

Reject GEO/AFT push to impose U-M contract ultimatum! Mobilize campus workers, students, teachers against strikebreaking and poverty wages!

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Attend an online meeting on Monday, August 14, at 7:00 p.m. (EST) to unite the struggles of University of Michigan graduate students, Detroit teachers, workers and parents to oppose the assault on wages, living conditions and education. The meeting is hosted by the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Committee and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality at UM and Wayne State University. Register here.

The leadership of the University of Michigan Graduate Employees Organization (GEO), an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), is moving to force through a vote to accept a sellout contract and end the five-month strike by 1,300 graduate student instructors (GSIs) and graduate student staff assistants (GSSAs).

The union has called for a vote at an online membership meeting Thursday evening on either the university's current offer of a 12.5 percent wage increase over three years or an as yet undisclosed GEO counterproposal, likely based on a new offer the university announced on August 2 and then retracted two days later, which would increase wages by 20 percent.

Neither proposal begins to meet the urgent needs of the grad student workers, who currently make a poverty wage of \$24,000 a year and lack adequate child care or healthcare benefits, or any protection against resurgent COVID-19 infections. Even the marginally improved wage increase in the now-retracted offer would mean a further de facto decline in real wages, given the devastating impact of inflation over the past two years and the ongoing surge in the price of basic staple

goods.

Moreover, the university has withheld the workers' pay during the strike, costing them more than \$2,000. U-M offered an insulting contract ratification "bonus" of \$1,000 in last week's revised proposal, less than half of the cut imposed in retaliation for the strike.

Any contract vote on Thursday will have the character of an ultimatum in the midst of a vicious strikebreaking drive by the university. On Monday, U-M Provost Laurie McCauley sent an email to all GSIs and GSSAs demanding that they end their strike before the August 28 start of the fall term or be terminated and replaced by strikebreakers.

This brutal threat reflects the fear within the Democratic Party government of Michigan, the Biden administration and the ruling class as a whole of an explosion of strikes in the coming days in response to inflation, speedup, austerity and the ever more naked plundering of society by the corporate aristocracy. This is under conditions of an escalating war against Russia in Ukraine, the attempt to make the working class pay for its cost through social cuts, including education, and an unprecedented political crisis and breakdown of the US political system.

Educators in Detroit are working under an extended contract and looking to strike when school reopens; tens of thousands of actors and writers remain on strike against the drive to turn them into "gig" workers; the union apparatus is seeking to ram through sellout contracts on West Coast dockworkers and 340,000 UPS workers across the country; and next month contracts will expire for more than 170,000 Big Three auto

workers in both the US and Canada.

The GEO is politically dominated by the pseudo-left Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which is a faction of the imperialist Democratic Party and trade union bureaucracy. The GEO leadership has systematically worked to isolate the strikers and refused to mobilize the powerful support that exists for their struggle among other campus workers, including AFT members, students, educators and industrial workers. The GEO long ago dropped its initial demand for a 60 percent wage increase and promoted the state-controlled “fact-finding” process, through which the university and the government prepared to impose a rotten contract. It shut down all picketing and other serious strike activity at the end of the winter/spring term in May.

Just last weekend, at its convention in Chicago, the DSA delegates voted overwhelmingly to remain a faction of the Democratic Party and promote its candidates in the 2024 elections. The GEO leadership has systematically done the bidding of its parent union, the AFT, whose President Randi Weingarten sits on the Democratic National Committee. Without any criticism from the GEO, the AFT has closed down a series of campus workers’ strikes and imposed sellout contracts. It gives tens of millions of dollars to Democratic candidates but refuses to give the striking grad students a penny in strike pay.

The response of the GEO leadership to the threats and provocations by the university has been the opposite of mobilizing workers and students to oppose the threat of mass firings and reaching out to other workers to expand the strike. It has instead praised last week’s retracted contract offer and pledged to work to end the strike before classes resume in two-and-a-half weeks.

The *Detroit News* on Wednesday quoted GEO spokesman Amir Fleishmann, a DSA member, as saying: “We also see that with this latest offer that we are much closer to a deal. The university knows that a strike in the fall is going to be extremely disruptive. ... I am optimistic we will reach a deal before then.”

GEO President Jared Eno sent an email to the U-M Board of Regents saying the union would hold a vote on whether to ratify the university’s offer at the August 10 membership meeting. Calling for further bargaining sessions to “clarify” the university’s offer—the full text of which has not been made available to the rank-and-

file—he wrote: “We understand that time is of the essence; our collective view is that this timeline best balances our commitment to democratic process with the need to move expeditiously.”

For its part, the university has reiterated its demand for total surrender and an end to the strike, or else!

The *Detroit News* reported that Provost McCauley has demanded that all instructors submit their syllabuses, teach scheduled classes, grade student work and submit grades on time, and complete weekly forms detailing how they have completed their “duties.”

“Those not fulfilling their job duties will not receive their stipend for any period during which they are not completing their duties,” McCauley wrote.

University spokeswoman Kim Broekhuizen said: “The Office of the Provost continues to work closely with the deans at each of our schools and colleges to confirm contingency instructional staffing plans that work for each of their academic communities.”

The grad student instructors have waged a courageous struggle and can defeat the strikebreaking of the university and its corporate and government backers. This requires the development of a rank-and-file committee independent of the AFT apparatus and its agents in the GEO leadership. Such a committee will formulate the non-negotiable demands of striking workers—including a 60 percent wage increase—and make an urgent appeal for the broadest possible support from the working class.

The first step is to vote down the sellout contract proposals that will likely be put before the membership meeting Thursday evening. But that by itself is not sufficient. The conduct of the strike must be taken out of the hands of the GEO/AFT apparatus and placed in the hands of the rank-and-file through its own committee, and rank-and-file control established going forward.

For information of forming a rank-and-file committee at U-M, fill out the form below.



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