

Long Island University lockout ends with contract extension and no issues resolved

By Alan Whyte
19 September 2016

The 12-day Long Island University (LIU) lockout of the school's faculty on the Brooklyn campus ended September 15 without resolving any of the contractual issues in dispute. Instead, the current contract is extended until May 31, 2017.

Long Island University and the union, the Long Island University Faculty Federation (LIUFF), affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), which represents about 400 tenured and adjunct professors in Brooklyn, also agreed to mediation in future negotiations for a settlement.

Although the LIUFF issued a statement calling the end of the lockout a "victory," this is far from the case. The union pledged that it would not call a strike, thereby granting LIU one of its major goals in this unprecedented lockout of faculty by an American college. The university was demanding a host of concessions from the teachers. Adjunct professors would see their teaching load reduced from 12 credits to nine, amounting to a 25 percent pay cut, and an increase in class sizes.

LIU was also seeking to impose a two-tier wage system that would pay new hires less. In addition, the university hopes to stop funding the Adjunct Benefits Trust Fund, which helps some adjunct professors to buy health insurance.

LIU wants to increase librarians' workload, lower pension benefits, and restrict academic freedom by establishing a post-tenure review process, which would give administrators greater control over classroom teaching.

One of the major issues in the conflict was the fact that the Brooklyn campus professors earn significantly less than their counterparts on LIU's Long Island C.W. Post campus. LIU's proposed wage offer of a 13 percent raise over five years would do nothing at all to

close that gap.

The university's lockout was part of a nationwide drive to sacrifice the quality of education for a more corporation-like business model. Part of that model involves charging students astronomical tuition.

Young people have been forced to pay these ever-increasing tuition costs, accumulating mountains of debt in the hope of obtaining a degree that will make it possible for them to make a decent living.

That is why, with each passing day of the lockout, opposition grew among LIU students, who complained that they were paying about \$36,000 per year for tuition, not including room and board, only to find that their classes and laboratories were either empty or being "taught" by totally unqualified personnel.

Jennifer, a second-year occupational therapy student, said, "In the class they held during the lockout, we had an occupational therapist who is the chair of the department to teach us. She was very upset and told the students that she could not cover for all of the faculty."

Gabriel commented, "The professors' union was not given a choice. They were just forced out. They found out they had no democracy."

Sarah, an undergraduate pre-nursing student, remarked, "I went to three classes and had only substitutes, not the teachers that we signed up for. I went to lab and the classroom was empty. This is costing me \$18,000 a semester. The school only cares about money."

Chris, a student studying health science, added, "I went to three health science classes and there was only one real teacher. There was chemistry class. So, three out of four classes were not available. The students should come before money."

While the students' support for their professors undoubtedly played a role in the decision of the

administration to work out a deal with the union to call off the lockout, the settlement does not represent a step forward for either teachers or students.

The teachers are back to square one in terms of a new agreement. The administration will use the union's pledge not to strike and instead work with a mediator to collaborate with the AFT behind the scenes in securing concessions.

The lockout was an attempt to blackmail the teachers into accepting the concession demands. It represents an attack not only on education, but on the working class as a whole. The LIU professors have walked out on strike in five out of the last six contract deadlines. The strategy of the university was a preemptive one, to "break the routine" of a strike, as an administration spokesperson said, and foreclose the possibility that such an action could have galvanized further support among workers in other unions, other campuses, and among New York City's large population of students.

In this the administration had willing collaborators in the AFT. That union's rotten agreement with LIU is part of the suppression of workers' struggles over the last year. It includes the UAW's maintenance of a three-tier wage system among autoworkers last fall, and the shutting down of the Verizon strike by the CWA in the spring.

Faculty at LIU's C.W. Post campus on Long Island are represented by a separate union local with a different negotiation schedule. These professors were not locked out and their union did not call for solidarity walkout.

While isolating the LIU faculty, the AFT sought to limit the demonstrations on campus against the lockout to protesting the role of LIU President Kimberly Cline. This was designed to obscure the fact that the conflict is part of wider offensive by the ruling class against education. Indeed, Cline was selected by LIU precisely for her history of cutting the quality of education for students and reducing the compensation of teachers.

The AFT, like the rest of the unions, is more than prepared to agree to concessions on real wages and to more onerous working conditions for its membership. Its actions are driven by the privileged and upper middle class character of the trade union bureaucracy and its political alliance with the Democratic Party. The reactionary nature of the AFT is most clearly revealed by the fact that it is backing Hillary Clinton, the

instrument of Wall Street and CIA, and the Pentagon's candidate of choice, in the November election.

The crisis in education is part of an overall crisis of capitalism and can only be resolved with the struggle of both youth and workers, independent of the pro-capitalist unions, against the profit system as a whole.

LIU faculty and students must draw the necessary conclusion of the last two weeks of struggle. They should use the coming months to prepare a genuine struggle to defend wages and benefits, teaching conditions, and access to a decent education, which requires a break from the unions and the whole big business political establishment. The World Socialist Web Site urges all LIU faculty and students to come to hear the Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Jerry White speak in New York on September 27.

To contact the WSWP and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wswp.org>