**GEO, Right to Work, and the Importance of Standing with Alex**

*What is Right to Work?*

During the legislation season of 2012, the state of Michigan became a Right to Work state. By passing this law, Michigan joined the more than 20 states in America that operate under a statute which limits the ability of unions to collect dues and therefore to remain stable in our current economic climate. Specifically, under Right to Work, employees at Michigan will not be required to choose whether or not they want to be in the union as a condition of employment, therefore eliminating the service fee as something that non-union members have to pay. By making payment to the union optional, dues will not be automatically deducted from paychecks, and workers will not have to to support the union financially, which means that funding will rely on official dues paying unions members which tends to result in a decrease in membership percentages.

*What did this mean for GEO?*

While this legislation was proposed and approved in 2012, it did not officially go into effect until March 28th of 2013. Therefore, GEO was able to sit at the bargaining table in 2013 and negotiate a contract that would shield us from the effects of this Right to Work legislation for a couple of years i.e. until the 2017 contract renegotiation. This is why, despite the fact that Right to Work has been passed, GEO is still able to collect dues and require GSI’s and GSSA’s to sign yellow cards as members or service fee payers.

*What must we do now?*

Now that we are quickly nearing the renegotiation of the contract, it is important that we show the university that our membership can remain strong and stable in the face of Right to Work. One of the best ways for us to do this, is through making sure that the contract that GEO fought so hard for in 2013 continues to be upheld and defended. This is because every year, there are multiple instances in which graduate student employees are confronted with injustices that violate our contract. While it might seem easier to ignore these contract violations in favor of not rocking the boat, if we don’t hold our departments and the university accountable to our contract then the contract can’t work for us. Filing grievances when necessary and seeing them through shows respect for the hard work that has been done in the past, while setting a precedent that the union will not be pushed around for the future.

*How is this relevant to #StandWithAlex?*

Currently, our campaign to #StandWithAlex is moving through the stages of grievance and it is a chance for us to ensure that the precedent sent by this case upholds our contract instead of dismisses it. By taking back Alexandra’s job after she was already hired, the powers that be within the School of Architecture have violated Article IX of the GEO contract with the university. Under Article IX, once a GSI is hired and signs a contract for a job, that job cannot be taken away without ensuring that the GSI is still given the benefits and provisions promised under that hire. Despite being made aware of this fact, Architecture has continued to try to not uphold our contract by refusing to give Alexandra her benefits and by denying her a tuition waiver when she has less than a year to completion of her degree. Especially with the precarity of Right  to Work, as union members we cannot and should not stand for violations of some of the most important portions of our contract. Article IX gives us job security, and if we lose that in bargaining because we did not defend it now, signing an employment contract with the university is no longer stable. Losing this article could result in graduate student employees being made vulnerable to unfair firing practices at the whim of department higher-ups.

*What’s the Ask?*

Now that you know the context of bargaining under Right to Work, we ask that you support the union and support your fellow graduate student by signing and disseminating the petition for Alex and turning out to our various strategic campaign moves. In addition, make your voice heard by participating in the platform development of this year and encourage other students to stay or become dues paying union members in the coming months and years. During these times of opposition to union organizing, there is especially strength in numbers and solidarity, and we must demonstrate that strength to the university by standing up and standing together against the injustice committed at this university.

**A Petition to Support Alexandra Chen**

*We the undersigned support Alexandra Chen in her grievance. Alex was hired for a GSI position in the Architecture Department only to have her chair cancel her appointment after she signed the job offer. The GEO contract states that in such a case, Alex should receive all of the pay, benefits, and tuition waivers she was supposed to get with her GSI position. The Department has decided to violate the contract. As such, Alex lost her health insurance and now has a hold on her account from the unexpected tuition bill. This hold is preventing her from applying to graduate. For Alex to be in this position ­­ without a job, without health insurance and owing tens of thousand in tuition ­­ is not only despicable, it is a violation of the legally binding UM­-GEO agreement. We call on the University to honor the job offer they made, and provide Alex with the pay, benefits, and tuition waivers she has a right to under the GEO contract.*

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