

Temple University president resigns in the wake of graduate workers' strike

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On Tuesday, the Temple University board of trustees announced that it had accepted the resignation of college president Jason Wingard. The former Goldman Sachs official had only served two years of a planned five year term at the university.

Wingard has faced public backlash for his handling of the recently-concluded university workers' strike, which lasted nearly a month and a half. The grad workers, who are responsible for grading, lecturing and other essential tasks, struck for a living wage, family-dependent health care coverage, parental leave and more, only to face ruthless opposition from the university.

Temple reacted to the strikers' legitimate demands by cutting their health benefits as well as demanding they pay their tuition costs in retaliation for withholding labor.

The university's ruthless attacks on the striking workers, who had massive support from fellow workers and students, compounded the administration's difficulties, which have been increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the coming days, the Wingard administration was to face a "no confidence" vote from Temple's teaching faculty. A week ago, Wingard had received a negative approval rating of 92 percent among undergraduates, according to a poll taken by *Temple News*.

In addition, Temple is facing the contract expiration for over 3,000 university professors in October, which a severely discredited leadership may not feel it will be able to contain.

Board of trustees chair Mitchell Morgan stated that Wingard was being let go despite demonstrating "unwavering commitment" to the board of trustees' "strategy to enhance the value proposition, reputation, and external profile of the University." According to

Morgan, Temple's board of trustees would "designate a small group of senior Temple leaders to guide the university" while looking for a replacement.

This would apparently supplement plans which the board already had in place. Following the strike's conclusion, the board of trustees announced that Temple faced an "unprecedented confluence of serious challenges." The board stated it would be paying "more rigorous attention to urgent matters" such as "campus safety, enrollment, and 'university engagement and responsiveness,'" wrote the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

The university's enrollment has declined by 14 percent since 2019, with student deposits down by 25 percent since 2021.

In the days after the strike concluded, Wingard released a public statement promising to "pause" a number of the university's "initiatives" and instead focus on the "inextricably linked" issues of safety and enrollment.

This was not enough. The "strategy" that Wingard had worked so "unwaveringly" to impose had made him a justifiably hated figure among the school's impoverished workforce and student body. Despite having imposed the poverty-level contract on the graduate workers last month, the former banking official was deemed to be far too polarizing to continue the job.

"In talking with our board and talking with my leadership team, I recognized that all the attention and focus that was being placed on me, and it was getting hotter and hotter; it was disallowing us from being able to satisfy that strategy I mapped out," said Wingard this week in comments to the *New York Times*.

Notably, both Wingard and the board of trustees' statements emphasize the issue of "safety" and "violence" in the northern Philadelphia area as their

concern. This is in keeping with the university's tactic of promoting the police to denigrate and draw attention away from the justified concerns about living standards and pay which animated the grad worker strike.

In this vein, it is notable that one of Wingard's final acts as Temple University president was to secure a state-level grant for \$1.7 million to use for hiring and training school police.

At the time, Democratic state Senator Vincent Hughes presented the funding as an investment in "our communities and our young people," promising "more resources ... to the Temple University Police Department so that its officers are equipped."

Hughes, demonstrating the incestuous relationship that exists between the university and the Democratic Party, and in keeping with the latter's use of racial demagoguery, denounced the resignation of Wingard, who is African American. The Democratic official called the resignation of the trustees' corporate hatchet man a "chilling message" to black people "at the highest levels of our academic institutions."



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