

University of Michigan IYSSE members call for workers, students to defend grad student strikers against administration threats

Our reporter
10 August 2023

Attend an online meeting on Monday, August 14, at 7 p.m. EDT 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 U-M and Wayne State University. Register here.

On Monday, the University of Michigan released a letter to graduate student instructors (GSIs) and graduate student staff assistants (GSSAs) in the Graduate Employees Organization (GEO), who have been on strike since late March, threatening to fire and replace any grad student workers who fail to return to work by the beginning of the fall semester on August 28.

The statement demanded that the striking grad students, whose average pay is currently at the poverty level of \$24,000, accept the university's contract offer, which fails to increase their real wages or address their need for childcare and healthcare improvements as well as protection from the ongoing COVID pandemic.

The leadership of the GEO, an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), is politically dominated by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), a pseudo-left faction of the Democratic Party. In alliance with the AFT bureaucracy, it is seeking to push through a sellout contract based on the university's offer, using the threat of mass firings and its own refusal to mobilize the strong support for the grad students that exists among AFT campus workers, students and workers more broadly to overcome the resistance of the grad student strikers.

In response to these developments, members of the

International Youth and Students for Social Equality club at U-M have issued statements defending the grad student workers and calling for workers and students to mobilize against the university's strikebreaking.

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Statement in support of striking grad student instructors by Dylan, the president of the University of Michigan IYSSE:

As the president of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) and an undergraduate student at the University of Michigan, I would like to address the ongoing strike by the Graduate Employees Organization (GEO) and advocate for the establishment of rank-and-file committees among our dedicated graduate student instructors, who keep our university running as we know it.

First and foremost, I would like to express my solidarity with the GEO members who have taken a brave and principled stand in their pursuit of fair wages, improved working conditions and a stronger voice in the decision-making processes that directly affect their lives and the quality of education at our university. The commitment and passion displayed by the GEO members are a testament to their dedication to the values of justice, equality and academic excellence.

In this crucial moment, I urge the administration and the university leadership to recognize the legitimacy of the demands put forth by the GEO. Graduate student instructors

are an integral and invaluable part of our academic community, contributing significantly to the learning experience of countless undergraduate students like myself. It is only just that they are provided with the support and respect they deserve.

Furthermore, I strongly advocate for the establishment of rank-and-file committees among graduate student instructors. These committees will empower our educators to actively participate in shaping the policies that impact their lives and the education they provide. Every member of our academic community, regardless of their role, should have a say in matters that affect them directly. By creating a platform for genuine representation, we can collectively work towards a university that values the contributions of all its members and strives for the highest standards of education and well-being.

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Statement in support of striking grad student instructors by University of Michigan IYSSE member Mazin:

As an undergraduate at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, I stand in support of the graduate students, who have played and will continue to play a critical role in my education and the education of thousands of students every year.

Amidst the war in Ukraine, the commitment of the university leadership to maintain poverty wages for graduate student instructors represents an important action in the broader movement of the ruling class to damage the education system in favor of a drive towards militarization and overseas bloodshed.

Moreover, the refusal to properly compensate employees at the Flint and Dearborn campuses further cements the deep wealth disparities that prevent the flourishing and rebuilding of Michigan's local communities.

As the GEO union has time and time again

attempted to sell out the graduate students in favor of maintaining the status quo, we at the IYSSE on the University of Michigan's campus strongly encourage the GSIs to take action and form a rank-and-file committee that exercises direct democratic decision-making and oversees all contract negotiations.

We are all implicated in this struggle, as quality education lays the foundation for the legitimate socialization of democracy and abolition of class inequality.

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Statement in support of striking grad student instructors by University of Michigan IYSSE member Gabe:

When the GSIs started their strike during the winter-spring term, I was hopeful that their efforts would significantly improve the compensation for their work. But as the strike progressed, it became evident that their efforts were losing steam as both the U of M administration and the GEO bureaucracy acted as forces against the success of their strike.

What is particularly concerning is the U of M administration's willingness to terminate GSIs and replace them, rather than give the existing ones better pay. To me, it seems imperative that GSIs keep an open mind toward forming independent rank-and-file committees. Doing so should give striking GSIs another avenue to advocate for themselves and improve the chances that they achieve their demands.

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



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact