

Three hundred workers laid off at Chicago State University

George Gallanis
7 May 2016

Chicago State University (CSU) announced the firing of more than 300 employees at the end of last month. The layoffs are the direct result of a bipartisan assault on public education by both Democrats and Republicans who are both seeking permanent reductions in funding for public education.

The layoffs come after the Illinois House and Senate voted to approve a “stopgap” funding measure that has provided roughly 30 percent of the previous year’s level of funding for public state universities and community colleges.

Prior to the approval of this legislation, not a single penny had been allocated for Illinois public higher education this year with negotiations over the state budget at an impasse for the last 11 months. CSU is just one of a number of other Illinois public universities and colleges that have also made cuts as a result of being starved of public funds.

The layoffs, which went into effect immediately following the announcement, equate to about a third of the entire CSU workforce and primarily affected non-instructional employees, such as counselors and carpenters. The layoffs, moreover, amount to a roughly 40 percent reduction in payroll, gutting \$2 million per month.

In April, administrators and civil service employees were informed by CSU officials not to return to work after April 30 unless they were instructed to do so. Those not part of the more than 300 laid off were given “recalls” and told to return to work. More employees may be recalled in the future, with Thomas Calhoun, president of CSU, having stating, “The recall process really is a process. If we find, for example, that we are short in an area that is creating a bottleneck or a way in which we cannot function ... we will make note of that and recall appropriately.”

In other words, the more than 300 workers who have been given layoff notices are now in an indefinite limbo, where they may have to wait days, weeks or months to be recalled or, in the more likely scenario, may never be asked to return to work at all.

In February, the entire CSU workforce was placed on the chopping block when CSU threatened to lay off its entire staff due to a lack of state funding, declaring a state of “financial exigency.” A committee was assembled by CSU to “review and decide all employment actions, including layoffs, reductions in compensation, terminations and significant position modifications.”

The “stopgap” funding measure, which injected funds it desperately needed to keep campuses open, will provide \$600 million to partially fund cash-starved public colleges and universities throughout the state: \$356 million allocated for universities, \$74 million for community colleges and \$170 million toward the Monetary Award Program scholarships, which many low-income students heavily rely upon to cover the costs of their tuition.

CSU has received \$20.1 million in emergency funding, which fulfills approximately 60 percent of its total operating budget. However, other colleges and universities will only receive enough funding to cover 30 percent of their budget.

Speaking about the agreement on the stopgap bill, Illinois Republican Governor Bruce Rauner stated, “What we did was come together on a bipartisan basis to come up with a short-term solution to a crisis. None of us want a university to close its doors, like Chicago State was on the verge of doing, none of us want professors at universities to lose their jobs. So this was a short-term solution and I’m supportive of that, what we’ve got to do is stay persistent to come up with a

long-term solution with more money for our universities for '16 and '17, a long-term solution with a balanced budget, new revenues, and—very critically—reforms.”

Rauner, a billionaire businessman, has spearheaded the gutting of Illinois public higher education. His “reforms” will consist of a further butchering of public education throughout the state. The Democrats, who have feigned contempt for Rauner’s open attack on public education, rely on him to do their dirty work.

Commenting on the stopgap funding, Senator Donne Trotter, a Democrat from Chicago, stated: “We wanted to spend the dollars where it did the most good, where the help was needed the most. And as we without a doubt know, Chicago State—for years of underfunding and not funding—was in the most critical condition. So we certainly wanted to give them as much of their funding, 2016 funding, as we could. And at the same time find what we thought was an adequate amount for these other universities, that didn’t express the urgency as much as it was at Chicago State.”

The rotten scraps handed to CSU “did the most good” by forcing the layoffs of over 300 people. As for the rest of the universities and colleges, according to Trotter and the rest of the Democratic Party, they received “an adequate amount” of funding, that is, enough money to cover a mere 30 percent of their budget. This is the “fight” the Democrats are waging against the Republicans.

On Tuesday, the Illinois Senate committee approved a new plan called SB2048, sponsored by Trotter, to provide more funding for cash-strapped public universities and colleges. The plan would provide additional funding so that all public state colleges and universities would receive enough funds to cover only 60 percent of their budgets. Trotter commented, “We tried desperately to find at least some more dollars, some new dollars, to not only give parity to those universities, but also to give them a fighting chance ... to make that bridge actually happen from 2016 to 2017.”

This so-called desperate attempt to fund Illinois’ public universities and colleges at only 60 percent is a stark warning of things to come. The Democrats, along with Republicans, are seizing upon the budget impasse to lay the groundwork for an even deeper withdrawal of funding from Illinois public higher education.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact