

A closer look at the faculty union's deal that halted the California State University strike

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Opposition is growing to the tentative agreement signed by the California Faculty Association (CFA) earlier this month that was used by the CFA to cancel a planned five-day strike by 26,000 professors, lecturers, librarians, counselors and coaches employed at 23 California State University (CSU) campuses.

Working closely with the state Democrats, the CFA shut down the walkout, scheduled to begin on April 13, in order to head off a confrontation between faculty, students and potentially other public sector workers on one side, and Governor Jerry Brown and the Democratic-controlled state legislature on the other.

The April 7 agreement was reached after closed-door meetings between the union and top university administrators, during which time the CFA agreed to a media “blackout.” Afterward, union officials pronounced that faculty had won a “victory.” However, any deal crafted behind the backs of workers and based on the emasculation of their struggles cannot result in anything but a miserable sellout.

This is confirmed as details of the tentative agreement emerge. As inadequate as it was, the union's main demand, a 5 percent general salary increase for the 2015-2016 academic year, has been abandoned despite claims that its yearlong campaign to “Fight for Five” was successful.

In reality, the 5 percent general salary increase will only apply to the months of July and August for the 2015-2016 academic year, and it is not retroactive. Workers will receive a tiny fraction of the wage increase they supposedly won, and to add insult to injury, the raise leaves out all lecturers who do not teach over the summer.

The tentative agreement extends the current contract by one year and expires on June 30, 2018. On the surface, the CFA-CSU deal promises a 10.5 percent increase over three years. This includes a 5 percent general salary increase on June 30, 2016, at 11:59 p.m., a 2 percent raise on July 1, 2016, and a 3.5 percent increase on July 1, 2017.

Leaving aside for a moment the thoroughly insufficient character of the raise for workers who reside in one of the

most expensive states to live in the US, there is absolutely no guarantee that workers will even see this raise. The fine print in article 41.3 of the contract states that all of the promised wage increases can be reneged if the state legislature does not provide what the CSU administration deems adequate:

“Any term(s) of this Agreement that carries an economic cost shall not be implemented until the amount required therefore is appropriated and made available to the CSU for expenditure for such purposes. The CSU shall make appropriate requests for financing or budgetary funding in amounts sufficient to meet obligations set out in this Agreement. If less than the amount needed to implement this Agreement is appropriated in any given year of this Agreement, and made available to the CSU for expenditure, the term(s) of this Agreement shall automatically be subject to the meet and confer process.”

This same loophole was in the CFA's 2007 contract and was used against workers following the 2008 financial crisis. Faculty members were promised a 19 percent increase over three years, but saw only a 2 percent raise, after the union and administrators “met and conferred.” In 2009-2010, the CFA forced workers to accept a 10 percent wage reduction through accepting 18 furlough days, which the union said was necessary to “save” jobs.

Faculty members, who will vote on the deal from April 22 to 29, have expressed their anger on social media. Recalling the way the CFA betrayed workers the last time, one worker noted: “In 2008, when the crash hit, Chancellor Reed literally told the Governor [California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger] he could give back \$50 million with no harm to the CSU, then went the very next day into a CFA meeting and told the faculty he didn't have the money to pay the lion's share of the 2007 agreement. Not only that, we were conned into taking a 10% ‘furlough’ cut to ‘save lecturer jobs.’ Then he laid off most of the lecturers anyway. Since then, the CSU has more and more gone to contracts that give them the right to get rid of lecturers in a hurry any time they can whine about not having enough money. And

the new agreement says our current Chancellor can renege on this agreement if the legislature doesn't give him what he deems enough to fund it."

That the CFA would accept such a treacherous deal only underscores the fact that it does not "represent" faculty members but functions instead as an arm of the Democratic Party. From President Obama on down, the Democrats are spearheading the attack on education and educators no less than the Republicans.

The CFA is under the umbrella of the California Teachers Association (CTA), which has donated over \$100,000 to the campaigns of Jerry Brown who has overseen millions of dollars in cuts to education and social services. CSU officials do not act without sanction from Governor Brown, who sits on the state university's board of trustees, along with his lieutenant governor, the Democratic assembly speaker and the State superintendent of public instruction.

It is likely that any financing legislation passed in Sacramento will be tied to tuition increases on CSU students who are already burdened by high costs and crippling debts. While claiming there is no money for decent living standards and affordable education, the Democrats and Republicans funnel trillions to the corporate and financial elite and the Pentagon war machine.

The tentative agreement also doubles the amount of time required to receive full health benefits after retirement from 5 to 10 years, for those deemed "at 100% service." Under the previous terms, part-time lecturers, if they worked 50 percent of the time, would have to work 10 years to receive retirement benefits. Now, they will have to work 20 years.

Given the precarious nature of the work and the improbability that lecturers will be rehired year after year, the CSU administration and the CFA understand most lecturers will never get retiree health benefits. The university will thus have a powerful financial incentive to do away with tenure altogether and transform the workforce into largely "flexible"—i.e., casual—laborers.

The CFA's website also notes that the deal explicitly expires articles 20.36 and 20.37 on June 30, 2018, which respectively provide reduced teaching expectations for new probationary faculty so that they can "establish their programs of research, scholarship, and or creative activities... to support them in meeting requirements for retention, tenure, and promotion." It also vacates the provision to grant funding of "\$1.3 million to allocate to "faculty engaged in exceptional levels of service that support the CSU's priorities, but who are not otherwise receiving an adjustment in workload to reflect their effort."

Faculty members, who have yet to vote on the deal, denounced the sellout on social media. One worker said, "By accepting the CSU offers of 'compromise' the CFA

has abandoned some of its long term members (lecturers and professors) who have suffered for over a decade under the previous chancellor's disrespect of faculty."

Another said, "This contract is NOT A FAIR CONTRACT to all CSU faculty/union members. The CFA gets to claim victory but rewards the CSU with a year of not paying any increment or anything for one year. This cuts the cost for the CSU with some faculty receiving nothing from the deal."

An angry worker wrote, "Thank you, CFA, for selling out on all faculty who are retiring this year with no retroactive increase."

"We've set ourselves up for a repeat of the disastrous 2007 agreement, where our future raises went away and got us where we are now. I'm sick and tired of pie in the sky by and by," another said referring to the song by the IWW martyr Joe Hill.

One worker complained that the details of the deal were not explicitly clear. "Well, we do get to vote on the contract. Disappointing the info is not clear. As a member I would have expected more clarity given the high stakes." To which another replied, "I think the confusion is intentional. Lots of lecturers, as well as people in my near-retirement position, might not like taking the big 'ZERO' on 2015-16."

The International Youth and Student for Social Equality (IYSSE) at CSU and the Socialist Equality Party urge faculty members to vote no on the tentative agreement. We urge rank-and-file workers to set up their own democratically elected committees to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the CFA and other unions. These committees, which must be answerable to all workers, not the Democratic Party budget-cutters, should reach out to the broadest sections of students and workers in California, throughout the US and internationally to develop a powerful counter-offensive against both big business parties and the corporate and financial elite that controls them.



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