

Barnard College contingent faculty vote on strike authorization

By Sandy English
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Nearly 200 members of the Barnard Contingent Faculty (BCF) union at Barnard College, the women's college affiliated with Columbia University in New York City, are voting this week on strike authorization. Results will be announced in early December.

Contingent faculty are members of the BCF and are affiliated with the United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 2110, which also represents Columbia University clerical workers. The BCF consists of visiting faculty, lab associates, guest artists, and adjunct professors, and others. Adjuncts are part-time teachers, but the BCF also has non-tenured instructors who teach full time, normally five classes annually. Tenured and tenure-track faculty, by contrast, normally teach four courses annually. Contingent faculty make up nearly 60 percent of Barnard's faculty, and more in some departments, including Barnard's flagship Dance and Architecture programs.

Barnard's support staff, who are not a part of these negotiations, struck twice in 1995 and 1996 against the college's attempts to increase health care costs.

The UAW became the bargaining agent for these workers in the fall of 2015 and started negotiations with the college in February of this year.

Like most adjunct and temporary faculty in American universities, these workers are, by any standard, underpaid. Their pay is egregiously low for the New York metropolitan area, which has one of the highest costs of living in North America. Most of these workers receive few or no benefits.

Adjuncts are hired by the semester and may teach up to three courses annually. They receive base pay of \$5,000 for each three-credit course they teach, which may vary by department. They receive no benefits. Full-time, non-tenured/non-tenure-track faculty receive a salary and sometimes get health, vision, and dental

benefits.

The BCF has proposed a \$15,000 base pay amount for adjuncts who teach courses of three credits or less and a \$75,000 salary for its full-time faculty. The BCF has proposed that benefits be extended to all of its members.

The college has resisted these requests, claiming that it has no money, and the union has substantially lowered its demands for increases in base pay, proposing a paltry 4 percent annual pay increase.

The union has sponsored several events and actions, including a demonstration at an event with Barnard President Debora Spar's. One student support group has delivered a petition to the administration asking for a fair contract and signed by 800 Barnard alumnae. Earlier this week, Spar announced her intention to resign from her office at Barnard to become the president and CEO of the artistic complex at New York's Lincoln Center.

The BCF negotiations come at a time of social eruption on American university campuses, including those in New York City, against the election of Donald Trump as president. While students have led these demonstrations, including on Wednesday at Columbia calling on the administration to make the university a sanctuary for undocumented immigrants, anger at the election of Trump among university faculty and staff is also widespread.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to members of the Barnard community about the possibility of a contingent faculty strike and the recent US election.

An Urban Studies student said, "Most of my teachers are contingent faculty. These are the conditions of my instructors and affect me as a student. I support my instructors having living wages and health care in their incredibly important role."

Shayna Reed, a biochemistry student at Barnard, told the WSWS, “It is really unfair what is happening to the contingent faculty. The administration has e-mailed us, and they just sounded defensive. These professors at Barnard and Columbia are not well treated.”

Joelle Milman, an English and Creative Writing major at Barnard, said, “When I came here I was shocked to find out how many were adjunct professors and not tenured. This is our education. I had an independent study program at Columbia. It was very good, and I worked very hard with the professor who I thought was very good. I didn’t find out until it was all over that he was an adjunct professor.”

Mark Nomadiou, an administrator for the Women’s Studies Department at Barnard and a member of Local 2110, said regarding Trump’s election, “This was not a surprise because since the 1980s the country has been going toward a capitalist nightmare. They want a strong-arm leadership that attempts to control people from class fear. Last week was just step one. The Democrats would have been the same result. I did not like either candidate.”

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