

Lessons of the Harvard dining hall strike victory

Advance preparation

The 750 striking Harvard University Dining Service workers — cooks, dishwashers, servers and cashiers — brought multibillion-dollar Harvard University to its knees on Oct. 25, 2016. After a three-week strike, the university bosses caved, giving the members of UNITE HERE Local 26 even more than they had initially demanded.

Most importantly, all the health care takeaways the Harvard Corporation had demanded were off the table. The strike victory holds valuable lessons for the workers and oppressed in the age of global capitalism — particularly now, under the Trump administration and the rise of fascist, racist elements.

Workers World's Martha Grevatt interviewed Chief Steward Ed Childs, a cook and leader in Local 26 for more than 40 years. This is the first in a series of articles based on the interviews where Childs explains how the workers won.

By Ed Childs

The Harvard University Dining Service workers are a majority women, a majority immigrant and half workers of color. Our members are from all over the world — Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe, the Caribbean and Latin America. We have long-term veteran workers and young workers. How did this diverse workforce — who said to the world that “Health Care Is a Human Right!” — come together and defeat the Harvard Corporation, run by the likes of Citigroup and Goldman Sachs?

We had a militant rank-and-file committee, but most were new to organizing a fightback. Our strike was spread out over 20 different locations in eight schools in two different cities. How did we overcome these challenges?

We began preparing for a possible strike well in advance, holding numerous meetings in every dining hall, on every shift, as well as constituency meetings. These included constituencies within the union — cooks, dishwashers, servers and cashiers — but also constituencies on campus: law students and medical students; Black, Muslim, LGBTQ and women's organizations; and other campus unions. At every meeting we went over Harvard's takeaway demands point by point.

The need for affordable, quality and preventive health care is universally understood. Our rank and file was part of that experience. They recognized later why all these seemingly endless meetings were necessary.

Building union structure

Through the decades we have built a classic structure for union organizing and devel-

oped leadership in the rank and file. We did this through classes — for shop stewards, organizing and leadership — and by meeting with workers one-on-one. We brought leaders up from the bottom.

I teach a course on organizing. You need a structure. At each worksite there are one or two stewards and secondary leaders. We have regular steward and leadership meetings. The structure builds the ranks, gives you more options about how to organize and takes care of a high turnover of workers by not relying on just one leader. This means you can survive — it's more work, but you get more satisfaction and results. In the General Motors sit-downs in the 1930s, the United Auto Workers had a structure that engaged the rank and file. It could not have succeeded with a top-down, business unionism model.

In the past there had been a large turnover of top leaders, so we focused on building leaders in the dining halls again. No hall went through the past year without a major meeting every couple of months.

Another purpose of these meetings was to politicize the issue of health care. As far as the bourgeoisie were concerned, the money that goes toward health care was forced upon them by past struggles, and now they were going to take it back and keep the money themselves. The capitalists let loose on us over health care.

There had been a successful campaign to get rid of the previous Harvard president, Larry Summers. The CEO of Goldman Sachs then took over the reins as interim president. That's when Harvard Corporation took direct con-



WW PHOTO: LIZ GREEN

trol. The president had an open house, invited union people and spelled out that the corporation intended to take a lot away and the main thing was health care. Throughout the entire economy, the bosses are doing it, so Goldman Sachs figures, why not at Harvard?

Goldman, Bank of America, Citibank and their ilk all have had campaigns to undo health care. They actually told us years before that they would target us. It was a political campaign to undercut pensions, to keep layoffs with no compensation, but particularly to cut our health care. They never said they couldn't afford it. They said, “This is the industry out there.” To settle our health care demand would have cost them less than half a million dollars. But they offered \$1 million to \$1.5 million worth of stuff we weren't even asking for if we would just drop our demand to hold the line on health care. Our ranks knew that.

On June 20 our contract expired. The usual summer layoffs took out all but 200 of our members. In September everyone came back ready to fight. There was a near-consensus on campus to support us if we struck for health care. We gave the bosses an ultimatum: If you don't give in, we are going out.

Building coalition around health care benefits

Coalition building was paramount. Spending over 40 years in the leadership of Workers World Party has taught me that. We reached out to all groups that had an interest in join-

ing us in the struggle to maintain health care benefits.

Everyone in the university community is in some way affected by the lack of adequate or affordable medical care or discrimination in health care. Professors and graduate student workers — who at Harvard are not unionized — are threatened by increased payments for health care. There are students who have no health insurance.

Women, Muslims, people of color and LGBTQ people are all discriminated against by the health care industry under capitalism. They had a stake in the coalition, which was built up slowly and with patience over time. It included groups like the Black Student Association, Harvard Islamic Society, Muslim Student Society, Harvard Law Students, Black Law Students, Student Labor Action Movement (SLAM), campus LGBTQ groups and women's groups, and the Jewish student group Hillel.

Well before the strike began, the union embraced all these constituencies with a stake in the demand for affordable, quality, preventive health care for all. We met at a dormitory called Adams House in April, and this cemented the coalition among our members, students, faculty and other campus unions. A lot of radical students, including those in SLAM, live at Adams. Two progressive professors hosted the meeting. The union officialdom of UNITE HERE Local 26, who came at our invitation, tried to change the coalition-building character of the meeting and run it like a regular membership meeting, but we wouldn't let that happen.

A lot of student and campus union allies spoke. Our rank-and-file leaders spoke. The Black law students had just had an occupation over racism, and no one had supported them until our union got behind them. They were fantastic when they spoke. That meeting was where we first met the medical students. The room sat 100, and it was not only packed but overflowed into the street. The meeting made an impression on the union leadership.

We also brought our coalition partners into our dining hall meetings so they would bond with the workers and the workers could see the living coalition. By the time the strike began in October, we had our fighting infrastructure well-established.

Phebe Eckfeldt, Steve Gillis, Steve Kirschbaum, Milt Neidenberg and Minnie Bruce Pratt contributed to this series of articles.

Victorious Harvard dining hall strike

By Ed Childs

Well in advance of the Harvard University Dining Service strike, we knew we would need to build a solidarity coalition to take on the Harvard Corporation. We spent months laying the groundwork. (For Part 1, about strike preparations, go to tinyurl.com/z3goecw.)

Once the strike began the coalition was critical. Harvard Medical School students staged two walkouts in support of the striking HUDS workers. The Student Labor Action Movement played a big role; they organized a dinner for us on campus where faculty, administrators, deans, parents and our workers spoke. Campus environmentalists saw worker health as necessary for a healthy campus environment. The Jewish group Hillel hosted meetings and fed us, and rabbis spoke at our rallies.

The LGBTQ student group wrote a long op-ed in the campus newspaper titled "This Strike Is So Gay," because the fight for health care is so important to their constituency. We in Local 26 have always led by example; we won the first nondiscrimination language on sexual orientation at the university in 1983. Harvard caved in to this demand after we took a strike pledge that year.

