

California State University faculty to vote on possible strike

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This week, members of the California Faculty Association (CFA) representing teachers who work for the California State University (CSU) system are voting on strike authorization if they are unable to reach a deal with the CSU administration over a contract dispute.

At issue are terms under which faculty are to work since their contract expired nearly two years ago, and CSU's ability to replace full-time tenured teachers with part-time, contingent teachers, cut benefits, increase the number of students in each class, and require faculty to pay more for parking. The union is also demanding a 1 percent increase in salary.

Should a strike be authorized, this will be the second time the CFA has voted for a strike within the last four months. The last strike was over the expired contract, which was followed by an ineffectual strike at only two of the CSU's 23 campuses, Cal State East Bay and Dominguez Hills. Should a strike be authorized, the same harmless tactics can be expected from the CFA.

The results of last November's "strikes" were so negligible the CFA was unable to even present them as a substantial victory, other than to show the CSU Chancellor and the Board of Trustees, "how very angry faculty are at his policies and proposals," as the union's web site put it. The CFA has promised this time around to authorize two-day "rolling strikes" whereby the CSU system will be divided in half with one group of campuses striking for two days, followed by the next group of campuses. How such a timid strategy can change the minds of the CSU administration the CFA does not bother to explain.

At any rate, a serious struggle to defend public education is the last thing the union has in mind. As Liz Cara, the San Jose State University chapter president for the CFA told the campus newspaper, the *Spartan Daily*, "Essentially, we'd like to prevent a strike. We

feel the strike vote will show that we're serious in our intent, in our vision and that we see that public education is really seriously in trouble."

CSU faculties have been working without a contract since the previous contract ended in June 2010. Since that time, the union has collaborated with the CSU to impose furloughs, pay cuts, and mass layoffs on its members. As Richard Francisco, vice president of SJSU's CFA chapter told the *Spartan Daily*, "What we did was we took a voluntary cut in pay. Furlough days were not forced—we volunteered in order to help—in essence, to save the CSU so that the Chancellor's Office could figure out ways to keep us afloat without having to cut personnel."

At SJSU, the campus had a total of six furlough days for the 2009-2010 academic year. Four of those days were campus-wide and two were faculty-only. Despite the furloughs, however, staff and teachers were ultimately laid off.

Even if a strike is authorized, the contract dispute will go to a third-party arbitrator. If that does not settle outstanding differences, the CSU Chancellor Charles Reed can then propose a final contract before the CFA can legally strike. In a press release, the CSU stated, "At this point in the negotiations there are a limited number of issues that remain in dispute. Both parties have expressed a desire to reach a negotiated settlement and CSU, for its part, remains committed to that goal."

The CFA's goal is not to defend the livelihoods of its members, much less lead the struggle for free, high-quality public education. Rather, the CFA wants to act as an intermediary between the CSU and the faculty in imposing cuts on the latter. Like virtually every trade union in the United States, the CFA fights only to get a privileged seat at the bargaining table. Or as the CFA put it on their web site, "There simply must be 'action

away from the table’ in order to get ‘action at the table.’”

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the CFA has also officially endorsed Democrat Governor Jerry Brown who according to their web site, “worked tirelessly to defend teachers and increase funding for education.” In fact, as every teacher and student should know by now, Governor Brown has done just the exact opposite since taking office.

In March of this year alone, 20,000 teachers received pink slips, trigger cuts have trimmed an already anemic school budget last December, plus the budget for K-12 education will be slashed by another \$4.8 billion if voters do not approve the governor’s regressive tax increases in a November referendum. These cuts are only the latest of years of non-stop budget reductions and teacher layoffs that have taken California from its historical legacy as the leader in education and technological innovation to the pariah of public schooling in the United States. This process, decades-long in the making, has only accelerated under Brown’s tenure.

At the university level, the Brown administration has overseen an exorbitant increase in tuition and fees, making college education unaffordable for thousands of working class students. Those campuses where students protest against these policies have been met with police repression and hostility from the administrators.

The CFA itself has sought to utilize the opportunity of the strike vote in order to attract students opposed to tuition hikes and budgetary cuts. But this action reflects the union’s strategy to make sure no independent mobilization of students gets out of the CFA’s policing control. That the CFA endorses Brown can only mean that they seek to act as safety valve for student and faculty protest, while bringing any unwanted radicalization safely within the confines of the Democratic Party.



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