

"We need to get new leaders who actually work on campus and are a part of the working class."

University of Minnesota service workers continue strike despite University and police intimidation

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On Wednesday, University of Minnesota (UMN) police, along with Hennepin County deputies, detained and handcuffed 12 striking UMN workers outside Pioneer Hall, citing them for "gross-misdemeanor interference with public property."

During the incident, police officers became violent with striking service workers, shoving one elderly worker to the ground. Officers also blocked public sidewalks with barricades to prevent protesters—including both striking UMN service workers and students who had joined them—from passing through.

Teamsters Local 320, of which the striking workers are members, responded the same day by filing an unfair labor practice (ULP) charge, calling it an act of "coordinated intimidation."

The striking UMN service workers are engaged in their first system-wide strike since the 1970s. The strike follows the overwhelming 82 percent rejection of the University's "last, best, and final" offer, which included raises of just 2 to 3 percent and a \$1,000 bonus—an offer that effectively cuts real wages. Meanwhile, the UMN administration has already spent more than one million dollars on out-of-state scabs while sitting on a \$6.1 billion endowment.

The escalation by the University and the state is a clear violation of democratic rights. It reflects growing concerns within the ruling class over the prospect of working-class opposition spreading among university students and developing into a struggle that will ultimately confront the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party (the local Democratic Party in Minnesota) and the capitalist system itself.

These attacks occurred after UMN service workers had been on strike for just over a day, with the strike continuing into the end of the week. The striking UMN workers are part

of a broader resurgence of working-class opposition to extreme social inequality and declining living conditions.

The escalation by the University and the state also comes amid a broader attack on democratic rights. Just this month, the U.S. Supreme Court decided a landmark case, *Homeland Security v. López*, granting federal officers immunity for racial profiling. This legal cover for discrimination, originally intended for ICE raids, is now being used to menace immigrant campus workers.

Notably, UMN Regents have remained silent on both the ongoing raids and the court ruling. Ominously, a recent University HR memo reminded staff of their "federal compliance obligations." In other words, the official position of the Regents is that workers must comply with the demands of the Trump administration.

Despite this, a University of Minnesota press release absurdly claimed that picketers "threatened to report replacement workers to ICE" and blocked medical-center deliveries.

The Teamsters responded, noting in their Local 320 reply that their workforce is majority immigrant and that no evidence was produced for these claims. They called the University's press release a classic "divide-and-rule" tactic.

The WSWS spoke with striking UMN workers about the conditions they face. One striker, who has worked at the University for over two years, said: "The University, being a state institution, brought in their thugs—the police force and the county sheriffs. They were trying to push us around so we would be intimidated and not have a voice. It's wrong. The whole point of collective bargaining is that we should be able to voice what we feel we deserve."

"Our members were 'detained.' They put barricades surrounding a bunch of our strikers and told them, 'you're

not protesting or striking here.'... They zip-tied or handcuffed them, then put them in the car, drove three blocks away and then basically cut them loose. So then they had to walk back.

"There was an old lady that the police pushed to the ground, then got on top of her and said, 'Stop resisting!' They didn't warn or say anything to her prior to shoving her to the ground. You know, basic intimidation. Then have everyone say, 'Oh no, what happened!'"

Another pair of workers expressed distrust in the Teamsters bureaucrats.

"We were just talking earlier on the picket line that after the strike ends, the next move is to target Teamsters leadership, because they've largely failed us during negotiations and throughout the whole strike. We were supposed to strike ages ago and they kept letting the University administration push it back and push it back. It looked like they were going to push it back again until Teamsters members lashed out really heavily on social media against the leadership. We need to get new leaders who actually work on campus and are a part of the working class."

The second worker added, "We want to call a vote of no confidence in the leadership. All these awful offers that the University administration is offering us, the Teamsters leaders keep trying to push us to accept it. They want us to accept pennies. So even the offer we are fighting for now, it's barely anything. It's an awful compromise."

Speaking about the contract and the need for working-class solidarity, another striking worker commented:

"First of all, I think the contract is too short. The fact that it ends in December instead of in the summer makes it a lot harder to strike when it's cold out, and it's the holidays. It's a lot more effective for us to be able to strike at the beginning of the school year. That's a deliberate attack on the University's part against us, to make it harder to organize and strike. I don't like the fact that it's a one-and-a-half year contract. I like the security of a three year contract."

When the WSWS pointed out that, without a cost-of-living escalator tied to inflation, even a three-year contract has its dangers, the worker voiced his agreement.

"I agree. That would be a great thing, because there's so much anxiety, especially the way the economy is right now. If they give us a three percent raise in the second year, that could be completely inadequate."

When discussing the necessity of the working class to forge greater unity, this worker declared, "If we could collaborate with other unions and cooperate during a strike with workers bringing things into the building and making deliveries, things like that, that would be helpful. We should

be working with other departments within the university, cross-union collaboration, things like that would be helpful."

There is support for the striking workers among both workers and students across the city. Farm Aid 40, a music festival started by Willie Nelson, Neil Young and John Mellencamp, is aimed at building support for U.S. farmers. It was scheduled to take place at UMN on September 20, but organizers and musicians have indicated they will cancel or move the event if pickets remain, stating openly that artists, stagehands and organizers refuse to cross the picket line.

Eric, a sophomore at the University who joined the pickets in support of the strike, told the WSWS, "I support them. They're putting some stress on the University. I hope that the University is more willing to negotiate, but in this country and concerning the unions, there won't be any support from the administration. Speaking on the police intimidation, Eric continued, "I mean, the MPD (Minneapolis Police Department) has been doing some screwed up stuff to the workers. They were actually attacking them."

"You know, the University raised our tuition this semester and it all went to the administration and maybe some expansion, I'm not sure. You're going to see the administration do the same thing companies try to do—get as much money as possible and not give it to the people who actually do the work. The president of the University—who makes over a million dollars a year—is only out to benefit herself."

It is critical that striking UMN workers urgently take the struggle into their own hands. UMN workers can win their demands, but only on the basis of a break from the Teamsters bureaucracy and the political parties of Wall Street. Rank-and-file committees, led by the most militant workers, must be elected, and these committees should appeal to students, graduate workers and workers across the Twin Cities for immediate support.

The logic of such appeals should point toward a general strike, recruiting striking Boeing workers, healthcare workers, university workers and other sections for joint action. Demands should be advanced to end attacks on workers everywhere, including the genocide in Palestine, with divestment from Israel and U.S. imperialism as a minimum.



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