Students from the Harvard School of Public Health and the medical school were in the forefront because they took their oath as doctors seriously: to not just treat illness in society but to prevent it. How can we prevent illness and promote good health when workers on our campus cannot afford healthcare? they asked.

The coalition also brought in the custodians whose contract was almost up; they had similar issues around health insurance and were themselves threatening to strike. In fact, after the HUDS victory, their union, Service Employees Local 32 BJ' won a good contract that kept health care intact.

Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers, the largest union on campus, comprised of 4,500 workers, was poised to join forces with us earlier in the year. When Harvard got wind of that, they intimidated HUCTW and got them to ratify a new contract in May. Although HUCTW has higher fees for various health services in their new contract, management had to cancel plans to impose deductibles to avoid a clerical strike. Clerical workers walked the picket line with us.

Members and leaders from the Graduate Student Association, who were filing for union recognition, joined the strike lines.

Building broad solidarity

We met with Cambridge and Boston city councils, and they both endorsed the HUDS workers' struggle — the first time before the strike began and the second during the strike.

We knew a striking union has to create activities that promote bonding between workers. We worked with New York UNITE HERE Local 100. They, along with locals in Atlantic City, Hartford and Philadelphia, sent large delegations to one of our biggest rallies. Local 100 expects to wage similar campus campaigns, and the International union is predicting a number of strikes across the country stemming from the Harvard strike. This kind of struggle raises consciousness and encourages militancy.

The HUDS unit is the largest in Local 26. When you're building a strike coalition, you have to be sure your union leadership — of the local and the International — is part of it. I don't see a strike surviving without the union's backing.

The local did not want to strike, but we knew we had no choice. so we rallied and called for the strike. Then the union leadership had to go along with us, because they couldn't let Harvard destroy one of their stellar contracts. Losing would have had national repercussions with many contracts coming up. Hotels are becoming very difficult to organize, especially in misnamed "right to work" (for less) states, but universities are wide open.

Our group of workers in the local met often in order to steer the strike in a progressive and militant manner.

The International brought in full-time paid staff and member organizers from around the country as a support team to do things like write media releases. At first their organizers tried to undo our structure. It was a struggle to have our leaders stay in leadership — issues arose like who was going to give a speech. While we butted heads when staff tried to disempower the coalition, we worked with them. And we succeeded because we had our structure already established. In the end the union's resources were indispensable.

Because we built the coalition the right way, we won!

Now we're engaged in poststrike activism. We met with Islamic students and held a joint forum Feb. 4. There we discussed fighting Islamophobia as well as lessons learned on strike and where we go from here. We put both in the context of the fight against Trump and fascism. We won a huge battle, but the struggle continues every day! □

Lessons of the victorious Harvard dining hall strike

Class-struggle unionism in action

By Ed Childs

We had no illusions that we could beat this country’s oldest corporation — Harvard Corporation, which follows the dictates of Wall Street — by just going through the motions of picketing each worksite. Our tactics were all militant, class-struggle tactics: constant pickets, marches and rallies with raucous chanting and constant drumming on plastic buckets. You could hear us all over campus and in classrooms.

Picketing lasted from 5 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the dining halls, with marches to the law school, the business school, etc., every afternoon. We marched to football games and Alumni Week events. We had the support of athletic teams, including the football team. Over 400 workers marched through Harvard Yard and Harvard Square, where there were lots of people and traffic. Greater Boston labor came out in strength for mass protests that drew more than 1,000 people.

Over 100 workers went by bus from the main campus in Cambridge to Harvard Medical School in Boston. Workers greeted the medical students as they walked out of class. Together, they held a loud, two-hour rally. We targeted Harvard Corporation members’ homes and businesses. Supporters in other parts of the country picketed board members in their area. On Oct. 14, the president of UNITE HERE Local 26 and a group of women in the local’s leadership sat down in the middle of the street and were arrested.

‘Support from all over the world’

We were getting support from all over the world because we took on Harvard — Wall Street in the world’s eyes — and because health care is a universally recognized human right. At first, workers felt they were just fighting for themselves. By the end of the first week, we felt we were fighting for the whole country, and by the second week’s end we knew we were fighting for health care worldwide.

Even before the strike, our first international support came from a labor federation in occupied Palestine. When the strike happened, letters and articles of support poured in from students, workers and faculty in South Africa, Japan, Brazil, Ireland, Russia and other European countries, as well as all over the U.S. The

World Federation of Trade Unions supported us, and while they were meeting in South Africa, we composed a message to the Congress of South African Trade Unions supporting their general strike.

The moneyed elite was getting worried about our escalation plans and the expansion of our unity. We had met with local Black Lives Matter activists and BLM organizers who had led high school walkouts. They came to our pickets, where they proposed, as a possibility, that high school students would walk out in solidarity with us. It was good for us that these other struggles and ours were happening simultaneously.

Harvard management started to break down by the third week. Students bombarded them with complaints about closed dining halls. Morale on campus was low; the only high morale was in support of us. Events were falling apart without food service. At the Kennedy School, where the world bourgeoisie meet all the time, and at the School of Business, meetings were collapsing.

Out of 750 members, only 24 crossed the picket line and four of those came back out. But we had to take into account the time element. HUDS workers had just come off a 2-3 month layoff with no unemployment compensation — thanks to a Reagan-era federal law that denies benefits to food service workers and custodians during “seasonal layoffs.” We would have had difficulty sustaining a protracted strike.

‘Ratcheting up our tactics’

Both sides were cracking. It was the last gasp for them and for us, so we knew we had to employ drastic actions. By the third week, our conversations were all about ratcheting up our tactics.

The culmination of three weeks of class struggle came on the evening of Oct. 24. After a student walkout from a class where former Harvard President Larry Summers was the guest lecturer, the students joined the strikers who were rallying in the Yard. They marched over to the building where negotiations were taking place. Then 500 students marched into the building, chanting, “If we don’t get it, shut it down!” and took over the lobby while 300 workers kept up a noisy line outside. The stu-

dents stayed late into the night, chanting and drumming. Negotiations went on, and at 1:30 a.m. the next day, Harvard caved in.

We got a total victory, everything we demanded and more. We won wage increases amounting to \$3 an hour over the five-year contract (retroactive to the June 20 contract expiration date); a substantial, first-time-ever stipend during summer layoffs; better, less expensive health insurance, including for retirees; increased uniform and shoe allowances; and strengthened gender identity nondiscrimination terms. The new contract established a task force through which union members have the power to stop discrimination and promote diversity in the workplace — a demand the corporation insisted it would never accept. The university’s recognition of “Columbus Day” was replaced by Indigenous Peoples Day.

Most importantly, all the health care take-aways that Harvard Corporation was demanding were off the table.

The bosses had been testing the ground to see how they could destroy us. In the middle of negotiations, they fired their lead negotiator, Harvard’s general counsel, and hired Paul Curran, well-known in Boston as a professional union buster. He tried to bust city unions, including the school bus drivers’ union.

