of the Temple Board’s Budget and Finance Committee is Citigroup executive Christopher McNichol. At Citigroup he heads the Mid-Atlantic Public Finance region and is a “primary coverage” banker for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the State of Maryland.

Citigroup played a major role in precipitating the 2008 financial crisis, which devastated the working class. After the banking giant’s stock price plummeted, it was provided with a \$45 billion bailout, the largest received by any single financial institution from the federal government that year.

Anthony McIntire founded a retail insurance brokerage firm in 2002 that was bought by another multinational insurance firm, Arthur J. Gallagher & Co, in 2013. McIntire remains an executive with the firm. In 2022, Gallagher reported over \$8 billion in revenue.

Joseph Coradino has been the CEO of PREIT since 2012, a real estate investment trust that owns and operates over 22 million square feet of retail space in the United States.

Bret Perkins is Senior Vice President of External and Government Affairs for Comcast Corporation. As of 2020, Comcast was the second largest internet provider in the US and third largest cable television provider. Perkins is also a member of the Board of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia and serves on the Board and Executive Committee of the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia.

Tamron Hall is an American broadcast journalist and television talk show host who has hosted her own syndicated daytime talk show since 2019. Before that she worked in various journalism roles at NBC and MSNBC. She hosted Hillary Clinton on her show on March 2. Presumably

they did not discuss the ongoing class struggle at Temple. Her show’s official Twitter account has not issued any statement on the ongoing strike.

The American Federation of Teachers

The striking workers are led by the Temple University Graduate Students Association (TUGSA) Local 6290, which is affiliated to the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). The AFT is de facto a faction of the Democratic Party. The AFT President, Randi Weingarten (annual compensation: \$487,953), is a member of the Democratic National Committee, the leadership body of the national Democratic Party.

Come election time, massive AFT resources, extracted from poorly paid teachers, are directed into electing Democratic officials. According to the latest LM-2 filing with the Department of Labor, the AFT spent \$35,762,365 on “political activities and lobbying” for the 12 month period July 1, 2021-June 30, 2022. Revealing their central role as strikebreakers, *the AFT did not spend a single penny on strike benefits during the same time period.*

When a major wave of teacher strikes broke out in 2018, Weingarten and other teacher union bureaucrats systematically worked to isolate and smother each strike, calling on teachers and their supporters to “remember in November” and vote for Democrats.

The AFT is playing the same strike-breaking role at Temple. While graduate students continue to strike, faculty in another AFT affiliate, the Temple Association of University Professionals, remain on the job.

TUGSA and the AFT, despite chanting demagogically that Philadelphia “is a union town,” have made no appeal to the broader working class in the city or Pennsylvania to join in the strike. Minor actions of solidarity, such as local Teamsters’ choice not to cross the picket line, have not fundamentally undermined Temple’s operations. Instead, the grad students’ association has invited a slew of Democratic Party politicians to visit the picket line, giving disingenuous pledges of “solidarity” as they plan the eventual sellout.

On February 17, TUGSA brought back a “tentative agreement” which addressed none of the workers’ demands. The agreement was rejected by 92 percent of those voting.

For its part, the AFT joined the chorus of capitalist institutions that tried to frame the TA as the end of the strike itself. The AFT’s state affiliate’s Twitter account wrote “Congratulations TUGSA on coming to a tentative agreement with Temple University and ending your strike!” Similarly, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) tweeted, “Outstanding news this Friday evening! Congratulations and solidarity forever!”

Conclusion: Build a rank-and-file committee to expand the struggle!

Graduate and research assistants at Temple must understand the class and political forces arrayed against them. They face powerful political and financial interests that run the university, linked closely to the Democratic Party, the AFL-CIO bureaucracy, and major corporate interests. These forces are fixated on seeing the graduate students isolated and defeated.

Graduate student workers are hindered in their struggle by a union that is tied to the Democratic Party, the same political party which exerts enormous influence on the Temple Board of Trustees and is one of the two main parties of American capitalism.

For the Temple strike to succeed, it is vital that the graduate and research assistants understand that their allies are not to be found in the political offices of the Democratic Party, but in the working class. Workers and undergraduate students have rallied to the graduate employees’ defense, but a further mobilization is required. Without this, the strike will be defeated.

To break out of the straitjacket imposed by the Democratic Party-aligned trade union apparatus, striking workers need to form a rank-and-file committee to broaden the struggle and bring the university to a full closure. Such a committee must reach out for common action to graduate workers and faculty at other institutions, who face the same conditions

and the same antagonists.

Only through such a rank-and-file committee will graduate and research assistants be able to make the broadest possible appeal to all sections of the working class, and overcome efforts by the AFT to isolate and shut down the strike.



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