California Faculty Association prepares to sell out CSU workers

Evan Blake, Guillaume Garnier
14 March 2016

Contract negotiations between the California State University (CSU) administration and the California Faculty Association are continuing with the CFA threatening to call a limited statewide strike by 26,000 professors, lecturers, librarians, counselors and coaches employed at 23 CSU campuses.

Barring an agreement between the two parties, strikes are scheduled to take place from April 13-15 and April 18-19 in what would be one of the largest academic strikes at a four-year university system in US history. CSU enrolls roughly 460,000 students, and while the CFA has held two-day work stoppages in the past these were not system wide.

Last October, 94.4 percent of CFA members authorized a strike, expressing overwhelming hostility to the state's slashing of their wages, benefits and pensions. Democratic Party politicians, including Governor Jerry Brown, in power since 2011, have spearheaded the attack on higher education funding.

The CFA is a bargaining unit of the larger California Teachers Association (CTA), one of the key financial backers of the state Democratic Party. Knowing that the union can be counted on to impose the Democrats' austerity measures, the unelected CSU Board of Trustees rebuffed the CFA's initial proposal for a 5 percent pay increase and proposed a derisory 2 percent raise instead.

Both miserly figures demonstrate the line-up of the state and the unions in the drive to increase the exploitation of educational workers. Accounting for inflation, the average CSU faculty member has endured a pay cut of 7.16 percent since 2008.

According to the *Press-Enterprise*, Eastern Michigan University Professor Howard Bunsis recently confirmed during the fact-finding phase of negotiations that the CSU "can afford to pay faculty members the raise they have been demanding." It is estimated that a 5 percent raise would cost the state an additional $102.3 million, while Bunsis found that the CSU system had roughly $500 million in excess cash flow in 2015 and more than $2 billion in reserves.

Behind the backs of workers, the CFA is collaborating with the Board of Trustees to impose a sell-out contract on the faculty. Neither party desires a strike because it could become a catalyst for a broader mobilization of workers and young people who have faced a relentless attack on their living standards and social rights, including the right to public and higher education.

While there is a growing militancy among rank-and-file workers, the CFA is determined to limit any walkout, if it calls a strike at all, to nothing more than a symbolic protest. This is summed up in the union's chief slogan, "I don't want to strike, but I will," which has been printed on hundreds of t-shirts worn by union members at public meetings. Equally telling are the California Democratic Party Convention's endorsement of the CFA's "Fight for 5%" campaign and the CFA's accompanying slogan that "Five % is FAIR!" In fact a 5 percent raise is far from fair in a state with among the highest costs of living in the United States.

In a memorandum titled "Strike 411" sent to faculty on February 29, the CFA announced it would not pay strike benefits in the event of a walkout. All it will provide is "a hardship fund application process" for "faculty who face significant and immediate financial hardship in the event of a strike." The CFA is threatening workers with starvation rations to force faculty and other workers into submission.

Since 2010, the California Teachers Association (CTA) has directly donated over $100,000 to the

© World Socialist Web Site

campaigns of Jerry Brown. During the 2010 state elections, the CTA spent upwards of $7 million on "independent expenditures," which largely went toward supporting the Brown campaign.

After his election, Brown appointed or maintained 20 members of the CSU Board of Trustees. He also joined the CSU Board, taking direct responsibility for imposing spending cuts and tuition increases on the entire CSU system.

During his first term in office Brown savagely cut public services, including k-12 and higher education, health care, pensions for state workers, and numerous other programs. Repeating the justification for austerity used by big business politicians in every country, Brown moralized, "We've lived beyond our means."

Between 2006-2010, the CTA also contributed $48,000 to the campaigns of Bill Lockyer, a longtime Democrat who has been active in state government since 1972. While serving as the state's treasurer from 2007-2015, Lockyer played an instrumental role in crafting the post-2008 austerity measures, which heavily slashed education spending.

In 2010-11, Lockyer oversaw the slashing of more than $650 million from the University of California and CSU systems. Part of the 2011 state budget included "triggers" to cut public spending on education and other public programs if an anticipated windfall of $4 billion failed to reach state coffers. When a bill was introduced by a section of Democrats to roll back the triggers, Lockyer's spokesman stated, "we like the triggers the way they are."

These measures stem from the Democratic Party's insistence that the working class must pay for the economic crisis of 2008 by enduring austerity. This demand is shared by the CFA and CTA.

While state university workers are struggling to make ends meet, the CFA Board of Directors are paid by the state on the basis of "lost time," meaning they are compensated for the hours they spend on "union business" in lieu of the time they would have spent in the classroom.

The average salary of a CFA Board of Directors member was over $88,200 in 2015. This is only $1,800 short of being double what an average CFA member is paid and is over triple the average lecturer's salary.

Of the 25-person CFA Board of Directors, eight are paid over $100,000 each year. It is noteworthy that the member with the second highest level of pay ($137,000), Lillian Taiz, is the Chair of the Political Action Committee. Between 2014-15, Taiz received a $31,000 raise, more than the average lecturer's total salary.

In light of these facts, workers must draw the proper conclusions. The CFA is an organization intimately tied to the exact political forces that have decimated public education and undermined the pay and living standards of faculty for years.

State media sources have taken their measure of the CFA, with the *Bakersfield Californian* stating that "the potential strike that California Faculty Association leaders announced" is "a far cry" from the militant labor strikes of the mid-20th century. An associate professor of sociology at Fordham University commented, "I don't think they're trying to cause economic impact."

For a genuine mobilization of the CSU faculty to occur, the struggle must be taken out of the hands of the CFA. Workers should form rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by workers themselves, to fight for a 30 percent increase in wages and the full restoration of all past concessions. These committees must reach out to every section of the working class—public school teachers, telecom workers, immigrant workers, young people, students and the unemployed—to build up a powerful movement against both parties of austerity and war.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site