

For a living wage and an end to bank bailouts and war!

Mobilize educators and workers to support striking University of Michigan graduate students!

Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
9 April 2023

The Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee calls on all educators and workers across the state to rally to the defense of the 1,300 striking graduate student workers at the University of Michigan. Our committee backs the graduate student workers' fight for a living wage to combat skyrocketing inflation. We urge mass picketing and the mobilization of the entire U-M campus, including the student body and all sections of workers on campus, to broaden this struggle as widely as possible.

The U-M graduate students' strike is the most significant strike presently taking place in Michigan and across the United States. It is part of a wave of working class struggles globally, including mass demonstrations in France and across Europe, as well as in Israel, India, South Africa, Bolivia and elsewhere.

But the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), with which the Graduate Employees' Organization (GEO) is affiliated, has done nothing to raise awareness about the U-M strike among the union's 1.7 million members across the US. The same can be said for the AFT-Michigan, which has kept its 35,000 members in the dark since the strike began on March 28.

The graduate students have courageously fought against a ruthless university administration, headed by multimillionaire President Santa Ono. In doing so, they have defied the state's reactionary 1947 state law banning strikes by public employees.

As educators across Michigan, we confront this same anti-strike law, as contracts are expiring this year in dozens of AFT-affiliated districts across the state. But the AFT refuses to mobilize support from any other

locals in the state, including on the U-M campus itself! The Lecturers' Employee Organization (LEO) and United Physician Assistants of Michigan Medicine (UPAMM) have been kept on the job throughout the GEO strike, despite facing the same poverty wages and horrendous working conditions.

Our committee, formed during the fall 2020 semester when educators across the US were forced to return to unsafe school buildings at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, is determined to break through the union-imposed isolation of the U-M strike. We have joined your picket lines and informed our coworkers of your struggle and will continue to do so.

The strike is now at a turning point, with Washtenaw County Circuit Court Judge Carol Kuhnke deciding Monday whether or not to issue an injunction demanded by the university. Regardless of the outcome of the trial, the GEO leadership has made clear its intention to wind down the strike as quickly as possible.

To prevent any betrayal by the AFT-GEO leadership, it is critical that striking graduate students understand the political forces arrayed against you and make the decision to form a rank-and-file strike committee aimed at broadening your struggle as widely as possible.

Above all, this strike represents a direct confrontation with the Democratic Party and its demands that workers sacrifice everything to fund gargantuan military spending. Last month, the Biden administration requested an unprecedented \$1 trillion military budget to expand the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and prepare for war with

China.

The university's refusal to pay grad students a living wage reflects the position of the Biden administration and the capitalist class as a whole, whose policy of "fighting inflation" means lowering wages, destroying jobs, and preparing for World War III. *Trillions of dollars* are made available to fund the war machine and bail out failing banks, while there is nothing but austerity for the working class.

The AFT is dominated by a bureaucratic apparatus which functions as a caucus of the Democratic Party. Randi Weingarten, the AFT's multi-millionaire president, sits on the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and gives stump speeches for Democrats across the US. She is a rabid war hawk and was the first union official to fly to Kiev on behalf of the State Department-affiliated Education International to back the US-NATO war against Russia.

During elections, the teachers' unions, along with the rest of the AFL-CIO, send tens of millions of dollars of members' union dues to the Democratic Party, a capitalist party no less than the Republicans.

But the Democrats are responsible for the very conditions driving graduate workers into struggle. The bitter fruit of their policies are visible everywhere. Crisis now grips the entire American educational system after three years of mass infection with COVID-19, which has killed thousands of educators and over 2,000 children, and left masses struggling with Long COVID.

Every strike movement of educators that has erupted in the past decade—including the teachers' revolts in West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona in 2018, as well as subsequent strikes in Los Angeles, Oakland, Seattle, Chicago and across the US—was diverted, defanged, and buried by the AFT and the National Education Association (NEA).

Throughout the pandemic, the AFT and NEA have played the central role in stifling educators' struggles and facilitating the homicidal school reopening policy, including during the September 2020 U-M graduate students' strike and in all of the districts where our committee members work.

During the current U-M graduate students' strike, the AFT has not provided a penny in strike pay, despite having at least \$6 million in their "defense" fund. Instead, they offer merely to pay the interest on loans

that the union is encouraging members to take out, saddling them with even greater debt.

Much of the GEO leadership is affiliated with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), a faction of the Democratic Party, and therefore seeks to suppress these fundamental political issues. While posturing as radical, the GEO leaders in fact seek to climb the union career ladder to attain higher-paying positions in the apparatus.

For this strike to be successful, graduate student workers need to form an independent rank-and-file strike committee, to link up with other workers through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). This global network of rank-and-file committees fights to unite educators, autoworkers and other sections of workers internationally. To take up this fight, we urge you to contact the Michigan Rank-and-File Safety Committee at wsws.org/edsafety.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact