

California State University teachers and faculty to hold one-week strike in January

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The California Faculty Association (CFA), which represents 29,000 professors, lecturers, librarians, counselors and coaches in the California State University (CSU) system, announced on December 20 that it is planning a “systemwide strike” across all 23 campuses in the state on January 22-26. Support for a strike is overwhelming among the teachers and faculty, who voted by a nearly unanimous 95 percent to strike in November.

In the first week of December, the union held a four-day series of one-day “strikes” at four different locations, modeled after the phony “stand-up” strikes associated with United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain. Since then, CFA members have returned to work without any of their demands being met and without any new agreement being reached with the university authorities.

The proposed strike this month is scheduled to take place only if the union does not reach an agreement with university management at a series of bargaining sessions scheduled to take place on January 8, 9, 10 and 12. The proposed CFA action on January 22 through 26 is timed to coincide with another scheduled action by Teamsters Local 2010, which represents 1,110 skilled trades workers in the CSU system who were also forced back to work after an isolated one-day strike.

The 29,000 faculty and other educators serve some 485,000 students in the CSU system. It is the largest four-year public higher education system in the country. The strike vote represented a clear indication of the willingness of workers to fight against the impossible financial situation faced by CSU faculty and lecturers, who live in areas with some of the highest costs of living in the country.

Under the current contract, CSU faculty and lecturers are overworked and underpaid. The CFA’s published list of demands includes a general salary increase of 12 percent for all faculty, coaches and counselors—well below what many teachers and faculty insist is necessary to keep up with inflation and afford basic necessities. The *World Socialist Web Site* has interviewed teachers and faculty, who are calling for 50 percent raises, pay tied to inflation, equitable workloads and full benefits for all workers.

An unequal tier system is in place with the growth of adjunct lecturers, who make far lower wages while lacking job security and subsist with fewer benefits. Meanwhile, tenured positions are becoming increasingly rare, and job duties are mounting. Professors are expected to be active and productive researchers in their field of study, participate in faculty governance through oversight and hiring committees, evaluate their peers’ research,

create new policies for the university, and advise undergraduate and graduate student projects, on top of the expectation to teach several uncapped classes. Many CSU professors are not given teaching assistants to help with grading, an increasingly overwhelming task, particularly with uncapped and growing class sizes.

Another critical issue for faculty and lecturers is insufficient parental leave. The CSU currently gives new parents only 30 days off, instead of the full semester (or two quarters) of leave standardized across the University of California system. The CSU’s 30-day parental leave policy disrupts classes as faculty leave mid-semester and also forces teachers to take time off with no pay.

This year has witnessed what amounts to an insurrection by workers throughout the California State University system, whose struggles are being systematically sabotaged by the respective union leaderships. In addition to the ongoing struggle by faculty and lecturers, 10,000 academic and another 16,000 administrative staff recently had rotten contracts imposed on them by the United Auto Workers and CSUEU/SEIU Local 2579.

The last time the CFA was set to strike was in 2016 when the union called off strike action in the eleventh hour, accepting a concession agreement. The WSWs called for a “no” vote at the time, explaining that the TA betrayed demands for transformative wage increases, healthcare, pensions and job security. It should also not be forgotten that in 2008-2009 CFA, working along with the state Democrats, endorsed a de facto 10 percent wage cut through accepting 18 furlough days.

The conditions faced by CSU faculty and green lighted by CFA are a reflection of a broader war on education in the United States. The Democratic Party, which represents one faction of the ruling elite, has been in complete agreement with the Republicans on the decades-long defunding and attacks on public education. Despite making unlimited sums available for war and military violence, including the Israeli genocide against Gaza and occupied Palestine, the ruling elite always insists that there is not enough money for education, infrastructure or social programs to eliminate poverty.

The CFA has not carried out actions or organized to protect CSU professors from being reprimanded for speaking out against the US and Israel’s ongoing genocide of the Palestinian people, despite massive rank-and-file support.

The various union bureaucracies, despite occasional posturing, answer to the Democratic Party, which is the primary beneficiary

of monthly union dues that come from workers' paychecks. The historical purpose for the payment of dues is to set aside funds so that workers can strike until their demands are met. On its website, the union claims that "CFA does not have a strike fund that would make up for lost salary if management docks pay during a strike, very few unions do." Workers must be warned that at UC, the UAW collaborated with the university to retroactively dock pay to academic workers for their six-week strike.

