

# California State University faculty headed into confrontation with Democrats

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24 February 2016

Tens of thousands of workers at the California State University system (CSU), who have faced years of declining real wages, are heading towards a confrontation with state officials and the Democratic Party. In October, 94.4 percent of the 23,000 professors, lecturers, librarians, counselors and coaches authorized the California Faculty Association union (CFA) to call a strike at 23 CSU campuses.

On February 8 the CFA said it would call limited work stoppages on April 13-15 and April 18-19. While faculty are concerned with high executive compensation, the growth of the administrative bureaucracy, and ever-rising fees for students, the crux of the struggle stems from workers' demands for higher wages.

The CSU Board of Trustees has rejected CFA proposals for a five percent general salary increase and instead has offered a derisory two percent raise, leading to a deadlock in negotiations. Following an ongoing "fact-finding" process the Board of Trustees can present its final offer, with the CFA having the legal option to strike if the contract is rejected.

The CFA called a strike vote after feeling immense pressure from the rank and file. CSU faculty members are among the millions of public sector workers in the US and internationally who have suffered a devastating decline in living standards and are being targeted for more austerity. According to *Golden Gate X press* at San Francisco State University, CFA members have received raises totaling only three percent since 2008. The Bureau of Labor Statistics cites inflation in the US between 2008 and 2015 as 10.1 percent.

The systematic lowering of working class living standards stands in sharp contrast to the rapid enrichment of the wealthiest layers of society, including top officials in the CSU system. Since 2004,

CSU campus presidents have seen their salary increase from \$218,871 to \$314,357 on average, with CSU Chancellor Timothy White making over \$400,000 a year.

According to the CFA, the average salary of a faculty member is \$45,000 a year before taxes, but this figure masks the reality for most workers. Sixty percent of faculty are lecturers averaging only \$27,000 a year. This only underscores the insulting character of CFA's call for a five percent raise. Even if the Board of Trustees accedes to these "gains" the average lecturer will take home only \$28,350 a year.

This exposes the fact that the CFA has no intention to conduct a serious fight. On the contrary, the CFA is responsible for the miserable state of faculty pay. While faculty members voted for strike authorizations in 2007, 2011, and 2012, the CFA opposed any action and instead accepted concession-ridden contracts.

In the run-up to the 2012 agreement, the CFA called a phony one-day strike on November 17, 2011, which was limited to the Dominguez Hills and East Bay campuses. The CFA claimed this—aimed at allowing workers to let off some steam—"increased the pressure on the Chancellor at the bargaining table" and showed "we can do MORE than threaten to strike."

Shortly afterwards the CFA signed a concessionary contract. In the so-called highlights of the deal, the CFA admitted they "were not successful in getting [graduate student instructor] or [service salary] increases for 2012/14 and 2013/14." As a result of this and other sellouts, the faculty has suffered an effective pay cut of 13.6 percent between 2004 and 2014.

The acquiescence to these austerity demands stems from the CFA's alliance with the Democratic Party and its insistence that workers must pay for the economic crisis they did not create. The CFA, like unions

throughout the United States, raises money and campaigns for the Democratic Party, peddling the lie that the oldest capitalist party in the United States is a vehicle for social progress.

In reality, the Democratic Party is spearheading the attack on education and public employees. This is underscored by the fact that California's Democratic Governor, Jerry Brown, is the president of the CSU Board of Trustees.

Since 2008 public education in California has been battered by austerity, which did not slow down after the Democrats took control of the state government in 2011. Upon taking office, Brown proposed cuts of \$1.4 billion to higher education and raised fees for the state's 350,000 community college students from \$36 to \$46 a credit.

All three large public institutions of higher learning—the system of community colleges, the Universities of California, and the California State Universities—were hit with deep cuts. At the same time, the Democrats have allowed teacher pensions to go unfunded; in the 2012 fiscal year the California State Teachers Retirement System added \$4 billion to its unfunded obligations. The conscious decision to defund pensions will be used as an excuse to attack retiree benefits in the name of “saving” pensions.

The legitimate demands of workers throughout the CSU system for decent living standards will not be fought for by the CFA or other unions. Workers need to form new organizations of struggle, democratically organized by rank-and-file workers, to fight for the broadest mobilization of the entire working class against the austerity demands of both big business parties and the corporate and financial elites they defend.



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