

# Build a rank-and-file committee to continue the Rutgers strike!

International Youth and Students for Social Equality  
20 April 2023

Last week, 9,000 professors, graduate students, adjuncts, researchers and clinicians at Rutgers University in New Jersey began a powerful strike for better pay, job security, health care and other basic needs. In launching the strike, Rutgers workers demonstrated their immense courage and determination to jointly fight against increasingly unlivable circumstances.

But before dawn on Saturday, the three unions to which the workers belong announced that they had agreed to suspend the strike without having even reached tentative agreements on new contracts, effectively strikebreaking against their own members. At an online meeting last Saturday, union leaders admitted that the most critical issues for workers remain unresolved, and the biomedical faculty's demands had not been negotiated at all. Nevertheless, the union leaders ordered all their members back to work on Monday without any democratic consultation.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) calls on Rutgers workers to form a rank-and-file strike committee to stop this massive betrayal by the unions, and instead continue and broaden the strike until your demands are met. By building such a committee, you can take leadership of the struggle out of the hands of the union bureaucracies which have proven themselves hostile to your interests. We propose that this committee be formed based on these demands:

- **For a continuation and broadening of the strike!** The Rutgers strike must continue until workers achieve their demands, and it must be expanded across the state and the country. What is politically convenient for the union bureaucrats or for Governor Murphy is of no concern to the workers. The latter alone must determine how long the fight continues.

- **For massive pay increases!** Rutgers must provide pay increases that are more than double what the unions negotiated. President Jonathan Holloway accrued \$1.2 million in his first year at Rutgers, while graduate student workers earn less than \$33,000, far below a living wage in New Jersey. Workers need pay increases that enable them to afford adequate housing, food and child care. They must receive raises that beat inflation.

- **Full strike pay for the duration of the struggle!** The AFT is sitting on millions of dollars in assets derived from workers' dues, while starving out workers on the picket lines. This money must be controlled by workers themselves, to sustain their struggle as long as necessary.

For Rutgers workers to wage their struggle successfully, they must know their enemies and their allies.

Contrary to the claims of the Democratic Party and the union officials themselves, the union bureaucracy does not represent the interests of rank-and-file workers. Like other unions, the American Federation of Teachers is headed by a layer of wealthy union officials who garner hundreds of thousands of dollars each year, chief among them AFT president and multimillionaire Randi Weingarten. As a member of the Democratic National Committee, Weingarten embodies the nexus between the union bureaucracy, the Democratic Party and the American state.

Over the last three years, the AFT leadership has worked hand-in-glove with the Biden administration to prematurely reopen K-12 schools and universities at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has led to the deaths of thousands of educators and students. Tens of thousands more are suffering from Long COVID. Over the past year, Weingarten has played a prominent role in beating the war drums for the US proxy war against

Russia in Ukraine.

At Rutgers, the Democratic Party has been centrally involved in negotiations from the very beginning, working together with union leaders to shut down the strike as quickly as possible. Even before the strike, New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy was involved in negotiations for months. Then, when the strike began, he had almost non-stop back-room meetings with union leaders and Rutgers officials, during which plans were drawn up for the suspension of the strike.

In return, union leaders heaped praise on the Democrats. Several union officials, including Rebecca Givan, president of Rutgers American Association of University Professors-AFT (AAUP-AFT), president of the Rutgers Adjunct Faculty Union (PTLFC-AAUP-AFT) Amy Higer and Donna Murch, president of the New Brunswick chapter of AAUP-AFT, applauded Governor Murphy effusively for his intervention in the strike.

Givan stated, “We would not have gotten here without our members’ commitment and the support of our governor.” Higer said that she “deeply appreciated” the efforts of the governor and his staff.

Despite its pretensions, the Democratic Party is no friend of working people. It is one of the two political parties of the American ruling class, a party of Wall Street and war. The Biden administration has overseen the strangling of workers’ struggles in several major industries, including directly intervening to ban a national strike by over 100,000 railroad workers at the end of last year. Biden and the Democrats are currently spearheading the reckless escalation of the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, and the drive to war with nuclear-armed China.

The war aims of American imperialism lie at the heart of the Democrats’ direct intervention in the strike by 9,000 academic workers at Rutgers. The escalation of war abroad, for which Biden has requested an unprecedented \$1 trillion military budget, requires that all of society’s resources be diverted toward war and away from social spending such as public education. Moreover, in order to wage war abroad, the ruling class needs to suppress domestic opposition at home.

As was the case with the rail workers and West Coast dock workers, the Democratic Party fear above all that the strike of Rutgers workers could spark a broader struggle of the working class.

This is exactly what workers at Rutgers must fight to do. Rutgers workers cannot win their battle for higher pay, job security, adequate benefits and safe working conditions alone! The strike must break out of the isolation imposed upon it by the unions and the Democratic Party, and turn to the working class in New Jersey, New York and beyond.

Presently, 1,300 graduate students are continuing their strike at the University of Michigan. A rank-and-file committee at Rutgers would immediately work to link up these two struggles, as well as with the fight of educators, transit and auto workers throughout the surrounding regions.

Across the US and internationally, the class struggle is erupting to the surface with explosive force to reverse the massive decline in living standards and abysmal working conditions that now exist everywhere. Workers in country after country are entering into mass struggles with revolutionary potential, including in France, Portugal, Israel, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States and beyond.

These are the allies of Rutgers workers, not union bureaucrats or Wall Street politicians. It is this political perspective and program that must guide Rutgers workers in their struggle. On April 30, the IYSSE, the student and youth wing of the world Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International, is co-sponsoring the 2023 International May Day Online Rally, alongside the IWA-RFC and the World Socialist Web Site. We urge striking academic workers, students and youth to attend this rally and build for it as widely as possible.



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