

“I want to see faculty members join the strike. We must come together to fight for a good raise ... What good is a one day strike?”

California State University skilled trades workers hold one day strike

David Rye
16 November 2023

Over 1,100 skilled trades workers carried out a one-day strike Tuesday against the California State University system (CSU). The workers striking include plumbers, locksmiths, electricians, carpenters, technicians, mechanics and other skilled trades, affiliated with Teamsters local 2010. They are part of a growing wave of university workers who have gone on strike in recent months, part of a broader upsurge in the working class.

Workers are fighting for annual wage step increases which were conceded for the past 28 years. CSU campuses are located in some of the most expensive regions in California. The 15 percent offered by CSU board of regents over the life of the contract will not make up for years of stagnant wages and increased inflation and costs of living.

Spread out between 22 campuses, each strike location involved an average of about 50 workers per campus. Pickets started around 5:30 a.m. in most locations, when it was still dark, and were wrapped up around noon or shortly after.

A carpenter at CSU Fullerton told the WSWS he was striking because “One of the big issues is they took away our step increases, so we’re one of the only state employees that don’t have step increases. So in our pay range, for whatever your job is, there’s no step increases to get to your top salary pay. There’s people that have worked here 20 years that have never gotten to their top salary.

“They say, ‘oh, we’re going to give you the steps back,’ but they tied the steps to the budget. So all they have to say is, we don’t have it in the budget. And

then, if they don’t have it in the budget, we can go back to negotiations.”

When asked about understaffing, he said, “I don’t know the exact numbers, but in each campus you have a plumbing shop, electric shop, painting shop, carpenter shop, HVAC shop, and each shop has a maximum number of workers. But we’re understaffed. I mean, we should have two or three more carpenters, two or three more painters, you know. So, absolutely we’re understaffed. People retire and they don’t replace them and people move on or do something else. And things don’t get done.

“They have money. They just raised tuition. They gave all the presidents raises. The new chancellor got a raise. Her total package is a million dollars. All the presidents in the CSU get their housing paid for. They all get a car allowance. We take care of the president’s residence here. We go up to the ranch, they’ve got a pool, a pool house, the whole thing in this place up here. So, yeah, they’ve got it pretty good, they don’t share the wealth.”

A power maintenance worker at San Diego State University told the WSWS, “Compared to other employees, we are way behind. We are fighting for automatic step raises for every year. We haven’t had step raises for almost 30 years. I have been a worker here for 18 years, and this is my first time going on strike.

“I want to see faculty members join the strike. We must come together to fight for a good raise. The cost of living is going up, prices are rising. Everybody is affected by this. It is not only us. The service we

provide is critical for the infrastructure. We are responsible for maintaining the learning environment for students. How can they claim to not have the money when the work we do is so critical? We need to be the first consideration. We need our needs met.

“They say we are doing this one-day strike because that’s what they say they can pay for. But what good is a one day strike?”

Significantly, some students began engaging with the workers, with some joining the pickets. When two students approached a picket to ask a worker what was taking place, he said, “We are fighting because we don’t have automatic raises. I have been working here for 30 years and the salary they hired me in is the same as what I am being paid now. If we need to, we have to utilize the full strength of the Teamsters.”

Another group of academic workers, members of the United Auto Workers, who were themselves recently forced to accept a sellout contract, joined with the picket. They told the WWSW, “We need to be out here supporting the Teamsters, they are just as important to keeping this school running as we are.”

Nothing has been resolved for the 10,000 academic workers who continue to live in poverty and housing insecurity after the UAW contract was rammed through earlier this year. Significant opposition to the agreement emerged during the struggle, expressed in the founding of the Academic Workers Rank-and-File Committee at SDSU, which called for a “no” vote and to unify their workforce with faculty, staff and employees.

Tuesday’s strike also occurred ahead of a pending vote by CSUEU/SEIU Local 2579 on a tentative agreement which has provoked significant opposition, and a potential strike of the 29,000 college faculty in the California Faculty Association (CFA). Keeping with the strategy to minimize and isolate strikes in the manner of the phony “stand up” strikes, much like the UAW, the CFA has attempted to limit strikes to four staggered single campus strikes during the first week of December, while keeping things business as usual throughout the rest of the CSU system, the largest university system in the country.

The CFA’s limited strikes will be contained to Cal Poly Pomona on December 4, San Francisco State on December 5, CSU Los Angeles on December 6, and Sacramento State on December 7.

The trade union bureaucracy is closely aligned with the Democratic Party, which controls the CSU Board of Trustees, and are working together to hinder a unified movement of campus workers, prevent or limit strikes and isolate different sections of the workforce from each other.

CSU workers are faced with the need to liberate themselves from the grip of the union apparatus and unite into a potent industrial and political counteroffensive, advocating for ample funding for public education.

The workers in the CSU system are divided into numerous separate unions, their contracts negotiated separately, and the “no strike” clauses enforced by the trade union officials designed to ensure a united fight that could shut down the CSU system is prevented, but it is precisely this which is needed.

The blanket assertions made by both Democrats and Republicans—that there is insufficient funding for secure, well-paying jobs, affordable education, etc.—need to be dismissed out of hand. The ruling elite manages to allocate trillions for endless wars, such as the conflict in Ukraine and the ongoing genocide against the Palestinian people—conflicts that the unions have endorsed.

To secure victories for workers within the CSU system and to demand the decoupling of higher education from the military-industrial complex, workers must build up a network of rank-and-file committees independently of the trade union bureaucracies.

To learn more about building and joining a Rank-and-File Committee among your coworkers, please contact us here.



To contact the WWSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wwsw.org/contact