

# Harvard Academic Workers-UAW leaders sabotage strike of non-tenure-track faculty

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As the strike by members of the Harvard Graduate Student Union–United Auto Workers (HGSU–UAW) begins to enter its second week, their class brothers and sisters in the Harvard Academic Workers-UAW (HAW-UAW) union have reached a critical turning point in their struggle. The fight by 4,000 non-tenure-track faculty and researchers for a first contract with the Ivy League university is a focal point in the struggle of academic workers across the country.

The primary obstacle to victory is not merely the recalcitrance of the Harvard administration, but the sabotage of the UAW bureaucracy. UAW International and Region 9A officials have moved to strangle the strike before it could become a united counter-offensive by academic workers and graduate student workers.

In a flagrant violation of democratic principles, the HAW-UAW bargaining committee has unilaterally called off plans for a spring strike, overriding a clear mandate from the membership. As reported in the *Harvard Crimson*, during a general membership meeting, 53 percent of attendees voted to close the strike authorization vote and begin striking immediately. Rather than implementing this decision, the committee engaged in “bureaucratic gaslighting,” citing “procedural confusions” and “notification windows” to justify an abrupt about-face that rules out any strike action for the remainder of the semester. This maneuver is a deliberate attempt to protect the university’s “reading period” and commencement operations at the expense of the workers’ primary leverage.

This betrayal is a gift to the Harvard administration. By preventing a unified front with Harvard Graduate Student Union (HGSU-UAW) members who are already on strike for living wages, the HAW-UAW leadership has effectively enforced the “divide-and-conquer” strategy of management. While graduate workers face \$3,500 median rents in

Cambridge on a pittance wage as little as \$18 per hour, the HAW-UAW bureaucracy is ensuring that the non-tenure-track faculty remains isolated, stripped of their power to shut down the university.

The UAW International apparatus functions as a policing mechanism for the financial oligarchy. Under the leadership of Shawn Fain, the bureaucracy has perfected the use of corporatist “red tape” to stifle the initiative of workers. The HAW-UAW bargaining committee’s claim that a strike was “logistically unfeasible” is a political fiction designed to obscure their role as management’s enforcers.

To justify their stand-down, the committee cited a “substantial risk” that the UAW International leadership would not authorize the strike, deploying a series of bogus procedural hurdles. These include:

- Participation Thresholds: Arbitrarily demanding a 50% participation rate to demonstrate “strong support,” regardless of the actual vote outcome.
- Authorization Thresholds: Utilizing the UAW rule requiring a two-thirds majority of voters, effectively granting a minority veto power over the struggle.
- Strike Pay Sabotage: Threatening workers with the loss of financial support by claiming the International would not process authorization in time.

These rules are not intended to protect the membership; they are designed to ensure that no struggle escapes the control of the bureaucratic center. The UAW International views independent worker initiative as a threat to its collaborative relationship with the university. This bureaucratic “red tape” is the direct mechanism used to subordinate the working class to the financial requirements of the Blackstone and KKR oligarchs who sit on the Harvard board.

The Harvard Corporation members manage the university as an extension of their corporate portfolios, functioning as a “Committee of Capital” dedicated to the requirements of the national security apparatus.

As we have previously reported, the most important figures on the Board include:

• Penny Pritzker: Billionaire; Former Commerce Secretary (Obama); Boards of Microsoft & Icertis.

• Timothy Barakett: Founder, TRB Advisors; Appointed to KKR Board (March 2025).

• Mariano-Florentino Cuéllar: Former NSC Senior Director (Obama); President of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a major thinktank for the military-intelligence apparatus.

• Michael Chae: Vice Chair and CFO of Blackstone (World's largest commercial landlord).

• Sylvia Mathews Burwell: Former Health and Human Services secretary; Chief of Staff to Robert Rubin (Architect of deregulation).

The administration has weaponized a narrative of “financial distress,” citing a projected \$365 million deficit to justify wage suppression. This is a strategic accounting lie. Harvard sits on a \$53.2 billion endowment and recently raised \$629 million in current-use gifts. The “crisis” is a political choice made under the pressure of the Trump administration’s scorched-earth campaign against academic freedom and student anti-genocide protests.

With Education Secretary Linda McMahon placing Harvard under “heightened cash monitoring” and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth freezing \$2.2 billion in grants, the Harvard Corporation is offloading the costs of its political conflict with the far right onto the backs of the workers.

The *Harvard Crimson* reported last week that Harvard President Alan Garber attended by invitation “one of the nation’s most secretive conservative gatherings last month, joining closed-door debate over higher education as the University faces intensifying scrutiny from the right.”

The UAW leadership, including Region 9A Director Brandon Mancilla—a Democratic Socialist of America member and Fain crony—functions as an unaccountable layer of the middle-class bureaucracy. Their record is one of consistent betrayal, where “radical” rhetoric is used to channel workers back into the Democratic Party, a party of Wall Street and war.

The sabotage at Harvard follows a well-worn pattern of treachery. At Columbia University, Region 9A ordered locals to water down demands such as “cops off campus” and divestment from the weapons industry, threatening trusteeship over any local that dared to challenge the imperialist state. The UAW rejected an overwhelming vote in favor of strike for a second time even after the local leadership acquiesced to the UAW demands.

Mancilla and the DSA represent the “pseudo-left” cover for the bureaucracy, providing a radical veneer to a corporatist apparatus that is fundamentally hostile to the independent mobilization of the working class.

The only viable path forward for Harvard workers is the

strategy proposed by Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president. Lehman has explained that the Harvard strike is part of a global movement against exploitation and war, which pits workers against the pro-war labor apparatus. “The bureaucracy can’t be reformed. It must be abolished,” Lehman has stated, emphasizing that academic and industrial workers face the same bureaucratic enemy.

Lehman’s call for a “unified counter-offensive” is the only response to the Harvard Corporation’s retrenchment and the Trump administration’s drive toward fascist dictatorship.

The victory of Harvard workers depends on their ability to break the grip of the UAW bureaucracy and the two-party system it serves. The leadership’s decision to override a strike vote is a warning: the apparatus will always prioritize its relationship with the university and the state over the needs of the workers.

To prevail, Harvard workers must:

- Reject the sabotage of the HAW-UAW leadership and demand an immediate return to democratic control over the strike timeline.

- Form independent rank-and-file committees to coordinate action across bargaining units, independent of the highly paid officials of the UAW International.

- Link the struggle to the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to unite with the international working class in a common fight against capitalism and war.

The fight at Harvard is a central battleground in the global class struggle. Workers can only win by recognizing that their true allies are not the “labor lieutenants of capital” in the union offices, but the international working class mobilized in a revolutionary struggle against the financial oligarchy.



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