

Vote “no” on the California Faculty Association contract!

Break with the Democrats! Unite CSU faculty and students to defend the right to education!

23 April 2016

The battle by 26,000 professors, lecturers, librarians, counselors and coaches at California State University (CSU) is at a crossroads. While faculty voted overwhelmingly to strike and were set to mount a serious struggle on April 13, the California Faculty Association (CFA) cancelled the planned strike and agreed to a deal that betrays workers' demands for improved wages, health care, pensions and job security,

CSU workers who are voting between April 22 and 29 should reject this deal with the contempt it deserves and prepare a genuine struggle, involving students and the broadest sections of the working class to defend their livelihoods and the right to affordable and quality higher education.

The CFA has failed to secure even its own meager wage demand of a 5 percent general salary increase. The raise will only apply to the months of July and August for the 2015-16 academic year, and is not retroactive. Workers will receive only a tiny fraction of the increase they supposedly won and, to add insult to injury, lecturers who do not teach over the summer are not included. Moreover, faculty retiring this year would see no raise at all, meaning pensions would be locked in under current salary figures.

CFA claims it received 10.5 percent over three years, but even this is shot full of loopholes. Leaving aside the fact that this is wholly inadequate in a state that is one of the most expensive in the country to live in, there is absolutely no guarantee that faculty will ever see this raise.

According to the fine print in “Article 41.3,” CSU administrators can renege on the promised wage increases if the state legislature does not provide

adequate resources to cover the raises:

“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 is exactly what happened after the financial crisis of 2008-2009. After being promised a 19 percent raise over three years in the 2007 CFA contract, faculty only got 2 percent. Then the CFA, working along with the state Democrats, endorsed a de facto 10 percent wage cut through accepting 18 furlough days. In other words, the burden of the economic crisis was shifted onto the backs of workers once again. Faculty members have not had a raise of more than 1.6 percent since 2007-2008, and the new deal will hardly make a dent in the lost wages and increased indebtedness of CSU workers and their families.

In addition, the length of service required for new faculty to receive full retiree health benefits would double from five to 10 years of full-time employment. Reaching this length of service is becoming increasingly impossible as universities virtually eliminate the right to tenure. By 2011 approximately 70 percent of college faculty in the US were non-tenure track compared to around 30 percent in 1975. Teaching has been largely transformed into a low-paid independent contractor character. This is in line with what is happening throughout under Obama's so-called economic recovery, during which temps and contractors accounted for virtually all new job growth.

Last October, over 94 percent of faculty voted to

authorize a strike. In doing so, they gave voice to the growing anger throughout the working class as a whole over the stagnation of wages, the growth of part-time, temporary and casual labor, and the relentless push overseen by the Obama administration to shift the burden of health care and pensions costs from private and public employers to workers.

After a deliberately prolonged bargaining process from July 2015 to April 2016, the CFA announced a strike deadline and then cancelled the job action. This is not because such a struggle would not have won widespread support. On the contrary, workers and students would have enthusiastically welcomed such a fight.

However, the CFA and its parent organizations, the California Teachers Association (CTA) and National Education Association (NEA), are closely allied with the Obama administration, Governor Jerry Brown and the Democratic Party-controlled state legislature. The last thing the unions and the Democrats want is a strike by tens of thousands of CSU workers, which could quickly develop into a confrontation with the Democrats, which is a party of austerity just like the Republicans.

Whether under control of Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger, or Democrat Brown, the political establishment in California has carried out a relentless attack on public education with only minor tactical differences on how cuts are to be administered. Any funding bill from Sacramento to increase the state budget will include further increases in tuition for students or other regressive measures.

What is at stake in this struggle is not just the living standards of the CSU faculty, but the right to higher education for working class and lower middle class youth. For this fight to be successful, the conduct of the struggle must be taken out of the hands of the CFA and other unions through the formation of rank-and-file committees uniting faculty and students and appealing for support from the broadest sections of the working class.

After decades of attacks on the working class, there is a growing mood of resistance among workers in the US and around the world. Just in the past few weeks, struggles have broken out, including the walkout by 39,000 Verizon workers and the wildcat strike over wages and pensions by air traffic controllers in

Brussels, who defied their union and efforts by the political establishment to brand them essentially as terrorists. This followed unauthorized sickouts by Detroit teachers, walkouts by students in Chicago and Boston, and last fall's rebellion by autoworkers against the sellout agreements pushed by the UAW.

These individual struggles, which are deliberately kept apart from one another by the unions, must be united into a powerful industrial and political counteroffensive by the entire working class. The universal claims by both parties—that there is no money for secure and good paying jobs, affordable education, etc.—must be rejected. Both parties can find trillions to bail out the banks and fund endless wars.

California is home to 111 billionaires—92 of whom have landed their place on the Forbes 400. The richest on the list is tech giant Larry Ellison. His wealth alone, \$47.5 billion, would have been more than enough to cover the entire 2014-15 California General Fund for K-12 education and child development of around \$45 billion.

What is needed above all is a political movement of the working class to fight for socialism. A vast redistribution of wealth is needed to meet the social rights of workers and young people. The big corporations and banks must be nationalized under the democratic control of working people. Only in this way can social needs take precedence over the ever more grotesque accumulation of wealth by the super-rich.

We urge CSU faculty and students who want to take up this fight to contact the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Students and Youth for Social Equality (IYSSE).



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact