Stop the strikebreaking against U-M grad student instructors! Mobilize the students! Build a rank-and-file strike committee!

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We want to hear from you: Fill out the form at the end of this article to tell us what you think about the grad student workers' strike, the strikebreaking threats of the university, and the conditions facing students and campus workers.

The strike by 1,300 graduate student instructors (GSIs) at the University of Michigan (U-M), now entering its fifth week, is in serious danger.

The poverty-level wages of the GSIs, averaging $24,000 per year, are being further eroded by soaring inflation. But the university remains intransigent in its hostility to the needs and demands of the GSIs and their families. The workers struck on the demand for a 60 percent wage increase to bring their annual salary to a minimum living wage of $38,000.

Over the weekend, the university issued a thuggish press release amounting to a threat to declare an impasse in contract talks and impose its final (and original) offer for a pay hike of 11.5 percent over three years, well below the inflation rate.

The press release was accompanied by a statement from the university Board of Regents attacking picketers as "unruly" and "dangerous."

This is under conditions where classes have ended and final exams will be over by the end of this week. The university calculates that once the bulk of students have left for the summer, the leverage of the striking workers will evaporate and, since the administration has stopped their pay, they will be forced to end the strike on management's terms.

In this, they rely on the treachery of the GSI's parent union, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the leadership of the AFT's local affiliate, the Graduate Employees' Organization (GEO). The GEO and AFT are deliberately isolating the grad students, refusing to mobilize the widespread but latent mass support for the strike that exists among faculty, campus staff, students and health care workers at the university's hospital.

The conditions exist to link up the GSI struggle with mass working class struggles developing across the US and internationally in opposition to the US/NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, the diversion of trillions into military spending, the channeling of trillions more into bank bailouts, the ongoing toll in death and disability from COVID, and the drive by governments to make workers and youth pay the cost of this crisis through brutal social cuts and authoritarian forms of rule.

The main obstacle is the trade union bureaucracies and their fake "left" allies in organizations such as the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which holds a dominant position in the leadership of the GEO.

Just last week, the AFT ended five strikes that erupted after the U-M strike began on March 29, involving over 11,000 AFT academic workers in Illinois and New Jersey. All of them were ended without a vote by the membership. The union has not even obtained a tentative contract in the Rutgers strike, involving 9,000 academic workers. The GEO leadership at U-M has not issued a peep of opposition to this back-stabbing betrayal by the AFT.

The potential for expanding the U-M strike and defeating the university's strikebreaking efforts was demonstrated Monday when faculty members issued an online open letter denouncing the U-M administration's tactics, including efforts to force professors to carry out the work of GSIs during final exams, and supporting the strikers' demand for a living wage. Within the first day of the appearance of the letter, more than 1,200 faculty, staff and students had signed it.

On April 20, construction workers on campus honored a picket line set up for a few hours by GEO members, and Masters students stopped grading exams when they learned they were being used as scabs against the GSIs. Many History Department faculty are withholding grades until May 12 in solidarity with the strikers.

But the response of the AFT-GEO leaders is to publicly proclaim their readiness to water down their compensation demands in an attempt to accommodate the university.

On April 21, the GEO leadership announced on its Twitter page that it had submitted a third "substantially restructured compensation proposal" to the university negotiators, which offered "considerable cost savings to U-M relative to our previous proposal."

The GEO added that it had "bent over backwards" to accommodate the university, while inexplicably claiming its new offer would ensure that "grads in our bargaining unit earn a living wage." In bargaining notes the leadership posted on the GEO website, the negotiating team claimed its new offer would save the university $12 million over its initial compensation proposal.

While the university has cut off the pay of striking GSIs, the AFT/GEO refuses to provide strike pay. The AFT has net assets of $55 million according to the latest union filing with the US Labor Department. President Randi Weingarten's salary is listed as $426,000, and the combined salaries of the top four national officers is well over $1 million. These bureaucrats live large off the dues of rank-and-file members who are unable to meet their daily expenses.

On April 13, the GEO suddenly introduced a new "supposal" offer that replaced the 60 percent wage increase with a seven percent

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increase in the first year and cost-of-living increases in the second and third years. GEO leaders proposed that the university provide a "summer bonus," modeled after fellowships for some grad students, that would supposedly bring their total pay up to $36,000 per year, already short of the original demand for $38,000. How this would work has never been explained to the membership, and the university has steadfastly rejected any kind of summer bonus.