The CSU administration continues to claim that it cannot afford to meet even the CFA's limited demands, despite empirical evidence to the contrary. Eastern Michigan University Professor of Accounting and Certified Public Accountant Howard Bunsis, who was retained by the CFA during the negotiations, determined that the "marginal cost of the CFA proposal over the CSU administration offer can be met by the significant annual operating cash surpluses that the CSU has generated for many years. The CSU system has significant reserves, but these reserves will not have to be accessed to meet the CFA request; the request can be satisfied by existing annual surpluses." Additionally, the CSU's claim of not having an operating budget sufficient to meet the CFA's demands is challenged by the CSU's September approval of a 6 percent per year annual tuition increase through 2028, a cumulative 36 percent increase.

The money to meet workers' demands certainly exists, even within the CSU system as it is presently constituted. This is underscored by the fact that CSU's high-ranking administrative officials are currently paid salaries on a par with business executives. The CSU administration's wages have increased at double the rate of professors. Presidents of CSU campuses are paid between \$370,000 and \$533,000 per year, and all but one presidential position includes a generous \$50,000 to \$60,000 yearly housing stipend or provides a home free of charge. Currently, the CSU chancellor is paid just shy of \$800,000 per year, almost eight times more than a typical tenured CSU professor makes annually. CSU administrators and the well-paid California Faculty Association administrators alike are unaffected by the decisions made during negotiations.

The money is there to meet workers' demands, and there is a powerful will to fight expressed in the 95 percent strike vote, but teachers and faculty have been held back by the CFA bureaucracy, which has followed the playbook of the United Auto Workers' (UAW) use of standup strikes, aimed at minimizing the Big Three auto companies' financial losses and resulted in a series of pro-company sellout contracts with General Motors, Ford and Stellantis. It is no coincidence that Stellantis announced almost 3,700 layoffs on December 8, just weeks after the ratification of the UAW's contract.

Autoworkers had sought a 40 percent wage increases, cost-of-living increases, a reduction of the workweek with no reduction in pay, no layoffs or plant closures, the elimination of the tiered employee system, and moving temporary workers into permanent positions. The UAW's use of standup strikes, closed-door negotiations and asking UAW members to return to work before contract ratification all contributed to the ratification of contracts featuring almost none of the original demands.

Despite the potential power of the 60,000 strong workforce,

Teamsters Local 2010, CSUEU/SEIU Local 2579, California Faculty Association and the United Auto Workers have worked to isolate each struggle.

CSU faculty and staff must learn the lessons from betrayals of graduate students and academic workers last year by the UAW at UC and CSU. In both instances a paltry wage was pushed through by the bureaucracy, who used all of its resources to hail both rotten deals that the bureaucrats claimed were "historic." At UC campuses academic workers were demanding a \$56,000 base salary, up from \$26,000, when the UAW accepted a miserable \$34,000 salary. At CSU, the 5 percent increase of the existing poverty wage amounted to what the Rank-and-File Committee of Academic Workers at SDSU calculated was an increase of only \$73.67 for the month. This was a slap in the face when academic workers at both institutions had demanded a 50 percent increase and live in some of the most expensive regions in the state and country.

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 Rank-and-File Committee of Academic Workers at SDSU was founded last fall to oppose the policies of the UAW Local 4123 bureaucracy, which announced a sellout tentative agreement. The committee called for a "no" vote on the agreement and advocated for continued striking until all their demands were met.

A member of the committee warned, "The CFA bureaucracy, as with the bureaucracy of our own UAW 4123, has repeatedly either proposed paltry demands or has implemented feckless strike action, which only serves the interests of the CSU and CFA bureaucracy. The UAW 4123 Rank-and-File Committee was created in an effort to advocate for transformative demands beyond the paltry demands and actions put forth from the UAW 4123 bureaucracy.

"We call on the CFA rank and file to create their own rank-and-file committees. We seek to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to demand radical changes and transformative demands that stretch solidarity across boundaries manufactured by the CSU in efforts to minimize the capabilities of the solidarity and collaborative action amongst all CSU workers."



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