

Open letter to undergraduates of Temple University: Support striking Temple grad students! Fight back against tuition increases!

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality
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The IYSSE fully supports the grad students' strike at Temple University. We know that the academic workers carry the bulk of teaching duties at big universities like Temple. It is high time that the university recognizes the value of their labor. Temple graduates need a salary and benefits that make it possible to live decently in an expensive city like Philadelphia. We further condemn the university's cruel removal of healthcare coverage for these student workers, many of whom are struggling to support young families.

We congratulate the Temple grad students in their rejection—by an overwhelming 92 percent—of the rotten contract presented to them by the Temple University Graduate Student Association (TUGSA) Local 6290. They defied not only a deceitful campaign by the capitalist media, insisting that the “strike is over,” but the threats of the Temple administration and the wishes of the parent union, the American Federation of Teachers. Their tenacity reflects a growing opposition in the working class in the US and internationally.

We call on all students at Temple, undergraduate and graduate alike, to rally to the support of the grad students. Students must understand that this is not only the TAs' fight. It is our fight too! Temple students should form a committee of support for TAs. The IYSSE stands ready to assist.

Students must turn to the working class and make an appeal to other sections of the labor force at Temple: faculty, maintenance janitorial workers, and clerical staff. We call on Temple students to help organize a rank-and-file committee that will include committed representatives of all sections of the campus community: TAs, RAs, faculty, staff and students. Build toward a mass student walkout that, together with striking workers, will shut down the entire campus until the grad students' just needs are met!

If the administration is allowed to defeat the academic workers, it will turn on other parts of the campus community

next, including the undergraduates. Students indeed, face the same antagonists at Temple as the grad students. For years, students and their parents have been shaken down for tuition increases by university administrators and the Board of Trustees.

Some facts:

- Current base tuition for in-state students at this supposedly public institution comes close to \$22,000, with around 66 percent of all students relying on financial aid to make payments. With room and board, the figure rises to nearly \$35,000 per year.

- A typical Temple student can expect to shell out \$140,000 or more over four years. Many graduate with tens of thousands of dollars in debts owed to the federal government and private banks.

- Last year the university administration increased tuition by another 3.9 percent! The university claimed that this was to offset inflation. But what about inflation for students and their parents?

- Average minimum tuition costs rose from \$6,648 in 2000 to \$17,136 in 2023, a 157 percent increase!

Is Temple University's education 157 percent better than it was in 2000? Where has all the money gone from these tuition increases? Clearly not to the striking Teaching Assistants, who are not even paid enough to cover housing and food costs in Philadelphia.

The university claims that it has no money to meet the demands of academic workers, but twenty administrators, coaches, and other notables each pocketed over \$400,000, including the college president, who “earned” nearly \$1.4 million. These bloated salaries added up to roughly \$16 million—enough to double the pay of 800 TAs from the present to roughly \$20,000-\$40,000!

To win, the Temple grad students, workers, and undergraduates must understand the bankruptcy of appeals to the Democratic Party. This self-defeating perspective is what is

being pushed by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the parent union of the striking TAs. The AFT certainly has skin in the game. It is, in all but name, a bloc within the Democratic Party. The last thing that AFT head Randi Weingarten (salary: \$564,000!) wants is a struggle that challenges her patrons in the Democratic administrations in Philadelphia, Harrisburg and Washington D.C.

Temple University is for all intents and purposes controlled by the Democratic Party. The Board of Trustees is an entirely political body, composed of capitalists and figures with long political connections to the Democratic Party.

Board member Patrick Eiding is the former president of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) and a major backer of the state Democratic Party. Board member John Street is the former mayor of Philadelphia. His term was known for its promotion of charter schools, the shuttering of public schools, and the layoff of teachers and staff. Christine M. Tartaglione is a Democratic state senator from Philadelphia. Another trustee is Leonard Barrack. He served as the national finance chairman for the Democratic National Committee from 1998-2004. Barrack also served as vice-chairman to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, which is a right-wing war-mongering lobby group that promotes the state of Israel's oppression of the Palestinians.

Moreover, the state of Pennsylvania's governor is now, and has been, for eight years a Democrat. The university budget, which is invoked as constraining the possibility of giving modest wage and benefit increases to academic workers, is established by the amount of funding provided by the state. That which does not come from the state is realized from donations from corporations and the rich—who thereby gain influence over the institution—and through increased tuition on undergraduates.

Today, Temple University receives only 14 percent of its funding, around \$158 million, from the state of Pennsylvania. Among its corporate benefactors is none other than recently retired Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf, who donated \$40 million to Temple and three other state universities. Prior to entering politics, Wolf was the owner and CEO of a major building products firm.

The Democrats are every bit as hostile to the working class as the Republicans. By attempting to sow the illusion that they “support” the strikers, the Democrats aim to confuse the striking grad students—the better to pull the plug on their strike in collusion with the AFT bureaucracy. The Democrats would prefer that grad students not take notice of their long history of scabbing on strikes, the most recent example of which was the bipartisan vote in the US Congress, backed by the Biden administration, to strip 120,000 rail workers of their very right to strike.

The IYSSE rejects with contempt the claim that there is no money to provide decent wages to grad students and other

university workers, or to make tuition affordable. According to Forbes, Pennsylvania is home to 17 billionaires, whose combined net worth is nearly \$70 billion—colossal fortunes protected by Democrats and Republicans alike. Meanwhile, the Biden administration and Congress find endless billions for funding the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, a war that threatens nuclear destruction.

Temple University will not “find” money for the academic workers by appeals to the Democratic Party. The struggle must be expanded through the formation of rank-and-file committees representing all sections of the campus workforce and the students, and linking up with workers at other universities and in other industries.

Above all else, Temple grad students and undergraduates must recognize that their struggles are bound up with a growing movement of the working class in the United States and internationally. Among graduate student workers, there have been recent strikes in the University of California system, at Columbia University, and at New York University. Graduate workers at the University of Michigan are currently discussing strike action in opposition to the university's efforts to impose real-wage cuts.

The wave of graduate employee struggles at American universities are in fact part of growing movement of strikes and social protests the world over—including strikes by hundreds of thousands of workers in the UK, protests of millions in France against attacks on pensions, and mass demonstrations in Peru, and Sri Lanka, to name a few examples. In the United States, the recent train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio has lit the fuse of class anger in the initial months of a year that will see explosive class battles. Objectively, all of these struggles are arrayed against the war and austerity policies of the ruling classes.

To succeed, the Temple strike must be broken out of the strait jacket of isolation imposed by the unions.

We call on all students at Temple who want to organize and fight to defend the academic workers and expand the struggle to join the IYSSE.



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