Four days later, a Michigan administrative law judge ruled in favor of a U-M unfair labor practice filing, declaring the March 29 strike to be illegal. The decision is to be reviewed by the Michigan Employment Relations Commission (MERC) on April 28. Under the contract negotiated by the GEO following the calling off of the strike in 2020, workers who violate a no-strike clause accepted by the union are subject to discipline and even firing by the university.

At an April 19 membership meeting, the GEO said virtually nothing about its revamped compensation proposal and its abandonment of the demand for a 60 percent wage increase. It brushed aside as supposedly irrelevant the threatening ruling by the administrative judge. Most of the discussion was on access to the union's "hardship fund," which consists mainly of loans to desperate strikers that must be repaid. When a question was raised on the fate of the strike after the end of the term, GEO leaders cited the supposed "victories" won by strikers at Columbia University and the University of California who remained on strike after classes had ended. This was a lie. Those struggles were sold out by the union leaderships with none of the workers' demands having been met.

A radical change in course is urgently needed, and this requires that the rank-and-file strikers take the conduct of the strike into their own hands by establishing a rank-and-file strike committee.

The strike at U-M is part of a growing international upsurge of the class struggle. It cannot be seen as simply a sectional, trade union struggle. What is fueling both the drive of US imperialism and its NATO accomplices toward World War III and mass working class struggles, such as the ongoing strike movement in France against Macron's dictatorial imposition of pension cuts, is an unprecedented economic, social and geopolitical crisis of the capitalist system.

In all of these struggles, the capitalist governments and parties come forward more and more directly as instruments of the corporations and banks to put down working class resistance, increasingly with the aid of police and military violence. The US is no different.

In December, the Biden administration, with bipartisan support from both parties in Congress, signed a bill banning a strike by 110,000 rail workers and imposing a contract that had been voted down by rail workers. The role of the trade union bureaucracies all over the world is to block the independent political mobilization of the working class against the government and the capitalist system it upholds. They are given critical assistance by pseudo-left organizations such as the Democratic Socialists of America, most of whose Democratic members in Congress voted for the strike ban on the rail workers.

In the GSI strike at U-M, the DSA is working with the AFT bureaucracy and the Democratic Party to do the same. Randi Weingarten, a virulent supporter of the US war against Russia in Ukraine, is a member of the Democratic National Committee. The Democratic Party, which controls all of the levers of political power in Michigan, is behind the university's strikebreaking. The majority of regents are Democratic appointees, as are the members of MERC. This is being concealed by the GEO leadership.

Despite broad support for solidarity action, the leaders of the AFT-affiliated locals at U-M, such as the Lecturers' Employee Organization and AFT locals at the university health care system, are doing nothing to mobilize their members behind the GEO strikers, with the tacit support of the GEO/DSA leaders.

The International Youth and Students (IYSSE) at U-M is calling for students to join with the strikers to defeat the government strikebreaking and calling for the entire workforce to mobilize in support of the GSIs' demand for a living wage.

The building of a rank-and-file strike committee at U-M, joining similar committees being established among autoworkers, health care workers, educators and others across the US, as well as in Canada, France, Germany, the UK, Australia, Sri Lanka and other countries, as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, is a critical step in the fight against austerity and war.

We propose that rank-and-file workers demand:

- Stop the strikebreaking! Shut down the campus until the strikers' demands are met!
- Extend the strike to other sections of workers across Michigan, the US and internationally!
- Full strike pay! AFT officials paid no more than the GSI strikers!
- No retreat from the demand for a 60 percent wage increase!

Workers are moving into rebellion against the pro-capitalist union bureaucracies. This must be combined with a socialist and internationalist political perspective.

This coming Sunday, April 30, the International Committee of the Fourth International, the International Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality and the *World Socialist Web Site* are holding a global online meeting to celebrate May Day, the international day of working class solidarity. It will feature speakers from around the world, including Russia and Ukraine, advancing the socialist program of uniting all workers against war and the capitalist system that produces it.

We urge all GSI strikers, U-M faculty and staff, Michigan Medicine workers and U-M students to register and take part in the rally this weekend.

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