

University of Michigan graduate students take a stand for life against profit

By Joseph Kishore—Socialist Equality Party candidate for US president
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Graduate students and workers at the University of Michigan (UM) have taken a courageous stand. In fighting against the unsafe reopening of campus, they are fighting for the health and safety not only of themselves but for the community as a whole.

The outbreak of coronavirus at campuses throughout the country makes clear that the resumption of classes will inevitably mean a surge of cases. People will get sick and die. At UM, the administration's "plan" for reopening fails to include the most minimal requirements, including universal testing and remote learning.

What is driving this insane policy? First of all, there are the financial interests of the university administration. The Board of Regents is dominated by officials with close ties to the corporations and political establishment (particularly the Democratic Party in Michigan). The university has a web of connections to powerful corporations. No doubt, taking the necessary measures to stop the spread of the virus will have negative financial consequences for not a few millionaires and billionaires.

A broader policy, however, is involved. In relation to the pandemic, the ruling class in the United States, along with its counterparts internationally, has effectively adopted a policy of "herd immunity"—that is, that the virus should be allowed to spread without restraint, come what may. Businesses must resume, workers must go back to producing profit, schools must open.

From the beginning of the pandemic, the social interests driving policy have been those of Wall Street, corporate executives and the capitalist class as a whole, not the concerns of masses of people who want to save lives.

One could hardly have a more damning exposure of

the criminality of the ruling class than the tapes released this week by Bob Woodward of interviews with Donald Trump. The world has now heard from the horse's mouth that Trump lied to cover up the danger of the virus. Trump acknowledged that he deliberately downplayed the threat in order to avert a "panic."

What was the "panic" that kept Trump up at night? First, he was worried that the reality of the crisis would spark a fall in the markets before the ruling class could put together a massive bailout of the banks. Second, he was fearful of the growing opposition of the working class as it became clear what was coming.

Trump, however, had many aiders and abettors. What he knew was known throughout the political establishment. At the end of March, Democratic and Republican politicians set aside their minor squabbles and passed, on a nearly unanimous basis, the so-called CARES Act. In doing so, they gave Congressional sanction to a bailout of the rich unprecedented in world history. Since March, more than \$3 trillion has been funneled into Wall Street and corporate America through the US Federal Reserve.

Having taken measures necessary to secure its wealth, the ruling class immediately began its back-to-work campaign and then its back-to-school campaign. Restrictions had to be removed. No measures were put in place to ensure universal testing and contact tracing. The policy has been, "Let it rip."

The results have been catastrophic. Already, nearly 200,000 people have died in the United States. As many as 410,000 may die by the end of the year. That is, in less than one year as many people may die from the coronavirus as US soldiers were killed in World War II in the course of nearly four years.

This horrific reality underlies a social and political crisis in the United States that is unprecedented. Less

than two weeks before the election, the Trump administration is intensifying its efforts to stoke a far-right, fascist movement. Trump is not running for president; he is running for Führer. He is waging a hysterical campaign against socialism while encouraging his supporters, including within the state, to carry out violent reprisals against protests against police violence.

The Democratic Party, however, offers no genuine alternative. The campaign of Biden and Harris is being waged on the most right-wing basis possible. Biden has joined the denunciations of “looting” and “socialists” and is committed to a program of austerity and war. The Democrats created the conditions for Trump’s rise, covered up for his crimes, and facilitated and supported his right-wing policies.

The strategy of the working class must be based not on the arithmetic of the election, but on the logic of the class struggle.

The strike at the University of Michigan is an important advance. But what is the logic of this struggle? The issues at stake—protection against the coronavirus, economic security, opposition to militarism and police violence—cannot be resolved within the university.

These are mass issues that require the intervention of the working class throughout the country, and indeed around the world. What is involved is a fight against an entire social and economic system, which subordinates social need to private profit and the accumulation of wealth by the rich.

This is the central issue: The fight against the pandemic is a fight against capitalism and for socialism.

Workers want to fight back. Teachers are beginning to take a stand against the back-to-school campaign, which has already led to a surge in new cases and at least six deaths of teachers in the last few weeks. Students and lecturers at New York University, Cornell, University of Iowa, University of California and many other campuses throughout the country are opposing the reckless openings.

There is seething anger among autoworkers, Amazon workers, transportation workers, service workers and other sections of the working class to the back-to-work campaign and the effort by the corporations to use the pandemic to increase exploitation. The protests against

police violence have been fueled by a broader social anger among millions of people.

At issue in every struggle ultimately is the question of political power: What class rules and in whose interests?

Within academia, a great deal of energy has been devoted to arguing against the centrality of class conflict. The basic truth of Marxism, that the history of mankind is the history of class struggle, was supposedly superseded by conflicts centered on race, gender and other identities. Even the notion of objective truth was denied in the post-modernist attack on “metanarratives.” The conception that the problems of mankind could only be resolved through the revolutionary mobilization of the working class against the capitalist system was to be relegated to a distant past.

The pandemic, however, has refuted these conceptions. Capitalism stands exposed as a historically bankrupt social and economic system. The overthrow of this system requires the mobilization of workers throughout the world on the basis of their common class interests. The wealth of the oligarchs must be seized and the gigantic corporations and banks turned into public utilities. The expropriators must be expropriated.

The Socialist Equality Party and our youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, urge students and workers at the University of Michigan to continue and broaden your struggle. Turn out to the working class and take up the fight for socialism.

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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