Then they fired their press secretary and hired a reporter recently fired by the Miami Herald. She lost her job there for deliberately lying, fabricating racist stories against Black residents and covering up a racist charter school movement; she was a personal friend of a pro-charter school committeeperson. The Black community had picketed the Miami Herald to protest her racist lies. Harvard immediately hired her, and she set up a media campaign attacking us, putting lie after lie in local and campus press.

The press, which wouldn’t talk to us, tried to turn students against us by saying more money for workers would mean less for scholarships. Harvard tried to break our coalition by getting professors and deans on their side, but none of the deans and only one or two right-wing professors meekly opposed us. In fact, everyone below the president of the university supported us. There was mass student support at ev-

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Lessons of the victorious Harvard dining hall strike

Marxism-Leninism and unionism

By Ed Childs

Beating back the attack on health care — saving it from the 1% — is the beginning of something with national and international significance. People see Trump attacking even the limited Affordable Care Act and feel hopeless about the fight for health care. We showed we can win.

By the third week, Harvard's position was crumbling. We pushed them over the edge when students occupied the building where we were negotiating. Seizing the means of production isn't just about factories. When you are up against a for-profit university, where finance capital trains its own, a classroom building is the means of production.

Occupations are a left tactic communists perfected in the 1930s. As Sam Marcy explained in the book "High Tech, Low Pay," "Seizure and occupation of the plants and other facilities have the effect of hastening a crisis in the relationship between the employers and the workers. ... It can change the form of the struggle, take it out of its narrow confines and impart to it a broader perspective. In truth, it brings to the surface a new working-class perspective on the struggle between the workers and the bosses. It says in so many words that we are not tied to a one-dimensional type of struggle with the bosses at a time when they

every one of the 20 schools; even the Republican Party's student group endorsed us.

Students were planning to seize another building and get arrested. We planned for student and worker hunger strikes. With the escalation of class-struggle tactics, and publicized plans to take the struggle even further, Harvard caved. The takeover was the powerful move that broke the Corporation's back. We were under a huge amount of pressure, but when the occupation happened, it was like two armies fighting, both exhausted, but then one gets fresh troops and just crushes the other side.

The political position of Wall Street was to defeat us. Now, we have been praised all over the world for protecting health care against the bourgeoisie who were trying to beat us down. □

have the levers of political authority in their hands."

That is as true in a restaurant, hospital or university as inside a plant.

In the middle of the occupation, the Boston Globe and the Boston Herald, which had not covered us since the first day, suddenly had an editorial saying to settle with the workers. TV news, which had been negative, said the same. Even Harvard's own press people told the media to say it was time for Harvard to settle.

Now the UNITE HERE International has claimed the Harvard strike as its own. Because it was so successful and had so much support, they wanted to call for a general strike on Inauguration Day. The international president of the union could not convince anyone in the AFL-CIO, but he said that the Harvard strike proves it can be done. The union also asked its employers to give workers the day off to protest immigrant-bashing. Would this be happening inside our union if we had not waged a successful strike against Harvard — and indirectly against Wall Street?

Employing communist tactics

With the strike victory behind us, we need to absorb its lessons. What is the role of communists in unions: What do they do? All of our tactics have to be viewed as Leninist tactics as distinct from ultra-leftism. We need to revive a revolutionary Leninist union perspective and not let Lenin's union work be lost.

What Lenin wrote in "Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder" describes revolutionary tactics to a "T." Lenin was worried that his experience leading to the success of the Russian Revolution would be lost because Russia was a backward country and the bourgeoisie was organizing to crush it.

Union leaders like Samuel Gompers in the U.S. and others in Europe laughed at Lenin, but Lenin said to fight it out with the labor bureaucracy!

Look at the union leadership in the U.S. since the American Federation of Labor's founding in 1886. There have only been six presidents: Gompers, Green, Meany, Kirkland, Sweeney, Trumka — the first three were for life. But Lenin said to stay in the unions.

There has been a debate in the labor movement about what won our strike, but it was classic Leninism: We won with a political struggle. I've learned from Sam Marcy, Milt Neidenberg and others how we struggle — "mild in manner, bold in matter" — by bringing the officials along but controlling our message and getting the politics across. If we ignore the fact that this was led and nurtured by communists, we lose half the meaning of this strike.

All of my work in the union has been about applying a classic Marxist-Leninist approach to a current situation. Workers World Party has been the guiding light of this union from the time when we first organized, through past strikes and last year's battle. Workers World was the only news source anywhere to chronicle every event of the strike from the workers' viewpoint.

What Marx wrote in "Trade Unions: Their Past, Present and Future" in 1866 applies totally today: "Apart from their original purposes, [unions] must now learn to act deliberately as organizing centers of the working class, in the broad interest of its complete emancipation. They must aid every social and political movement tending in that direction. Considering themselves and acting as the champion representatives of the whole working class, that cannot fail to enlist the non-society [workers] into their ranks.

"They must look carefully after the interests of the worst paid trades, such as the agricultural laborers [and today the service proletariat, including precarious workers], rendered powerless by exceptional circumstances. They must convince the world at large that their efforts, far from being narrow and selfish, aim at the emancipation of the downtrodden millions."

Workers World Party First Secretary Larry Holmes, speaking to party labor cadre in September, brought this up to date: "The organization of the working class must advance to encompass larger and larger numbers, whatever their circumstances — not based on an industry or a country, but on overthrowing capitalism."

Phebe Eckfeldt, Steve Gillis, Martha Grevatt, Steve Kirschbaum, Milt Neidenberg and Minnie Bruce Pratt contributed to this series of articles.

Strikers win at Harvard

Broad support for dishwashers, cooks vs. billionaires

By Ed Childs and Steve Gillis on October 31, 2016

CAMBRIDGE, MA — For 20 days Harvard Square was the scene of the most raucous, disruptive demonstrations this town had experienced since the Vietnam War. The workers at Harvard University Dining Services were on strike and Harvard wouldn't budge. But finally the bankers who control the Harvard Corporation caved, literally overnight.

At 1:30 a.m. on Oct. 25, leaders of UNITE HERE Local 26 announced "total victory" to cheering strikers and students who had been occupying the square and beating drums throughout the night.

The 736 cooks, dishwashers and dining hall workers celebrated the details the next day at a packed ratification meeting. They won retroactive wage increases amounting to \$3 an hour over the five-year contract; a substantial, first-time-ever stipend during summer layoffs; better, less expensive health insurance, including for retirees; increased uniform and shoe allowances; strengthened gender identity nondiscrimination terms; and union-power language that exceeded their initial demands.

And there was more.



The new contract established a Task Force in which union members will exercise power to stop



discrimination and promote diversity in the workplace — a demand the corporation insisted it would never accept.

