SUPPORT THE NEW YORK UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC WORKERS STRIKE!



BY WILL LEHMAN
Mack Trucks worker and rank-and-file candidate for UAW president

On Monday, 950 New York University full-time contract faculty walked out on strike for pay that covers the cost of living, real job security, and academic freedom. As a rank-and-file autoworker and UAW presidential candidate, I fully support your strike. Your fight is not an isolated campus dispute, but part of the developing offensive of the working class against austerity, dictatorship and war.

The fight for major wage increases and job security are critical as the cost of housing, food and childcare in New York City has exploded under the impact of war, militarization and the Trump administration's diversion of vast resources into the Pentagon. While contract faculty generate large sums of money for NYU, you are paid a fraction of this and live under constant threat of non-renewal. The NYU administration invokes "financial uncertainty" as an excuse while sitting on a $6.5 billion endowment and roughly $15 billion in real estate, making it one of the largest private landlords in the city. The administration's stonewalling is a demand that you pay for the crisis with your livelihoods.

Your strike is also a courageous fight to defend academic freedom and basic democratic rights. NYU has repeatedly disciplined and silenced both faculty and students who speak out against the genocide in Gaza. These attacks are part of a nationwide and bipartisan effort to criminalize opposition to war and bring universities into ever closer alignment with the military and intelligence apparatus, of which NYU has many connections, while gutting research funding. Defending the right to teach, research and protest without censorship or retaliation is inseparable from the struggle for decent pay and job security.

Over the past several decades, higher education has been transformed along the same lines as the auto industry, with a hated "tier" system that divides workers into layers with different pay, rights and security. The 950 non-tenure-track contract faculty make up around half of the full-time faculty at NYU, doing the bulk of teaching for lower pay and fewer rights, just as "temps," contractors and lower-tier hires have been used in auto plants to undercut wages and working conditions for all. The goal in both cases is the same: to turn education and production into low-cost, disposable labor platforms for greater profits.

This is why your strike must be understood as part of a common struggle of academic workers—in New York City and beyond, including at University of California (UC)—as well as industrial, logistics and healthcare workers more broadly.

At the New School, the administration has announced plans to eliminate 20% of university employees through buyouts and layoffs while cancelling courses and closing academic departments. Many of those affected at the New School are represented by the same UAW Local 7902 that includes NYU faculty and adjuncts.

At Columbia University, student workers who are also under the UAW have powerfully voted by 91.5% to authorize a strike for their second contract, demanding living wages, stronger healthcare, protections for international workers and an end to campus surveillance and police repression. This is likewise a crucial battle over both material conditions and democratic rights on campus.

Yet the UAW bureaucracy under Region 9A Director Brandon Mancilla—a Democratic Socialist of America (DSA) member installed by UAW President Shawn Fain—has intervened to block this struggle: threatening receivership if student workers did not gut their demands, and making clear that no strike would be allowed by the UAW International Executive Board (IEB) if they insisted on challenging the university's collaboration with police and intelligence agencies.

Such anti-worker actions by UAW leadership are not isolated incidents, but the norm. A 2024 student worker strike at the New School was shut down by the UAW apparatus after only three days, without a membership

vote and without releasing the full contract which proved completely inadequate. UAW California Local 4811 kept 40,000 UC academic workers on the job this month for nearly three weeks after their contract expired, defying the members' overwhelming strike mandate, and forced through a sellout agreement.

This is the same apparatus hated by autoworkers for its role in isolating and shutting down strikes with sellout contracts which have imposed tiers, speed-ups and concessions while hoarding over a billion dollars in assets for the salaries and privileges of a bureaucratic caste.

Shawn Fain, who was elected promising reform, has only continued these policies. His phony "stand-up" strike has led to plant closures and layoffs. Fain openly supports Trump's economic nationalism and tariffs, while his administration is involved in corruption scandals.

As a Mack Trucks worker running for UAW president, my program insists:

1. The UAW bureaucracy cannot be reformed, it must be abolished and replaced by the direct power of the rank-and-file through the creation of a network of rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by workers themselves. The actions by UAW Region 9A are case in point. An apparatus that blocks strikes and threatens receivership when faced with the will of its members is a union in name-only.
2. End the collaboration of the UAW with corporate managements and re-establish the needs of the rank-and-file, not corporate profitability, as the purpose of the union. The vast resources of the union must be taken out of the bureaucracy's hands and placed under the democratic control of rank-and-file workers.
3. Repudiate the reactionary chauvinism of the UAW bureaucracy. Workers have nothing to gain from a trade war, which amounts to a struggle among capitalists for control of markets and a greater share of profits gained through the exploitation of the working class. What we need is an international strategy based on the unified struggle of the international working class.
4. Mobilize the full industrial and economic power of the union membership to defend democratic rights and oppose war.

The ruling class, led by the fascist Trump, attacks higher education as part of the drive toward dictatorship and repression at home while waging global imperialist war abroad. The resources stolen by war and corporate profit must be returned to education, healthcare, and social needs. This requires a movement of the working class. A movement with political independence from the pro-war, capitalist parties and the union bureaucracies that defend and promote them.

The significant New York City nurses strike earlier this year began to develop in this very direction when nurses rebelled against their union leadership and powerfully rejected a contract forced on them without their approval.

To NYU contract faculty members on strike today: your struggle can be won, but only if it is consciously expanded and placed in the hands of the rank-and-file, away from the deadly grasps of UAW Region 9A. I urge you to form a rank-and-file strike committee and reach out to academic workers at Columbia, the New School and campuses throughout New York City and beyond.

I also call on academic workers and students, as well as other sections of the working class throughout New York City to support the NYU strike, organize solidarity actions and prepare to join it. An expanded strike would have enormous power and become a focal point for a movement of workers and youth against austerity, war and repression.

Only by unifying these struggles can we defeat the combined offensive of university administrations, the Trump government, the complicit Democratic Party and the union bureaucracy. I stand with you in struggle. Organize, build rank-and-file power and refuse to be sold out.

Contact me to discuss this strategy and your strike, and to get involved in this campaign.

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Get involved with the rank-and-file campaign in the UAW elections.

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved