



The Union for Everyone | Members Run This Union

Local 300-CGSU Fights Suspension, Prevents Deportation of Member



Momodou Taal speaking at a peaceful protest demanding a ceasefire in Gaza.

October 11, 2024

Ithaca, New York

BY MARGUERITE PACHECO, UE LOCAL 300-CGSU

UE Local 300-Cornell Graduate Students United (CGSU-UE), which represents graduate workers at Cornell University, are currently fighting against the unjust discipline of one of our members. On September 23, Cornell's administration suspended international graduate worker Momodou Taal, citing his alleged participation in protest activity. This suspension fired Taal from his job and de-enrolled him as a student. He would have had to leave the country immediately once the University notified the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) of their choice to de-enroll him. Cornell said that they would not give Taal their customary grace period of twenty-one days before reporting to DHS.

This came after a tumultuous spring semester during which three graduate workers were suspended for protesting against repressive policies and the University's refusal to honor their divest guidelines (<https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2016/02/trustees-approve-new-standard-consider-divestment>), which require a review to “divest its endowment assets from a company ... when the company's actions or inactions [constitute] apartheid, genocide, human trafficking, slavery or systemic cruelty to children.” After membership picketed a bargaining session for hours, CGSU-UE secured a Memorandum of Agreement (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wi72Qj1fLU115wbERVJMU2LpgL4FtIOW/view?usp=drive_link) with Cornell in July that gave the Union the right to bargain over the effects of discipline of a worker. Importantly, the list of effects enumerated in this MOA includes de-enrollment!

“I believe that my presence as a Black Muslim and an advocate for Palestine places an extra target on my back,” said Taal. “The university wishes to make an example out of me by subverting due process as a means to intimidate others.”

Pursuant to the MOA, CGSU-UE issued a demand to bargain with Cornell Administration over the effects of Taal's recent suspension. Cornell not only refused to bargain, but disagreed that suspension and being banned from his job site constitutes discipline.

This particularly egregious instance of unfair discipline highlights the very fights that are currently playing out at the bargaining table. We are bargaining our first contract after having won our election last November, and the big articles (https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/162fHH1BNkKPdkt0KS8o5WrE2SM6tUYg5peN_u4nDI3M/edit?gid=521772788#gid=521772788) that Cornell refuses to move on are nondiscrimination, discipline and discharge, appointment security (which enumerates due process for performance evaluations), and academic freedom. We want just cause protections for all forms of discipline — including the “non-appointment related” discipline that Taal is receiving. We need nondiscrimination protections on a campus whose leadership openly stated that they would invite the KKK to campus if requested. We want due process in our evaluations to protect against discriminatory progress reviews. And on a university campus, we want strong academic freedom protections because our work is academic — we are teaching about controversial subjects — and we must be protected as workers while doing this labor!

In response, CGSU-UE has launched both a solidarity petition and a solidarity statement for other unions to sign on to, held a press conference, and engaged with local elected officials.

Most importantly, we held two mass actions. On October 2 we held a rally with over 300 workers and marched to the administrative building that houses the Cornell bosses who are

disrespecting our members. At this rally, people marched, chanted, and heard speeches from graduate workers including Momodou Taal, elected officials, and university faculty who are against academic repression. Then, on October 9, CGSU-UE held an open bargaining session and packed the bargaining room with over 110 union members, and over fifteen sibling unions who joined virtually. The disciplined graduate workers, sibling unions, and CGSU-UE bargaining committee members gave statements demanding just cause and nondiscrimination protections. At around 3 PM, word came through that Cornell had taken de-enrollment, and thus deportation, off of the table and agreed to bargain over the remaining effects of Taal's discipline! CGSU-UE met with Cornell on Friday October 11 for effects bargaining.

This is a huge success for unions in higher education, and a testament to the strength of CGSU-UE members!

Our sibling unions, both in UE and other graduate worker shops, are joining us in fighting against academic bosses who are trying to maintain unilateral disciplinary power via "academic" discipline. This is a long fight, and together we are standing firm for just cause protections against bosses who will tank workers' rights to appease a political donor class.

Subscribe!

If you like what you read, please consider subscribing to the UE NEWS (<https://actionnetwork.org/fundraising/subscribe-to-the-ue-news>) — for as little as \$5/year you can support great labor journalism and receive the print edition of the UE NEWS four times per year.

You can also sign up to receive monthly UE NEWS Bulletins (<https://www.ueunion.org/actionnet>) via email, or follow UE on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/ueunion/>), Twitter (<https://twitter.com/ueunion>), Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/ueunion/>) and YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/c/uetube>).