In desperation to end the strike, Harvard's board also agreed to pay the workers' check deductions during the 20-day strike at 100 percent for health, vision, dental, life, long-term disability, home and auto insurance, plus parking fees and public transportation to and from picket lines. Some strikers who work at the subcontracted medical school and faculty club will also receive a \$500 strike bonus.

The vote was 583 to 1.

'Harvard's attack was political'

The whole world knew that the Harvard Corporation, with its \$40 billion endowment, could afford contract justice for those who feed its community, who earned on average less than \$35,000 a year before the strike.

Ed Childs has been a cook at Harvard for 42 years. He's a union founder, a Local 26 Chief Steward and a National Committee member of Workers World Party. Childs explained: "Harvard's attack was entirely political. What the bankers from Goldman Sachs, Bank of America and Citigroup, who direct the

Harvard Corporation, wanted most was to pick \$4,500 per year of health insurance deductibles and copays from our members' pockets. They had forced this on professors and other campus workers first; it wasn't just their local program.

"Read the headlines this week. All across the country capitalist insurance companies have announced increases of 27 percent and up for poor people using so-called Affordable Care Act products. We decided it was up to the cooks and dishwashers to draw the line for everybody and fight Harvard's dangerous program of austerity!"

Student/labor coalition fights for healthcare

It wasn't just that the students, faculty and other workers on campus truly love their dining hall family, who sustain their work from breakfast to midnight snacks — even though that bond was evident daily in mass demonstrations that shook the ivied walls for three weeks.

For nearly a year leading up to the strike, Local 26, plus students and faculty, had built a political coalition based on the demand that "healthcare is a human right." Especially at Harvard's Medical School and School of Public Health, hundreds of students organized and hosted meetings with dining hall workers to develop solidarity. Their public manifestos tore back the veneer of Harvard's academic liberalism and exposed its neoliberal core.

Student publications and protest actions at local corporate offices called out the interlocking connections of the Harvard Corporation and its Board of Overseers with Wall Street's biggest banks and insurance companies, as well as with high tech and pharmaceutical giants like Google, Merck, Abbott Labs and CVS. They put anti-labor Harvard President Drew Faust in the same boat as criminal pharma CEO Martin Shkreli.

In a Sept. 30 public letter that went viral before and during the strike, two students wrote: "As medical students at Harvard, we were deeply troubled to learn that our university was proposing changes to dining workers' health plans that would make essential health care unaffordable. It is shocking that these low-income workers would be better off financially if they were not offered employer-sponsored insurance."

As the national stakes mounted and Harvard dug in, the International UNITE HERE leadership poured in vital resources and staff from San Francisco, Las Vegas, Detroit, New York and elsewhere to fortify the

strikers' fund and boots on the ground. Local 26 President Brian Lang and chief negotiator Michael Kramer joined nine courageous women strikers, Black, Latina and white, in civil disobedience arrests on Oct. 14 that shut down Harvard Square for hours. Meanwhile, more than 500 strikers and their allies banged drums, blew whistles and proclaimed, "No justice, no peace!"

The next Saturday, Oct. 23, the Massachusetts AFL-CIO organized a demonstration of 2,000 in Harvard Square. As speakers blasted the corporation's greed from the back of Teamster Local 25's flatbed truck, that union's president threw \$10,000 into the war chest. Despite a force of militarized police lining the way, Cambridge's main thoroughfare was shut down as a militant march on City Hall was joined by busloads from New York, Atlantic City, Philadelphia and New Haven.

Only one U.S. presidential campaign weighed in on this literally life-and-death national issue. The Monica Moorehead/Lamont Lilly campaign of Workers World Party was engaged through the candidates' daily presence, assistance and pro-strike publicity, and they got an enthusiastic response from many strikers.



Women lead the way

Lawrence Summers has been a professor and president of Harvard, a chief economist at the World Bank, Secretary of the Treasury in the Clinton administration, adviser to the privatization of post-Soviet states and a favorite millionaire ideologue on the Wall Street lecture circuit. He infamously remarked while Harvard president that women are "underrepresented" in science and engineering due to a "different availability of aptitude at the high end." The HUDS strike was led by women — Latina, African American, Caribbean, Asian, Indigenous, white, LGBTQ — who make up more than 60 percent of the

workers. They engineered ear-splitting disruptions that created a profound crisis for the corporation and its overseers.

While traditional picket lines played a role at 40 gates, strikers took on the street tactics of Occupy Wall Street and the Black Lives Matter movement. For 22 days, even after the "tentative agreement," strikers daily converged from their strike posts to form mass marches for miles through "private" campus courtyards and inside buildings, turning five-gallon food buckets and kitchen spoons into weapons, along with whistles, trumpets, trombones, cymbals and bullhorns.

The slogan "No peace" became reality for the bosses, from the tony business and law schools to the Crimson Homecoming of alumni and the usually staid Charles Regatta, whose 300,000 spectators were drawn into the inescapable fight. President Faust heard the constant drumbeat, day and night for 22 days, as protests followed her every move.

Robin McDowell, a first-term masters student focusing on labor history, gave WW this eyewitness account of the walkouts and occupations of Oct. 25–26: "At 2 p.m., the sound of drums and chants was heard all over Harvard Yard. Undergraduate and graduate students flocked to Massachusetts Hall to begin the walkout and march to 124 Mt. Auburn Street where negotiations were taking place.

"When we arrived, workers lined up outside the doors as students poured into the lobby, still chanting, still beating on buckets. It felt like the four-story building was shaking with our energy. Curious employees came to the windows and watched.

"After about 15 minutes of chanting, we all sat down, almost in unison. Everyone seemed to understand that we weren't budging until Local 26 negotiators emerged victorious. We heard that we'd see the end by 5:30. After 5:30 rolled around with no word, we sat on the hard marble floor, reading books, talking amongst ourselves. At 6 p.m. the doors would close, so everyone inside texted friends and posted calls to social media telling people to arrive by then. Employees began leaving work. One woman encouraged us, 'Keep this up. It's working!' as she left for the day."

Strike support scares the bosses

The Boston Globe and New York Times rushed an editorial and op-ed to web-print late that night

announcing support for the strike — showing an open split among Harvard financiers.

The strike settlement resulted in HUDS workers paying substantially less for health insurance than before. They got a better plan design than President Faust's own family. All this exceeded the union's goal of \$35,000 a year and was a direct reflection of the power the rank and file were able to bring to the street, despite all the difficulties, sacrifices and hardships.

As strikers return to work, these victories are being played out on the shop floor. At Adams House, the workers got a rousing ovation from students at breakfast.

Sarah Cleary, one of the strikers who was arrested and a cook at a "Restaurant Associates" isolated, subcontracted shop at the medical school's Longwood campus, described her experience: "Being on strike was truly one of the most powerful experiences of my life. Some of us in a way didn't want that experience to end. I'd never been active in the union before. There wasn't even a shop steward in my kitchen.

"The first day back, I told my manager that I'd be assuming the responsibility of shop steward from now on. He told me, 'Fine, you can talk to employees during breaks and after your shift.' I look forward to the new contract printed and in my hands.

"It calls for no discrimination for union activities, and it gives shop stewards the right to conduct union business with members anytime while on the clock. [These two are first-ever worker-power victories.]

"I am very much looking forward to being a part of building the union stronger and using this experience of victory in struggles to come."

Ed Childs is chief steward of UNITE HERE Local 26. Steve Gillis is financial secretary of Steelworkers Local 8751.

WW Photo Credit: Liz Green

Filthy rich Harvard

By Stephen Millies on October 31, 2016

Last year Harvard University's stash of stocks and bonds was worth \$37.6 billion. That's almost as much as the gross domestic product of the 81 million people in the Democratic Republic of Congo, according to the CIA World Factbook.

Why should Harvard be so rich and people in Congo so poor? That's the result of imperialism and a capitalist world market that started with the extermination of Indigenous peoples in the Americas and the African Holocaust.

Despite its wealth, Harvard tried to break the strike of its dining hall workers and take away their health benefits. Nearly 800 members of UNITE HERE Local 26, supported by Harvard students and the community, beat them back.

Harvard's loot, like capitalism itself, according to Karl Marx, "comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt."

The generosity of slavemaster Issac Royall Jr. helped establish Harvard Law School 200 years ago. Royall's family fled the Caribbean island of Antigua after an attempted slave revolt in 1736 that was crushed by burning 77 Africans to death.

The Royalls arrived in Massachusetts with at least 27 enslaved people. ("On the Battlefield of Merit" by Daniel R. Coquillette and Bruce A. Kimball) Following protests in 2015, Harvard agreed to change its law school seal, which featured the Royall family crest.

Harvard's largest benefactor was hedge fund operator John Paulson, who gave \$400 million to the school in 2015. The Wall Street Journal declared "foreclosures made John Paulson a billion dollars." (April 21, 2010) Children of families who lost their homes should rejoice that their misery resulted in Harvard's School of Engineering and Applied Sciences getting a hefty gift.

Puritan bigots and killers

Industrial Workers of the World leader Bill Haywood wrote in his autobiography that his father's ancestors



"would probably run to the Puritan bigots or the cavalier pirates. Neither case would give me reason for pride."

The wealth of so many "proper Bostonians" and the rest of New England "old money" is rooted in blood. It's well known that the Pilgrims would have starved to death without the corn and other aid given by Native people.

In return the colonists launched extermination campaigns, including the Great Swamp Massacre in 1675 in which hundreds of Native children were slaughtered. This atrocity was glorified in a history of "King Philip's War" by the Puritan minister Increase Mather, who became Harvard's president in 1692.

Karl Marx wrote how "those sober virtuosi of Protestantism, the Puritans of New England" set a price of 50 English pounds in 1744 on the scalps of Indigenous women and children.

The United States is the only country in the world that has a holiday called "Thanksgiving" that celebrates genocide. Since 1970 the United American Indians of New England has held a "Day of Mourning" on the same date in Plymouth, Mass., to tell the truth about this holocaust.

Colonial New England's economy revolved around supplying slave plantations in the Caribbean with food and other supplies. In return the 60 rum distilleries in Massachusetts and 30 in Rhode Island imported molasses. President John Adams didn't know why people "should blush to confess that molasses was an essential ingredient in American

independence.” (“Capitalism & Slavery” by Eric Williams)

Slave trading was important, too. The forerunner of Brown University in Providence — which like Harvard belongs to the “Ivy League” — was started by one of the biggest slave dealers, Nicholas Brown Jr.

It was on behalf of these Yankee pirates that the slave trade was kept from being prohibited for at least 20 years in Article 1, Section 9 of the U.S. Constitution.

The other New England

No wonder abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison called the constitution a “covenant with hell.” Garrison was dragged with a rope by a mob from Boston’s State Street financial district in 1835 and only escaped with his life when the mayor had him arrested.

Abolitionists were part of the other New England. The Black man Crispus Attucks became the first martyr of the U.S. American Revolution. Black soldiers helped repulse the Redcoats on Bunker Hill.

In the years leading up to the Civil War, even some of Boston’s wealthy helped the anti-slavery cause. Railroad magnate John Murray Forbes shipped rifles to abolitionists in Kansas and welcomed John Brown to Boston.

But the Forbes family fortune was based on smuggling opium into China. Another big-time drug pusher was Warren Delano, a grandfather of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Harvard’s Fogg Art Museum is named for the China merchant William Haynes Fogg.

The only reason Northern capitalists supported the right of African-American men to vote was to prevent repudiation of the Civil War debt. W.E.B. Du Bois proved this in his classic “Black Reconstruction.”

Yet it was Northern money men who helped overthrow Reconstruction, that brief period of Black freedom from 1865 to 1877. Here’s the historic arc of the capitalist class: While the father-in-law of John D. Rockefeller — the world’s first billionaire — was a conductor on the Underground Railroad, his grandson Nelson Rockefeller was the butcher of Attica.

Harvard was part of this racist reaction, which included the “eugenics” movement that promoted Nazi-like theories of “racial purity.” Tens of thousands of people, mostly young Black women, were sterilized against their will under laws upheld in a notorious

1927 Supreme Court decision written by Harvard graduate Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

A more refined version of Donald Trump was Harvard President A. Lawrence Lowell, who served as vice president of the racist Immigration Restriction League. (“Harvard’s Eugenics Era,” Harvard Magazine, March-April 2016)

Lowell gave Harvard students credit for joining the National Guard to try to break the IWW strike of Lawrence, Mass., textile workers in 1912. (“How Harvard Rules” by John Trumbour) Many of today’s Harvard students would have joined the IWW instead.

Armed with a Harvard Ph.D., Lothrop Stoddard published “The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy,” an influential racist diatribe during the 1920s.

More recently Harvard Professor Henry Kissinger theorized about the tactical use of nuclear weapons in a 1957 book. As Nixon’s National Security Adviser, Kissinger helped kill millions in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

Harvard’s dining hall workers and their supporters confronted these centuries of racism and male chauvinism when they defeated Harvard’s filthy money.

Harvard strikers show solidarity with COSATU

By Harvard University Dining Hall Strike Committee on October 30, 2016



The following abridged solidarity statement was sent to the Congress of South African Trade Unions by the Harvard University dining hall strike committee.

To our sisters and brothers of COSATU,

Our sisters and brothers of the Harvard dining hall workers of the UNITE HERE union Local 26 voted enthusiastically to send a solidarity message to you.

We greet you with solidarity.

For 40 years we have supported each other. During the appalling South African apartheid government, our members were arrested many times in the battles to stop Harvard University from supporting your enslavement by the apartheid government.

