First, congratulations for getting the number of signatures needed for holding an election.

I am here in my capacity as a tenured professor and department chair, and as a current and past supervisor of many terrific graduate students to say that I support your effort to call an election to form a union of graduate student workers here at Northeastern University.

Some of you may know that the History department wrote a letter in support of your efforts to form a union last spring semester, and I represent those faculty members as well. Historians have long understood the difficult past that led to the creation of the first unions in the 19th century. At a time when workers were unable to gain safe working conditions or reasonable working hours or compensation for injury, they had to fight against powerful employers to gain the right to bargain collectively for these things, sometimes for decades. We understand that the National Labor Relations Act that was passed in 1935 in this country was an initial victory for workers, which—and I quote—encouraged “the practice and procedure of collective bargaining and by protecting the exercise by workers of full freedom of association, self- organization, and designation of representatives of their own choosing, for the purpose of negotiating the terms and conditions of their employment or other mutual aid or protection.”

Those of us who have been graduate students or who now supervise graduate students know that you are students, yes, but that you are also employees who do vital work for the university in the classroom, with faculty on their projects, and in labs, among other things. A majority of you clearly feel that forming a union will benefit your work experience at Northeastern. And while I don’t know all of you, I do know the graduate students in the History Department, and I know that they are smart and well-informed, that they are in no way naïve stooges of manipulative union representatives, and that they clearly understand the advantages that collective bargaining can offer.

I call on the university to act not like the big employers of the past who have used half-truths and scare tactics to frighten employees from forming unions, but to take this opportunity to be a progressive example to the rest of the academic world. They can do this by allowing graduate students to hold an election unfettered by negative propaganda, and then by honoring its result without taking it to the regressive and punitive Labor Relations Board under the Trump administration. As a person who believes in social justice and as an historian, I could not fail to speak up for the right of our student employees to organize without deep hypocrisy. I call on other faculty and administrators to square your commitment to social justice with the demands of our valued graduate students right here, right now.