

# Harvard clerical, technical union leaders push through sellout deal as grad workers prepare to strike

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The Harvard Corporation is simultaneously waging war on two fronts against workers and students at the university. On one front, it has moved to suppress the wages and job security of its clerical and technical workforce. On the other, it has stonewalled thousands of graduate student workers in the Harvard Graduate Student Union–United Auto Workers (HGSU-UAW Local 5118), who have now set an April 21 strike deadline after nearly 96 percent of participating members voted to walk out.

The Socialist Equality Party calls on the members of the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers (HUCTW) to reject the tentative agreement announced on April 16, build a rank-and-file committee independent of the union bureaucracy, and join hands with their brothers and sisters in HGSU-UAW in a unified fight for living wages, job security and an end to Harvard’s complicity in war and genocide.

HUCTW leadership announced a tentative agreement with Harvard that is centered on a one-year contract that delivers a flat \$2,300 raise to most union members. A ratification vote is scheduled for May 12–13. The contract would take effect July 1 and expire one year later.

For a worker earning around \$55,000, a \$2,300 raise amounts to barely 4 percent. After inflation, it is far less. Workers would remain on poverty wages in the Boston metropolitan area, one of the most expensive housing markets in the country.

The contract is only one year long and is designed to prevent a fight over central issues: healthcare costs, job security and wage adequacy.

HUCTW leadership has said that delaying healthcare discussions reduces the risk of Harvard seeking to shift additional costs onto workers in the current bargaining round. The union leadership is not fighting Harvard’s attacks on healthcare, rather it is managing the timing of

those attacks. This is not a union protecting its members; it is a bureaucratic apparatus administering the conditions of workers’ exploitation.

Meanwhile, the layoffs have already begun. More than 3,600 people, including HUCTW members, non-union staff, faculty, students, alumni and members of other campus unions signed a petition calling on Harvard to halt layoffs that the union itself described as “painful,” “unnecessary” and lacking “concrete financial justification.” In the Alumni Affairs and Development unit alone, Harvard cut more than 50 staff members, including 12 HUCTW members. This was despite that office surpassing its fundraising goals for fiscal year 2026, raising a record \$629 million in current-use gifts. HUCTW leadership’s response to this documented irrationality is to accept a one-year holding pattern and leave those 53 workers behind.

The Harvard Corporation’s claim of financial distress is a fiction deployed to justify austerity. HUCTW has itself challenged the Faculty of Arts and Sciences’ projected \$365 million deficit as misleading, pointing to its fiscal year 2025 report showing a deficit of just under \$8 million. A university sitting atop more than \$53 billion in endowment assets and setting fundraising records does not have a financial crisis. It has a political one: the drive, under the pressure of the Trump administration and the demands of financial markets, to slash costs, discipline labor and subordinate the university’s educational mission to the imperatives of capital accumulation and military spending.

The HGSU-UAW struggle makes this plain. After over a year of negotiations in which Harvard’s negotiators refused to engage on key issues, the union announced it would begin a strike on April 21 if the university does not meet its demands, with only two of 26 articles reaching

tentative agreement.

Graduate students earn roughly \$50,000 annually during the first four years of their program, but after fellowship supplements expire, many rely solely on teaching fellowships (TF) paying roughly \$6,500 per section. Many teaching fellows earn between \$18 and \$21 per hour, so little that they qualify for state food assistance programs. HGSU-UAW has said that to close the pay gap between teaching fellows and research assistants (RA) would require a roughly 74 percent increase in TF pay to achieve basic parity. Harvard countered with a miserly 2.5 percent annually and refused to close the TF-RA pay gap.

Beyond wages, a central demand of the workers is protection for international students and workers from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Students have also demanded an end to surveillance, “cops off campus,” fairer disciplinary processes, and divestment from military contractors and weapons manufacturers.

The WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party have documented the pattern of the UAW apparatus in labor struggles across industries. The record is unambiguous: the UAW International Executive Board consistently functions to demobilize and contain rank-and-file militancy, channeling it back into the safe electoral framework of the Democratic Party. As Will Lehman, UAW presidential candidate on a platform of rank-and-file power and socialist internationalism, has noted, the 2021 HGSU-UAW strike—after a three-day walkout—was settled on terms that, adjusted for inflation, amounted to a real wage cut, which the UAW apparatus nonetheless declared a victory.

Workers should ask themselves: what will the apparatus call a “victory” this time? A contract that locks in poverty-level wages for another four years while Harvard accelerates its integration with the military-industrial complex and the financial elite? HUCTW members should ask the same question of their own leadership, which has just signed a one-year agreement designed not to resolve the healthcare and job-security crises, but to defer them.

The way forward for both students and workers is to build rank-and-file committees independent of both the HUCTW and UAW bureaucracies. These committees must be democratically controlled by workers themselves that can coordinate action across bargaining units, reach out to the broader labor movement, and impose the kind of unified pressure that the Harvard Corporation cannot ignore.

The WSWs calls on HUCTW members to adopt the

following to prevent the union leadership betrayal.

- **Reject the tentative agreement.** A \$2,300 raise on a one-year contract, with healthcare and job security left unresolved and layoffs continuing unabated, is not a victory. Vote “no” on May 12–13.

- **Build a rank-and-file committee.** Do not wait for the HUCTW leadership to lead a fight it has already shown it will not wage. Form an independent committee accountable to the membership, not to union executives who have made their peace with management.

- **Unite with HGSU-UAW.** The grad workers set an April 21 strike deadline. HUCTW members should declare their solidarity, picket alongside them, and demand that the Harvard Corporation meet the demands of all university workers—a living wage, full job security, robust healthcare and protections for international workers.

- **Demand an end to the suppression of anti-war protest.** The new UCRR disciplinary regime must be dismantled. No worker or student should face punishment for opposing genocide and war.

- **Demand divestment from the weapons industry.** Harvard’s endowment should not fund the instruments of mass slaughter. Workers and students together must demand full transparency and divestment from military contractors and their financial networks.

The Harvard Corporation is wealthy beyond imagination. It has the resources to pay every worker a genuine living wage, guarantee job security, provide world-class healthcare and protect every international student and worker on its campus. That it refuses to do so is not a financial necessity; it is a political and class choice. Harvard workers must answer it with a unified class response.



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