Some of the same corporations we are fighting today — Goldman Sachs, Bank of America and Citigroup Bank — profited greatly from your slavlike work conditions. These corporations lead the Harvard Corporation, which controls all major decisions at Harvard.

During apartheid, our dining hall workers refused to serve banquets for the South African apartheid government put on by the Harvard administration.

To force the Harvard administration to stop their support for apartheid, we had a coalition with the

Black students and others. This coalition put on a rally of over 5,000 workers and students to demand Harvard divest from enslaving you, and at this rally we had COSATU leaders speak. COSATU's words inspired us, because you used that time to support our struggle and the strike that we were about to have.

Our solidarity back then led us to have successful struggles. Today, we face the same opponents as then, from the Harvard Corporation to Johannesburg. Again it is the "less-than-1%" exploiting the "over-99%."

Our issues we are fighting for today — health care, retirement and layoffs — are similar to those of all workers of the world. Today, we are both on strike to stop this cruelty to workers.

Again: Solidarity. A better world is in birth.

The Harvard University Dining Hall Workers Strike Committee, UNITE HERE Local 26

Ed Childs, Chief Steward

Workers bus to Harvard protest

By Catherine Zeitz on October 26, 2016

A busload of workers from UNITE HERE Local 100 in



New York arrived at Cambridge Common in Massachusetts on Oct. 22. They came in solidarity with the Harvard University dining hall workers, who have been on strike for better health care benefits for several weeks. Members of Parents to Improve School Transportation and Community-Labor United for Postal Jobs and Services joined Local 100 on the bus.

Local 100 shops represented on the bus included New York Life, Hunter College, J.P. Morgan, Columbia University, Montclair State University, organized by Local 100 Secretary-Treasurer José Maldonado and Lead Organizer Shafiqur Rahman.

Along with 1,000 Local 26 supporters, we marched through Harvard Yard and down Massachusetts Avenue to City Hall, where we had a second rally. Local 100 militantly chanted, "No contract, no peace!" and many other chants throughout the march.

On the way home, Maldonado strongly stated that, in solidarity, Local 100 will supply staff and resources to the Harvard dining hall strikers' campaign. Some of the children on the bus chanted, "All day and all night! Harvard workers on strike!"

Local 100 will celebrate the passing of a New York City food service worker retention bill on Oct. 31 at 4 p.m. on the steps of New York's City Hall. This bill will make sure cafeteria workers can't be unfairly fired when buildings undergo new ownership. The new owners are now required to keep the workers for 90 days; workers can take violations to the Supreme Court.

Workers united will never be defeated!

WW Photo Credit: Johnnie Stevens

Support surges for militant Harvard workers' strike

By Gerry Scoppettuolo on October 22, 2016



Update, Oct. 25 — The dining service workers of UNITE HERE Local 26 have beaten back the billionaire university for a big win. At 1 a.m. on Oct. 25, HUDS workers announced a tentative agreement that met their demands on health benefits and wages. Hundreds of Harvard students had militantly occupied the negotiating site in solidarity, chanting, “If WE don’t get it, shut it down!”

CAMBRIDGE, MA — More than 1,000 striking dining hall workers and supporters, members of UNITE HERE Local 26 in Boston, shook and rattled Harvard University’s ivory towers today in the biggest show of fightback and labor militancy yet, on the 18th day of their strike. Massachusetts Avenue was shut down for more than an hour as the multinational, multilingual union members, 60 percent of whom are women, chanted “Shut it down!” Earlier in the day, a group of Harvard University Dining Service workers and supporters marched on the Head of the Charles Regatta, the world’s largest rowing event held on the Charles River in Massachusetts.

The dining hall cooks, servers and dishwashers are showing by their resolve that it is they — and not the wealthy Harvard Corporation and its \$37 billion endowment — who are in control of their destiny. The HUDS strike is raising the crucial demand that “health care is a human right!” The union is demanding no concessions on the health care plan they currently have and refusing the huge deductibles and copays that Harvard is trying to force on them.

The workers are holding the line for quality, preventive health care for workers and their families, and their fight for this basic human right has struck a chord

worldwide. More and more education workers are coming under attack from big business/big education institutions like Harvard, which are run by representatives of Citigroup, Bank of America and Goldman Sachs. They are also fighting for an annual base salary of \$35,000.

At the rally, the Harvard 9 — striking women who were arrested last week for sitting down in the middle of Harvard Square — promised to “get arrested again until we win!” They spoke from a huge flatbed truck stage provided by Teamsters Local 25, and were followed by a long line of students from the Harvard Medical School and the Harvard School of Public Health.

Students from Tufts University, Northeastern University, the University of Massachusetts-Boston, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Wesleyan and Yale universities came to show support. On Oct. 17, 500 students got up in the middle of their classes and walked out. They marched past cheering strikers and held a rally in Harvard Yard. A delegation from the Monica Moorehead/Lamont Lilly Workers World Party Presidential Campaign marched too.

The strikers’ militancy was matched by the unprecedented display of labor solidarity at the rally. Roxana Rivera, president of 32BJ SEIU’s District 615, joined after participating in a similar action minutes before at nearby Tufts University. “On behalf of the 18,000 members of my union who do much the same kind of work you do, I tell you that we also represent 1,000 workers at Harvard, and we may be joining you on strike too soon!” Immigrant workers are the backbone of both Rivera’s union and Local 26.

The huge Teamster presence was organized by Boston Local 25, whose president, Sean O’Brien, chaired the rally. “When you take on Local 26, you are taking on 1.4 million Teamsters,” he shouted to the roaring crowd. Teamsters have donated \$10,000 to the HUDS strike support fund.

Unions from through the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions sent delegations by car and bus to the rally. UNITE HERE Local 100 (New York City), Local 54 (Atlantic City) and Local 23 (Philadelphia) came, as well as UNITE HERE International President D. Taylor. UNITE HERE Local 100 recently won a major victory when the New York City Council passed the

Worker Retention Bill, which requires a 90-day retention period for food service workers when an owner or operator terminates a food service contract for a corporate cafeteria, arena, cultural institution, etc.

They were joined by the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers; the Massachusetts Nurses Association; United Steelworkers Local 8751, Boston School Bus drivers; International Electrical Workers Local 2222, Verizon workers; the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers; the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees; Operating Engineers Local 877; and Service Employees Local 509, human service workers and educators. Food service workers from UNITE HERE Local 217 at the University of Hartford, who are in the middle of contract negotiations, came to show support.

In a sign of growing political support, last week the Boston City Council voted unanimously to endorse the strike. Cambridge Mayor Denise Simmons also joined the rally.

WW Photo Credit: Liz Green

With affordable health care the issue, students, workers support Harvard strike

By Phebe Eckfeldt on October 17, 2016



Workers around the world are watching as Harvard University Dining Service workers take on the multibillion-dollar institution, demanding “No cuts in health care” and “Health care is a human right!”

The 750 workers represented by UNITE HERE Local 26 walked out on Oct. 5. Since then, calls, emails, letters and articles of support have poured in from students, workers and faculty in South Africa, Japan, Brazil, Ireland, Russia and other European countries, as well as the U.S.

Ed Childs, chief shop steward of Local 26, who has worked at Harvard for 43 years, explains why: “Health care is a civil rights issue. The Harvard Corporation and Board of Overseers who run Harvard University are pushing an agenda to undermine preventive medical care. This is about austerity.

“It would cost very little for Harvard to retain our current health insurance plan, as we are asking. But Harvard wants deductibles and increased fees for visits to emergency rooms, doctors and hospitals, as well as tests. This stops people from consulting a doctor when they have a cold or need diabetic testing, or when their children have a fever, since they can’t afford it. Then, they have to be hospitalized, ending up costing more. Capitalism has no interest in the long-term perspective of health care for the workers.”

Some 60 percent of HUDS workers are immigrants and an equal percentage are women. Luisa Mosso comes from Cape Verde and has worked in the Kennedy School of Government dining hall for nine years. She told Workers World: “I have asthma. I spent all day this past Friday going to four doctors for treatment. It cost me \$60. I can’t afford this and HU wants to increase co-pays and fees even higher each

time we see a doctor. We do not get paid during the summer. People are forced to choose between eating or going to a doctor. How can we work if we are not healthy?"

Student support for workers

Students from Harvard Medical School and the School of Public Health have been active and vocal in support of the strike. Two of them wrote: "As medical students at Harvard, we were deeply troubled to learn that our university was proposing changes to dining workers' health plans that would make essential health care unaffordable. ...

"The affordability of health insurance plans comes down to two factors: premiums and out-of-pocket costs. How affordable are employer plans? A team of Harvard medical students compared the plan Harvard proposed for the dining workers to what would be available on the Massachusetts health exchange [set up under the Affordable Care Act to facilitate the purchase of health insurance by individuals and families].

"For a family of three earning \$30,000, the Harvard plan requires an employee to contribute a premium of \$233 a month, while the health exchange has plans that require no premiums at all. Harvard Medical School faculty and the World Health Organization have defined any health spending over 10 percent of annual income as a catastrophic expenditure. The Harvard plan comes perilously close to this with premiums alone. The rotten cherry on the top? Harvard's plan also has higher co-pays than the exchange plans.

"It is shocking that these low-income workers would be better off financially if they were not offered employer-sponsored insurance." (StatNews, Sept. 30)

The Harvard Corporation and Board of Overseers have ties to Citigroup, Goldman Sachs, Bank of America, Merck, Google, Abbott Labs and CVS, among others. Striking workers have confronted them in their offices and on campus.

Nine strikers arrested in Harvard Square

On Oct. 14, some 500 strikers and their supporters marched on Harvard Square during rush hour and shut it down. As the crowd chanted, banged drums and blew whistles, nine women strikers sat down in the middle of the street and were arrested. Also arrested were the head of Local 26 and the chief negotiator.

One of the women arrested told WW that she direly needs a knee replacement and is in constant pain from standing on her feet all day. But she cannot afford the operation. When she struggled to sit down in the street, the crowd roared.

The workers know that the struggle for quality health care is global and united. Local 26 strikers have supported and spoken at rallies to change Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples' Day, in support of Standing Rock and against pipeline spills and water poisoning. In turn, Native students at Harvard have spoken at strike rallies.

HUDS strikers are holding the line for quality, affordable health care, and they're doing it for workers and oppressed the world over who suffer from the brutalities of capitalist and imperialist profit making in sweatshops and factories, fields and fast food restaurants.



Victory to the HUDS strike!

Health care is a human right!

WW Photo Credit: Phebe Eckfeldt



Moorehead-Lilly '16

For President & Vice-President

WORKERS WORLD PARTY.ORG

Abolish Capitalism - Black Lives Matter - Disarm ICE & Police - Fight for socialism

2016 WWP Election Campaign statement of solidarity with striking food service workers at Harvard U.

By Monica Moorehead and Lamont Lilly on October 13, 2016

Victory to the striking HUDS workers!

A living wage and quality health care are rights!

End racism and discrimination in Harvard's kitchens now!

The Workers World Party presidential campaign of Monica Moorehead and Lamont Lilly is proud to stand in solidarity with our sisters and brothers at Harvard University who are on strike against the wealthiest Ivy League school in the U.S. They are members of UNITE HERE Local 26.

The 750 Harvard University Dining Service workers lovingly cook for and feed people from around the world, serving 25,000 meals a day. The HUDS workers are African American, African, Latinx, Asian, and white; many are immigrants. Some of them are just out of high school, others are holding out for retirement.

By throwing down the ladles and hitting the bricks, these courageous strikers are holding the line and fighting back for tens of millions of workers across the country and worldwide who face corporate and government attacks on their health, welfare and living standards. In their militant strike, the Harvard workers are fighting for all workers.

The HUDS strikers are facing off scab deliveries of frozen foods and halting construction at vaulted halls. They are banging drums and proclaiming through bullhorns, "¡Sí, se puede!" ("Yes, we can!"), as they rally in prestigious Harvard Yard for the justice they have earned and deserve — and which everyone knows the university can afford. Harvard's plan to cut back its food service workers' health insurance coverage, while keeping annual wages for many below \$35,000, is clearly an



imposition of austerity. This political and economic policy is in line with austerity programs being inflicted by the capitalist class on the U.S. and international working class.

Harvard University's endowment of \$38 billion puts this corporation at the top of the wealthy Ivy League schools, with a larger treasury than many countries. Giants of finance capital like Goldman Sachs, Bank of America and Citigroup are writing its contract proposals, while titans of the U.S. military, diplomatic, economic and technocratic corps are running its Kennedy School of Government.

To add insult to injury, the pro-corporate tax code allows Harvard to avoid paying taxes, including for unemployment insurance. This means that for several months a year during school breaks, these workers are laid off with no income, and are forced to fend for themselves.

Inspired by Black Lives Matter movement

The strikers were inspired by the historic Black Lives Matter movement at Harvard last semester, when students won victories to abolish the racist “house master” title and discard a law school coat of arms depicting its founder’s slaves at work. Their demands include the establishment in the collective bargaining agreement of a task force to combat racism and discrimination in the kitchens.

We applaud UNITE HERE’s groundbreaking language that will strengthen gender identity protections, stop management discrimination in hiring formerly incarcerated people, and permit immigrant workers to take up to a year’s leave with job security and other rights not protected by federal law.

Contrary to Harvard’s vicious propaganda, the strikers have been enthusiastically joined on the picket lines by hundreds of students, faculty members, clerical and technical workers, and groundskeepers. Supporters have come from across Boston; the city’s communities view this fight as their own and consider the HUDS workers to be family members who are being threatened — and must be defended by every means necessary.

Harvard has not only gouged its own students, demanding a king’s ransom for tuition, bringing them a lifetime of debt peonage, but the school has moved to turn faculty into part-timers, too. The university has also forced huge concessions on some of its other workers and retirees.

Harvard’s sprawling real estate empire has caused spiraling neighborhood rents and forced mass dislocation throughout Cambridge and Boston communities. Its business conglomerates in charter school administration, public health and government consulting have pushed privatization, “uberization” and militarization to new levels.

It is the HUDS workers who are teaching Harvard and its neoliberal masters a profound lesson — that “an injury to one is an injury to all!” There is no power greater than workers who unite in direct action and demand, “If we don’t get it, shut it down!”

We stand with the HUDS strikers and concur with their vision that a better world is in birth.

A living stipend for layoffs!

A minimum \$35,000 yearly wage for Harvard workers!

Hands off HUDS workers’ health insurance!

Follow and support the HUDS strike at twitter.com/UNITEHERE26 and facebook.com/uniteherelocal26

WW Photo Credit: Liz Green

Harvard U. strike! Trying to survive capitalism

By Phebe Eckfeldt on October 12, 2016

CAMBRIDGE, MA — It was 5 a.m. on Oct. 5 and Harvard University Dining Services workers were already marching on a strike picket line, rather than serving up eggs and bacon on a cafeteria breakfast line. The workers, many of them immigrants, half of them people of color, are going toe-to-toe with an elite Ivy League university with a \$37.6 billion endowment.

The 750 rank-and-file members of UNITE HERE Local 26 are striking because Harvard has refused to back down from its “take-away” cuts to workers’ retirement and health benefits.

The university has also refused to honor a previous HUDS contract agreement guaranteeing workers a \$35,000 minimum yearly wage. Nearly half are earning less than that now. According to the MIT Living Wage Calculator, even that salary is not adequate to support more than a one-person household in Boston. (STAT.com)

In addition, HUDS workers are fighting for the right to establish a task force to combat racism in the kitchens, stop management bias against hiring formerly incarcerated people and permit immigrant workers to take leaves of up to a year with job security.

‘We aren’t budging!’

By midmorning, thousands of workers from 20 dining halls and 40 picket lines, along with supporters, converged and marched into Harvard Square chanting, “Hey, Harvard, you can’t hide! We can see your greedy side!”

The next day, Oct. 6, close to a thousand workers and allies marched again, this time through Harvard Yard in a half-mile trek, banging drums and roaring chants so that even the remotest realms of Harvard’s ivory towers shook with the unstoppable surge. They were joined by Massachusetts AFL-CIO President Steven Tolman. On Oct. 8, HUDS workers and supporters marched and rallied again at the Harvard/Cornell football game.



Local 26 Chief Steward Ed Childs told Workers World, “We aren’t budging!” on demands protecting the minimum yearly wage, retirement and health benefits. He stressed that increased health care premiums and higher co-pays would be particularly devastating for the dining hall workers, who get laid off three months every summer, but as “seasonal educational workers” are not allowed to collect unemployment insurance.

Childs emphasized that the privatized health care system was in failure mode when a multibillion-dollar institution refuses to supply adequate and affordable health care to its workers.

At one of the rallies, a HUDS worker with Type 2 diabetes said she has a hard time, even now, affording her insulin and testing supplies. If her insurance goes up, she could suffer kidney failure or a heart attack without needed medications.

Harvard Medical School students backed up the workers in a StatNews op-ed, saying the university’s attack on workers’ health insurance is a matter of life and death: “As physicians in training, we cannot stand by as the world’s richest university forces its most vulnerable employees to choose between dinner and a doctor’s visit.”

A member of the Racial Justice Coalition at Harvard Medical School, Darshali Vyas, told the press, "We now also know that more than half of HUDS workers identify as people of color — a level of diversity not reflected elsewhere at the University — and that many of these workers represent minority and immigrant families living in Boston. Protecting their access to affordable health-care coverage is intimately tied to racial justice."

"The cuts proposed by Harvard are anti-LGBTQ," asserted Ted Waechter in his article, "The HUDS Strike Is So Gay," in the student *Crimson* newspaper. He explained: "The proposed co-pay increases would devastate queer and trans workers in particular. When we make healthcare unaffordable, we keep queer and trans people from accessing gender-affirming treatments, like hormone therapy and gender-confirmation surgery."

Local 26 HUDS workers fought for and won one of the country's first sexual orientation nondiscrimination provisions, and are currently fighting for provisions based on gender identity.

HUDS coalition battles corporate power

Workers at Harvard are up against an "education" corporation that is part of big business profit making and the 1%, in an interlocking relationship with the military-industrial complex and big banks like Goldman-Sachs, Bank of America and Citigroup. The governing body of the university is literally Harvard Corporation — "the oldest corporation in the Western Hemisphere," dating back to the mid-17th century. (harvard.edu)

To do battle with this behemoth, the rank-and-file dining hall workers have put together a town-gown--community coalition that is a powerful model for how to win. Coalition members endorsing and organizing for the strike include the undergraduate Harvard School of Public Health, the Student Labor Action Movement, the Undergraduate Council and the Editorial Board of the famed student newspaper, the *Crimson*. Faculty and nonunion employees are supporting the strike, as they're also having their health benefits cut.

Unity also comes from Harvard Law School students, who protested university racism by occupying their own college in February. Both the Cambridge City Council and the Boston Homeless Solidarity Committee have endorsed the strike.

And the dining hall workers have built wide solidarity over many years, from their opposition to South African apartheid to their support for Indigenous and Palestinian struggles.

Dedicated union solidarity comes from the "old-style" militant Boston School Bus Drivers Union, Steelworkers Local 8751; the custodians of Service Employees Local 32 B-J; and the IWW "Wobbly" Cambridge local. Teamsters Local 25 has pledged to honor the picket line and refuse to pick up trash or make freight and equipment deliveries.

This strike forcefully raises the class question: How can workers survive a capitalism that will not pay them a wage that they and their families can survive on, and that will not provide adequate health care — a matter of life or death?

In socialist Cuba, medical care is completely free to all citizens and has no links to profit. In Cuba there is, in fact, no need for "health insurance" or for having to pay out money monthly to have a safety net against for-profit medical or Big Pharma bills.

Harvard University is rich enough to provide affordable health care to all its workers, but it will not do so without a fight. It will not because, like Verizon or Veolia or any other capitalist corporation, it needs profits to survive. Paying health care or other benefits to workers is not profitable. As capitalism decays, corporations and banks are employing fewer workers to do more work at less wages with minimal or no benefits.

HUDS workers have drawn the line.

The strike by the Harvard dining hall workers in their struggle for health care, for adequate pay, for what they need to survive is a new heroic battle in the centuries-old struggle of workers to take back our lives and our work.

*Steve Gillis, Martha Grevatt, **Milt Neidenberg**, Minnie Bruce Pratt and Gerry Scoppettuolo contributed to this article.*