



Graduate employees at Columbia, Yale vote to strike on April 18

New Haven Conn., and New York, NY, April 13, 2005: Graduate employees at Columbia University and Yale University have voted to go on strike at both campuses beginning Monday, April 18th. The coordinated job action is the first-ever multi-campus strike in the history of the Ivy League.

"A majority of teaching assistants on Yale's central campus want a union," said Mary Reynolds, a teaching assistant in Yale's American Studies Department and chair of the Graduate Employees Student Organization (GESO), an affiliate of UNITE/HERE. "Yale administrators are ignoring an overwhelming majority of teachers on our campus."

"We have strongly expressed a majority preference in favor of a union," said Felicity Palmer, a teaching assistant in English Department at Columbia and a member of the Graduate Student Employee United (GSEU), an affiliate of UAW Local 2110. "It's time for the Columbia administration to stop denying our democratic rights, and start working with us to improve wages and working conditions for academic workers who provide vital teaching and research services."

Teaching assistants will not teach their classes during the strike. Both universities use TAs to deliver a significant portion of undergraduate teaching hours.

Graduate employees on both campuses share common concerns, union leaders said, including the improved pay for graduate employees, quality, affordable health care and child care, and the establishment of an impartial grievance procedure.

On both campuses, strong majorities of graduate employees have stated their preference to deal with these issues by forming a union and bargaining a contract with their employer. This majority preference in favor of unionization on both campuses has been certified by public officials in New York and Connecticut.

After a count of union authorization cards in December of 2004, New York State Attorney General Elliott Spitzer certified that a majority of TAs and RAs are in favor of union representation at Columbia. Also in December, Connecticut Secretary of State Susan Bysiewicz certified 60% support in favor of union representation at Yale.

A unanimous National Labor Relations Board ruling in 2000 required private universities such as Yale and Columbia to negotiate with graduate employee unions. This precedent was overturned in a narrow, partisan 3-2 vote of the NLRB in 2004, with all of President Bush's appointees

voting against workers' rights and all previous appointees voting to uphold the established precedent.

Although the most recent NLRB decision means that private universities are no longer required to negotiate with graduate employee unions, union leaders emphasized that nothing in U.S. labor law prevents them from doing so.

"Our members have every right to work together with the University to bargain a contract that will improve working conditions for TAs and RAs, and enhance the quality of education on campus," said Maida Rosenstein, president of UAW Local 2110, which represents clerical workers on campus.

"Democracy has a place in every workplace," said Bob Proto of UNITE/HERE Local 35, which represents service and maintenance workers at Yale. "The goal of this job action is to convince administrators at Yale and Columbia to respect the rights of their own teachers."

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