

Teamsters shut down University of Minnesota strike, seeking to ram through sellout deal

Matt Rigel
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Shortly after midnight early Saturday morning, Teamsters Local 320 announced that it had reached a tentative agreement with the University of Minnesota (UMN) administration and was ending the less than weeklong strike by 1,400 service workers. The strike involved mechanics, grounds workers, facilities maintenance, sanitation workers and food service workers.

Trampling on workers' democratic rights, the Teamsters apparatus quickly shut down picketing Saturday, without releasing the full terms of the agreement to the rank and file. Union officials have stated that the offer includes paltry wage increases of 3.5 percent annually for two years, followed by 3 percent for a third year. Under conditions of rising inflation and escalating tariffs, this will result in a cut in real wages.

Workers must reject this agreement on principle. The union bureaucracy has shut down the strike in an anti-democratic effort to force workers into accepting the deal, repudiating the old labor maxim of "no contract, no work." As one worker put it on social media, "Well, I have questions. Shouldn't we not be going back in there until the contract is voted on."

The strike was shut down precisely because it was garnering wide support among workers, students and the broader population. Organizers of the Farm Aid concert, featuring Willie Nelson and other prominent musicians, had stated in the past week that their crews and performers would not cross the service workers' picket line for the scheduled September 20 concert.

The Teamsters have yet to publicly announce when the vote will take place, but workers must demand adequate time to carefully study, discuss and organize opposition to it. UMN service workers should follow the courageous recent example of striking Boeing

workers in St. Louis, who defied an effort by the International Association of Machinists (IAM) union to force through a third sellout deal last week.

It is vital that UMN workers set up rank-and-file committees, comprised of the most trusted and militant workers, to organize opposition to the Teamsters sellout, campaign for its rejection and prepare for the resumption of the strike. The fact is that workers confront a struggle against not just the university administration, but also the Teamsters bureaucracy, which has betrayed its members time and again, from railroad workers in 2022 to UPS workers in 2023, among the most prominent.

Even based on the limited information made available about the proposal, there is ample reason for workers to reject it as a slap in the face. For healthcare, there was zero mention of premium freezes in any press release. The previous offer had a 9-11 percent employee-share jump.

The deal was reportedly brokered by the intervention of Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, the Democratic candidate for vice president in 2024. The media and the university have largely focused on the claim that Farm Aid's 40th anniversary concert has been "saved."

The shutdown of the strike has followed the playbook of the pro-corporate trade union bureaucracy, which functions as a second layer of management to ensure workers' opposition never challenges the Democratic or Republican parties, or the capitalist system they defend. The union called off the strike before the vote, before the full text was released, and before workers could debate a single clause, then declared victory and ordered everyone back to work.

The WSWWS recently documented a similar maneuver by the IAM at Boeing, where the IAM hustled a "best and final" deal to members on Wednesday without

releasing the complete contract, then held a snap vote on the same Friday aiming to force the contract through. However, Boeing workers rebelled against this effort, in their third rejection of a pro-company deal brought back by the IAM.

Beyond Boeing, the United Auto Workers (UAW) union apparatus has announced a tentative agreement at GE Aerospace in Ohio, seeking to wind down an ongoing strike by workers there. UAW President Shawn Fain and local union leaders intend to keep workers in the dark about the terms of the deal until the eve of the ratification vote on Friday.

Significantly, both Boeing and GE Aerospace workers produce key products for the US military-industrial complex, under conditions of a renewed eruption of US imperialism.

Beyond demobilizing the rank and file, the bureaucracy's move is calculated to choke off the solidarity emerging among students, grad employees and other workers. This support is especially important as major unions, including the Teamsters, are developing ever-closer ties to the fascist Trump administration, which is rapidly constructing a police state in which workers will be stripped of basic democratic rights, including bargaining rights.

UMN workers have the opportunity to break through this stranglehold and lead sections of the working class to defeat the relentless attacks on wages, healthcare and working conditions. Workers should demand the release of the full contract, the holding of mass membership meetings and the resumption of the strike.

UMN workers should appeal for broad support in their strike among students and graduate workers, who are facing state repression for expressing free speech and seeking a future of economic security after school. At UMN and across the nation, students and graduate workers have faced bipartisan attacks for opposing the ongoing US-Israeli genocide in Palestine.

To carry forward their fight, workers should build rank-and-file committees, independent of Teamsters apparatus, connected with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). They must unite with workers and students across the Twin Cities against the source of dictatorship, war, and social inequality: the capitalist system.

For more information on how to build a rank-and-file committees, fill out the form below.



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