

Questions that must be posed at tonight's GEO membership meeting

International Youth and Students for Social Equality at U-M
19 April 2023

The IYSSE at U-M distributed the following statement at a GEO general membership meeting Wednesday night.

The strike by 1,300 graduate student workers at the University of Michigan (U-M) has reached a critical stage. Either rank-and-file workers initiate a rebellion against the bureaucrats of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and aspiring bureaucrats of the Graduate Employees' Organization (GEO), and fight for the broadest mobilization of support behind the strike, or the union leadership will betray the strike in the days ahead.

Last Friday, without any democratic discussion or explanation to the full membership, the bargaining committee, comprised of officials in the GEO and AFT, formally abandoned the strikers' core demand for a 60 percent wage increase. Instead, they offered the university a vague proposal for a "summer bonus," while the first year's wage increase would instead amount to "\$X." Bargaining chair Evelyn Smith cynically stated that this variable would allow the union to "haggle over numbers," opening the door to accepting any number under 60 percent.

There is also the very real possibility—again, never seriously discussed with the full membership—that the strike could be declared illegal, with striking workers subject to discipline or even firing from the vindictive university. On Monday, state administrative law judge David Peltz of the Michigan Office of Administrative Hearings & Rules ruled that the U-M strike violates the union's contract with the university. The case will now be decided by the Michigan Employment Relations Commission (MERC), an arm of the Democrat-led state government.

What took place last weekend to squash the powerful strike by 9,000 academic workers at Rutgers University

must be taken as a warning to the striking graduate students at U-M. Late Friday evening, AFT-backed and Democratic Party-aligned union leaders abruptly shut down the Rutgers strike and ordered rank-and-file workers to return to class on Monday before even reaching a tentative agreement, with no discussion or vote by the membership.

Such a betrayal cannot be allowed to happen at U-M. The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at U-M, a socialist student and youth group on campus, urges rank-and-file strikers to pose and demand answers to the following questions to GEO leadership at tonight's all-membership meeting:

- Why have you dropped the 60 percent demand and the fight for a living wage of \$38,000 per year?
- What are the concrete details of the so-called "summer bonus"?
- Assuming the university accepts this proposal, would all GEO members get the full increase rolled into their base wage?
- Why has there been no internal warning or official explanation given to the membership regarding Monday's state court ruling?
- Why has the AFT done nothing to mobilize support for our strike, including calling a sympathy strike by our AFT-affiliated colleagues in LEO and at Michigan Medicine?
- Why does the AFT refuse to provide us with strike pay from its vast assets?
- What is your strategy to win the strike?

Rank-and-file GEO members, you have a right to thorough answers to all of these questions. But there should be no illusions that the GEO-AFT leadership will provide sufficient answers or wage a real fight to secure your demands.

At this point of the strike, and in the aftermath of the

blatant betrayal at Rutgers, it is now abundantly clear that the conduct of future negotiations must be taken out of the hands of the GEO-AFT union officials and placed into the hands of the rank and file.

It is critical that the looming betrayal be prevented and the unnecessary isolation of the U-M strike ended. All sections of the campus must be mobilized behind the strike, including faculty, undergraduate students, university staff, hospital staff at Michigan Medicine and others. A powerful call must be issued to the broader working class, in particular autoworkers of Detroit, to join the struggle and shut down the university.

Your strike must be linked up with academic workers, educators and other sections of the working class entering into struggle in Michigan, across the US and internationally. From the beginning of your strike, the IYSSE and *World Socialist Web Site* have advocated for this broadening of the strike, which requires the formation of a rank-and-file strike committee wholly independent of the union bureaucracies that are tied to the Democratic Party.

Such a rank-and-file committee would fight to take up these and other demands:

- **For 60 percent wage increases and more!** The fight for a living wage amid skyrocketing inflation has immense support within the student body and with workers everywhere. To the extent that this popular support is rallied, even greater wage increases and benefits can be secured for all workers.

- **Provide full strike pay to GEO members to sustain the strike!** The AFT bureaucracy, which has millions of dollars worth of assets, is seeking to starve out workers on the picket lines. We demand full strike pay for the duration of the strike.

- **Mobilize the student body and campus workforce to spread the strike!** This is the most paramount issue. As long as your strike is isolated, the university and state Democrats will have the upper hand.

Fundamentally, the success of the U-M strike will be determined by the extent to which rank-and-file workers develop a correct political understanding of the forces arrayed against you. This is not just a fight against a ruthless university, but the imperialist Democratic Party which controls the Board of Regents, the court system and the union bureaucracies. All

official parties in this struggle are in fact the enemies of rank-and-file workers.

AFT President Randi Weingarten, who is undoubtedly closely following the U-M strike while maintaining radio silence, is a multimillionaire warmonger who has sold out every educators' strike she could since taking her position in 2008.

The demands and interests of rank-and-file academic workers, on the one side, run completely counter to a network of hostile forces aligned with the Democratic Party and the rich, on the other side. The Democrats are waging an unrelenting attack on workers' conditions everywhere and are escalating the danger of world war with Russia and China with every passing day.

The IYSSE will lend full support to any rank-and-file U-M grad students who wish to form a strike committee and take up a serious struggle over these issues. We urge you to fill out the form below (or scan the QR code on the leaflet) and contact us today to take up this fight.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)