

Thousands of California State University faculty begin limited four-day strike

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On December 4, thousands of California State University (CSU) faculty members begin a series of one-day strike actions.

The one-day strikes will take place at four different locations over four days: CalPoly Pomona (December 4), San Francisco State (December 5), California State University Los Angeles (December 6) and Sacramento State (December 7). The action follows a 95 percent strike authorization vote last month taken among members of the California Faculty Association (CFA), a union representing 29,000 faculty members, which had delayed the strike vote for weeks.

The CSU system includes 23 university campuses throughout California and is the largest four-year public higher education system in the US with nearly 500,000 students. The teachers and lecturers who voted to strike face low wages, excessive workloads, inadequate benefits, oppressive requirements to obtain leaves of absence, and insufficient health and safety measures.

The struggle of these tens of thousands of faculty members is being sabotaged and sold short by the union. Despite having the ability to call out these 29,000 faculty members across all locations following the 95 percent strike authorization vote, the CFA has limited the action to a series of one-day strikes at four separate locations.

These token actions, modeled after the theatrical “stand up strikes” in the auto industry organized by the UAW bureaucracy under President Shawn Fain in recent months, are strikes in little more than name. They are designed to give the illusion of action, while keeping most members on the job, minimizing disruption to management while avoiding the payment of strike benefits.

In addition to the inadequate four-day series of token

strikes, the CFA has raised paltry and incomplete demands, such as a 12 percent raise for year one and undetermined increases for the following years. Meanwhile, CSU has countered with a measly annual 5 percent raise for the next three years, citing budget constraints. “We recognize the need to increase compensation, and we are committed to doing so. But our resources are limited, and our financial commitments must be fiscally sustainable,” said Leora Freedman, CSU’s vice chancellor for human resources.

Last August, CFA and CSU engaged in a process of state labor mediation. Last Friday, a fact-finding report written by a third-party labor negotiator was released, with the negotiator recommending a 7 percent yearly increase for faculty wages. The report acknowledges that the increase does not offset the rate of inflation.

The reality is that many of the faculty members who voted to strike are unable to live in the communities where they teach. The cost of rent, groceries, utilities, healthcare, fuel and food are rising rapidly nationwide, and California was already known for a suffocatingly high cost of living before the recent inflationary trends.

While faculty and teachers are told there is “no money” to pay them enough to live, Mildred Garcia, the newly elected California State University Chancellor, will earn slightly under \$1 million in her first year, composed of a \$795,000 base salary, \$80,000 in deferred compensation, a \$96,000 annual housing allowance and a \$1,000 monthly auto stipend.

To add insult to injury, pay for CSU presidents has grown at a dizzying rate across the board. As one example, San Diego State University presidents have seen a staggering salary increase of 78 percent, from 2007 (\$299,435) to 2022 (\$533,148).

It is also important to note that the CFA has not raised any demands for safety in the workplace related

to the COVID-19 pandemic, adapting itself to the false assertions by state and local governments that the pandemic “is over,” despite the fact that schools and universities are well-documented vectors for transmission of the disease.

The CFA has publicized a letter signed by 37 state legislators addressed to Chancellor Garcia in which the Democratic state congressmen urge the CSU system to reconsider the CFA’s totally inadequate proposal. This is simply a public relations stunt aimed at promoting these Democratic Party politicians, permitting them to posture as allies and spokespeople for the striking teachers and faculty. It is, in fact, the Democratic Party that in the first instance shares culpability for allocating inadequate resources for public education in the state while the same party at the national level allocates hundreds of billions for repression and war abroad.

The current struggle is taking place in the context of what amounts to a general rebellion of workers within the CSU system, which the unions have barely managed to keep in check. Thousands of undergraduate students, staff and faculty continue to be grossly underpaid. Teaching jobs have increasingly been transformed into gig economy and precarious work. Tenure is becoming a thing of the past, and a tier system is destroying anything left of previous concessions that stabilized educational jobs.

In October, 10,000 academic workers across all 23 campuses, including teaching associates, student assistants and graduate assistants, were presented with a sellout deal by the UAW local bureaucrats in charge of negotiations, provoking intense opposition from the rank and file. In November, 16,000 CSU support staff under the California State University Employees Union (CSUEU) were also presented by union bureaucrats with a sellout contract after a similar one-day token strike.

Meanwhile, 1,100 skill trades workers, members of Teamsters Local 2010, whose contract expired on June 30, went on strike on November 14 protesting unbearable working and economic conditions.

Aaron Flores, an air conditioning refrigeration mechanic at San Jose State University (SJSU) and member of Local 2010 who commutes 80 miles daily to work, described the exploitative nature of his work in a recent local news report. “I basically have to live paycheck to paycheck just to get by.” He works on

rooftops, attics and crawl spaces and has to endure temperatures as high as 120 degrees. The jobs are so underpaid that 27 employees at SJSU have left since May 2020. Currently, the university has 25 vacancies in the facilities department

In each of these struggles, the union bureaucracy has worked to minimize the impact of any of action undertaken by workers and to make sure each strike would be isolated from others. These steps cut across the very concept of a strike itself, which is to exert the collective economic and social power of the members as a section of the working class.

At the same time, the fact that these struggles are breaking out simultaneously, even in a limited form, is a reflection of the growing insurgency of the working class against capitalism and against the more and more unmanageable conditions of life and work. There is enormous potential for CSU workers to take independent initiative and unite in a common fight for their demands in opposition to the diversion of gigantic sums to the wealthy and their wars.

Such an initiative requires the organization of rank-and-file committees to carry forward the struggle outside of the unreliable and treacherous union bureaucracies and the Democratic Party.

The WSWS will provide additional reporting and analysis as the struggle develops. We encourage CSU workers at all levels, not just those participating in these four days of strike action, to contact us.



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