

Demand 50 percent raises, COLA, equitable workloads, full benefits for all workers

Unify the faculty and entire workforce at California State University in joint strike action! Build rank-and-file committees!

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Over 29,000 lecturers, professors, librarians, counselors and coaches at the 23 campuses of the California State University (CSU) system are fighting for a contract to raise their grossly inadequate pay, end their oppressive work requirements, and raise health and safety measures for all. This strike is part of a growing wave of workers' struggles all over the world against poverty wages and terrible working conditions, which is merging with the largest antiwar movement against the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

After delivering a 95 percent strike authorization, however, the California Faculty Association (CFA) has organized only isolated one-day strikes over four days: 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 WSWS spoke to Communications Professor Sunny Lie at Cal Poly Pomona who was taking part in the one-day picket. She said, "We're on strike for our students. There's also anger, but it's also hope. We want a better CSU. We want a better university for our students, for ourselves. I can't believe that I have a PhD, and I can barely afford a solid middle class life. I can barely provide for my family. That is ridiculous!

"We want it to be better for our students. So, we're doing this for our students. I'm also doing it for my dignity, for my students and for my family. There's no other way. There really isn't. They're not going to give it up."

The union bureaucracy's tactic follows the playbook of the United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain's

"standup strike" in the auto industry this fall. The union bureaucracy called out a handful of plants, while forcing 80 percent of autoworkers to continue working and producing profits for the Big Three automakers.

The California State University system encompasses 23 campuses and seven off-campus centers, with 56,256 faculty and staff, and a student body of nearly 500,000 students. It is the largest four-year public higher education system in the country.

The workforce is divided into 11 bargaining units. Even though all the workers have faced decades of deteriorating pay and working conditions, the union bureaucracies have consciously worked to isolate, divide and impose intolerable conditions on the workers. Four of these units are facing contract struggles this year: the California Faculty Association (29,000 members), Teamsters Local 2010 (1,100 skilled trades workers), Academic Student Employees in the UAW (10,000 grad students and teaching assistants) and California State University Employees Union (16,000 support staff).

On October 15, the Rank-and-File Committee of Academic Workers at SDSU was founded to oppose the policies of the UAW Local 4123 bureaucracy, which recently announced a sellout tentative agreement.

A member of this committee stated, "The Rank-and-File Committee of Academic Workers at SDSU is in full support of our fellow academic workers in the CFA union as they struggle for living wages and adequate benefits. The 95 percent strike authorization shows that lecturers and faculty are ready and willing to use the powers of striking to fight for themselves and their fellow workers.

“We call for the CSU faculty members to form their own rank-and-file committee, organized independent of the union apparatus, and unite with the academic student workers and other workers on campus! We are stronger together!”

Alongside the CSU system, the state’s other higher education system is the University of California, which has 10 campuses, employing over 192,000 faculty and staff with a student body of more than 280,000 students.

We urge CSU faculty and staff to learn the lessons from the UAW’s betrayal of the UC grad students strike last year. This was the largest higher education strike in the history of the United States, when 48,000 academic workers belonging to three different unions affiliated with the UAW, struck the UC system for six weeks. Their strike was shut down by the UAW pushing through a rotten deal that the bureaucrats claimed was “historic.”

In the course of this strike, the initial demands issued by the UAW were roundly derided by thousands of rank-and-file grad students as inadequate. The fact that workers were forced to survive on \$23,247 a year is itself an indictment of the union apparatus and one of the main reasons that workers went out on strike in the first place.

The strike at UC was itself taking place as the UAW bureaucracy was engaged in hiding from its membership the fact that there was an election taking place for the union’s leadership. They were mounting a defensive operation aimed at suppressing the vote because a socialist and rank-and-file worker, Will Lehman, was running for the presidency of the union on a platform of abolishing the bureaucracy and transferring power from the UAW apparatus to workers on the shop floor.

The final vote amounted to only 9 percent of eligible workers having their votes counted, while 90 percent of the rank and file were never informed of the election. Despite the bureaucracy’s intimidation and obstruction, almost 5,000 workers voted for Will Lehman.

Last month, the Teamsters Local 2010’s one-day strike by 1,100 skilled trades workers was also isolated, designed to put as little pressure on the university as possible. The contract for these plumbers, locksmiths, electricians, carpenters and an array of technicians and mechanics, expired on June 30. Over 20 years ago, the then existing union accepted the removal of a step-increase schedule, leaving this section of workers unable to get to top salary levels.

After the skilled trades struggle, the California State University Employees Union (CSUEU) announced rotten tentative agreements, which included two paltry 5 percent

wage increases over the course of the three-year deal.

Simultaneously, CSU grad students saw their contract expire on September 30, with UAW Local 4123 submitting a TA also limited to two raises of 5 percent over two years, pushing the workers even farther behind because of lost wages from the previous contract.

Recently the CSU approved a 6 percent increase in tuition, forcing thousands of students to pay even higher fees for a college degree. The conditions have developed in which the struggles of the faculty, grad students, skilled trades and classified workers are objectively unifying with those of the youth and the massive protests on every continent against the genocidal war by Israel, backed by the US and NATO governments.

The unions no longer work as self-defense organizations for workers but rather as a police force for management. Their well-heeled bureaucrats have more in common with the presidents of temp agencies than with anything resembling working class fighting organizations. For workers at CSU, and indeed any of the campuses or workplace to win their demands, they must first break with these corrupt organizations of middle-class charlatans, who spend more time and workers’ dues money campaigning for the Democrats sitting on the other side of the table in the form of the Trustees than they do for the workers themselves.

Workers can only do this through the formation of democratically controlled rank-and-file committees that are independent of not only the union bureaucracies, but also of the Democratic Party. This is the first step, and it needs to be taken now.



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