

University of Michigan graduate students vote to extend strike as opposition erupts at campuses throughout the US

By Genevieve Leigh
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Striking University of Michigan graduate instructors voted Sunday to extend their strike against the reopening policies of the university into the coming week.

The students in the UM Graduate Employees' Organization (GEO) concluded its initial four-day strike on Friday. At a meeting late Friday evening, the GEO announced that its steering committee was recommending the extension of the strike by another week as the demands of the instructors had not been met by the university.

The membership had the weekend to cast their vote for the extension of the strike. The results were released late Sunday night showing overwhelming support, with 80 percent voting in favor of the extension.

The strike has garnered immense support from undergraduate students, Residential Advisors, faculty, university staff, local workers and high school students, as well as students and workers from campuses across the country.

The groundswell of support is an indication of the immense opposition that exists in the working class to the reckless drive to reopen schools and workplaces as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to sweep through the country.

A report published Friday morning by *USA Today* gives indisputable evidence that the reopening of colleges and universities leads to an increase in infections throughout the community. The report showed that 19 of the 25 largest outbreaks in the US are in communities with colleges that have reopened for in-person learning.

Every student and worker on the university campus

and in the surrounding community has a stake in the outcome of this struggle.

To continue and expand the strike, workers and students throughout the university should establish a campus-wide strike committee to fight for the closure of campus for in-person learning, oppose reprisals and victimization by the university, and link up the struggle with students and workers throughout the country against the broader policy of the ruling class.

Yesterday, news broke of virus outbreaks at Michigan State University (MSU), just an hour away from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Opposition is brewing among students and staff at MSU over the same issues at the center of the strike at UM, and the closure of both of these campuses would save countless lives throughout the region.

Students and faculty at Iowa State University and the University of Iowa, located just two hours apart, are organizing a joint strike starting this Wednesday. At San Diego State University (SDSU), outrage is growing over reopening policies that have led to over 500 cases. Hundreds of students and faculty have signed on to a letter to oppose the reopening of the University of California, San Diego at the end of the month.

Students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison protested in-person learning on Saturday by setting up gravestones in front of the dining hall that students in quarantine have to use. As of Friday, more than 1,800 students had tested positive at the university. The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse has issued a "shelter in place" order which includes all residence halls on campus because of the rapidly growing number of cases.

The result of reopening campuses for in-person learning, as was widely predicted, is producing a catastrophe. On Sunday, the state of Wisconsin reported a new record of 1,582 cases, driven largely by the reopening of schools and the broader impact.

The campaign to reopen schools and universities is part of the ruling class's policy of "herd immunity"—that is, to allow the virus to spread without restraint. This policy, spearheaded by Trump but implemented by Democrats and Republicans in states throughout the country, has already led to almost 200,000 deaths in the US. The University of Washington now estimates that the number of deaths by the end of the year could rise to above 400,000.

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. As victims of COVID-19 were piling up in the thousands throughout the US, Democratic and Republican politicians were busy preparing a bailout of the rich on a scale unprecedented in world history. The so-called CARES Act, passed nearly unanimously at the end of March, sanctioned the funneling of more than \$3 trillion into Wall Street.

Once their wealth was secured, the ruling class immediately began its back-to-work campaign and then, as the fall semester approached, its back-to-school campaign.

The Democrats and Republicans are united in their drive to reopen schools. While Biden's tactics and rhetoric are different from Trump's, the fundamental conclusion remains the same: schools must reopen. Biden's wife is in the midst of a multiweek "Back to School Tour" that will stop in ten major cities to promote Biden's campaign to "reopen safely."

The ruling class has been aided and abetted in this campaign by corporate-controlled unions, which have done nothing to oppose the homicidal policy of the ruling class. In relation to the strike at University of Michigan, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the parent organization of the GEO, has deliberately isolated the GEO strike. While there has been a surge of public support for the strike across the country, AFT President and Democratic Party official Randi Weingarten has yet to even publicly acknowledge the strike's existence, let alone support it or call out other AFT unions.

Teachers, staff and students have begun forming a network of nationally coordinated Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees, independent of the corporate-controlled unions and both big-business parties, to stop the school reopenings.

Students at the University of Michigan have taken an important stand in defense of health against profit. However, this struggle must be developed into a broader fight of the entire working class against a social and economic system, capitalism, that subordinates the needs of society to the accumulation of profit by the rich.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality in the US is holding a national online meeting Thursday, at 8 PM EDT to organize students against the reckless reopening of schools. We urge students and youth to register for the event today .

To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>