

Vote No on the TA! For a unified struggle with autoworkers, CSU faculty and staff!

Rank-and-File Committee of Academic Workers at California State University calls for No vote on Tentative agreement

Rank-and-File Committee of Academic Workers at SDSU
15 October 2023

Dear Fellow CSU Workers,

Our union, the United Auto Workers Union (UAW) Local 4123 in California, announced a tentative agreement on October 2. It offers paltry wage “increases” which will be eaten up by inflation and increases in university fees and tuition.

We, rank-and-file academic workers are calling for a resounding NO vote. We are founding the CSU Academic Workers’ Rank-and-File Committee at San Diego State University whose first order of business will be to ensure this contract gets rejected, and to carry out a real struggle to demand significant wage increases that actually pull us out of poverty, food insecurity, and homelessness.

As academic workers, we represent a powerful force of 10,000 teaching assistants (TAs), Graduate Assistants (GAs), and Instructional Student Assistants (ISAs) across 23 California State University (CSU) campuses. Our labor ensures that the largest institution of higher learning in the United States continues to run. As billions of dollars in profits are made, we, the low paid labor force, are doing everything we can to keep our heads above water with the high costs of inflation, housing, food, gas, parking, tuition, and fees. Everyday more of our fellow students are left by the wayside.

We encourage all our fellow workers to do the math for themselves and ensure this contract gets rejected so we can strike until we win transformative wages:

• A 5 percent raise, if you are making \$17 per hour amounts to \$17.85 per hour, over four weeks at 20 hours a week, is an increase of only \$73.67 for the month.

• The second 5 percent is not even guaranteed. The language in the contract makes clear it is contingent on the CSU system receiving \$227 million dollars in funding from the state budget. This also means that if Governor Gavin Newsom, who is also a CSU Trustee, does not sign off on \$227 million to the CSU system, then no raise is guaranteed, an obvious conflict of interest.

We are told to vote on numbers on which have no guarantee. The UAW claims, “In case this condition isn’t met, we return to bargaining and renegotiate salary, benefits, and sick leave.” What this means is that anything can be negotiated by the UAW, and we, the rank and file, will have no say in voting for what is going to be negotiated.

• The UAW claims that we will get the current 5 percent retroactive to “July,” however this language is misleading. Start dates for all CSU campuses began either the week of August 21st or August 28th. Assuming

the retro would be paid from August 21 to October 27, 5 percent retro for \$17 per hour at 20 hours a week [\$17 x 10 weeks (Aug 21-Oct 27)] equals \$170.

We founded this rank-and-file committee in opposition to the UAW Local 4123 bureaucracy which made clear it was never going to wage a fight for transformative wage demands. At the midday rally held a month ago, Local 4123 representatives told us we should avoid using the word “strike” and made toothless calls for “more than 4 percent.” Having “won” an annual 5 percent raise—a measly 1 percent more—the union apparatus believes that we should celebrate, but this will leave the rank-and-file food and housing insecure.

This fact cannot be stressed enough—the paltry 5 percent raise will be recouped by the CSU administrators due to increases in tuition and inflation increases. These CSU fee and tuition increases will make the raise negligible and will in fact amount to the university receiving even more from us. We demand an immediate strike vote be called.

Less than a month ago, the California State University Board of Trustees voted unanimously for a multi-year plan to raise tuition 6 percent for the upcoming school year, and by a total of 34 percent by the end of the plan.

Under the 6 percent tuition increase, San Diego State University and CSU San Marcos undergraduate students will see their tuition increase by \$342 from \$5,742 to \$6,084 for the 2024-25 academic year alone and skyrocket to \$7,682 by 2028-2029. For graduate students, who comprise the vast majority of academic workers, our tuition will increase by \$432 dollars this next year alone. At the largest highest education institution in the country, we also question why academic student workers, specifically TAs and GAs, do not receive full tuition waivers as is the norm at many other academic institutions.

In response to backlash by students, CSU Board of Trustee Leslie Gilbert Lurie stated “It is shocking that we have created a culture where people don’t expect tuition to be raised. ... Somewhere along the way we gave people the impression that this system is magically going to create money to sustain itself.” Lurie, a millionaire, and the entire Trustee board represent the financial elite and are hostile to students who they view as cash cows. The CSU administration is criminally charging students \$34-35,000 a year to live on campus.

These well-paid board members cannot claim ignorance that lines for the campus food pantries have been growing as has student homelessness. Increasing costs of living compel most academic workers to work multiple jobs to make ends meet. We are paid pennies to teach and do the lion’s

share of the grading. We are so exhausted teaching and working our off-campus jobs that we have little time and capacity to focus on our thesis. We teach thousands of undergrads who themselves are milked by the CSU administrators and face increases in food, housing costs, parking, and tuition.

We want a contract with real improvements and gains. These should include, at a minimum:

- An immediate 50 percent raise, then a 25 percent raise in July 2024, coupled with Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA). This is needed immediately to combat years of wage stagnation against skyrocketing inflation and ensure CSU fee and tuition increases do not allow CSU to claw back all gains. According to the US Labor Department in April 2023, inflation stood at 4.9 percent.

- Guaranteed .5 appointments for academic workers and full health insurance for all workers! CSU has been moving to .4 appointment in order to slash health insurance.

- Tuition waivers that cover 100 percent of tuition, not a fraction as is currently in place.

- Free parking for academic workers, staff, and faculty. The university continues to increase parking fees and claw back wages. We should not have to pay the university to work here.

We call for unity with our undergraduate students, staff, and faculty who themselves are underpaid. A highly exploitative tier system ensures that increasing amounts of teaching are performed by lecturers, who are essentially gig workers, while tenure and full time positions become increasingly rare. Faculty should seek to create their own rank-and-file committees so that we may operate in solidarity with one another.

The 29,000 faculty and staff want to fight for significant wage increases and an end to the exploitation of low paid lecturers. Their union, the California Faculty Association (CFA) has still not called a strike authorization vote. Instead, they have declared an impasse in their contract negotiations and submitted to state arbitration, which will produce nothing favorable for faculty and staff.

The state of California is run by the Democratic Party, which, no less than the Republicans nationwide, has been at the forefront of attacks on public education. The 25-member CSU Board of Trustees, is composed of state officials at the upper echelons of the Democratic Party, including California Governor Gavin Newsom, Lieutenant Governor Eleni Kounalakis, Speaker of the Assembly Robert Rivas, Speaker of the Assembly, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony K. Thurmond, and CSU Interim Chancellor Jolene Koester. The political officials of both parties are hostile to the working class, youth and student workers.

This past week alone Gavin Newsom vetoed numerous bills attacking the working class including one that would limit the cost of insulin for diabetics, primarily affecting the poorest layers and a bill which would ensure that workers who were fired for striking or carrying out workplace action could not access unemployment benefits.

We also call on 16,000 CSU support staff under CSUEU to link up with us and form your own rank-and-file committees on every campus. The clerical, healthcare, administrative and academic support, and custodial workers are themselves calling for a powerful NO vote on the similarly substandard contract brought to them by their union.

We reject the lie that “there is no money” for education, despite the fact that Biden and Congress have already approved \$137 billion in spending on the US/NATO war in Ukraine, including \$70 billion directly on weapons. Meanwhile, Biden and the ruling class of both parties have stated their full support for the Israeli onslaught against Gaza. Demonstrations have erupted throughout the world. Protests in France have been outlawed and across the US, students have been unconstitutionally targeted for protesting the Israeli occupation.

The fascistic regime of Benjamin Netanyahu has ordered 1.1 million Palestinians to flee Gaza City, but they find only closed borders. Israel has

now cut off Gaza’s water, fuel and electricity, and refers to Palestinians as “human animals.” There is a direct line between the wealth stolen from the working population and directed towards war. We demand billions for education instead, and an immediate halt to the financial support of the wars of the rich.

The California Master Plan passed in 1960, known as the Donahoe Higher Education Act, was passed by voters to raise taxes to ensure free, public higher education for all. However, there were no legal guarantees. Beginning in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s, the ruling class initiated a social counterrevolution against the working class that steadily clawed back what had been won.

In higher education, public funding was gradually cut and replaced with higher tuition and other student fees which have only skyrocketed since. While some countries provide free higher education, it is a crime that in the wealthiest country free tuition is not granted for all seeking higher education, and in fact, the price of an education is the most expensive in the world.

Workers are rising up in struggle in one sector of the working class after another. We call on workers at every campus to build a rank-and-file committee, connected to each other to carry out joint initiatives to ensure all sections are guaranteed their demands. It is particularly critical that we link up with autoworkers.

Right now, the same UAW bureaucracy that is seeking to push through this contract on us, is keeping over 80 percent of autoworkers on the job despite the fact that they are on strike and that 97 percent voted to strike. UAW president Shawn Fain and the entire UAW apparatus are working with the Biden administration and actively doing all they can to prevent an industry-wide strike involving all autoworkers, throughout the US, Canada, and Mexico.

We as academic workers must learn the lessons of the UAW struggle as well as the experiences by academic workers at the UC system, who were told by UAW bureaucrats they had to drop all their major demands by the union bureaucracy, including COLA.

The UAW bureaucracy has already proven its role in violating the democratic rights of rank-and-file members of Local 4123. In last year’s UAW presidential election, only 29 votes were cast from that local out of some 10,000 eligible voters. The aim was to stop younger workers from voting for rank-and-file socialist candidate Will Lehman, who continues to call for power to be taken from the bureaucracy and placed in the hands of the rank and file.

We call on all academic workers throughout the CSU to cast an overwhelming NO vote on this TA and contact us to join and build rank-and-file committees on every campus.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact