

UPDATE: Union shuts down California State University faculty and staff strike against wage cuts, casualization of jobs

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UPDATE 9:41 PM PST: Just before 9 PM local time on Monday night, the California Faculty Association called off the remainder of the strike planned for this week and announced a snap tentative agreement. Faculty and lecturers have been ordered to return to school tomorrow and notify students that classes are resuming.

More details on the contract will emerge soon, but the CFA's supposed "highlights" already point to major concessions in favor of the California State University system. The 5 percent wage increases under the new TA are nearly identical to the CSU's "last best offer" which workers had rejected earlier. Adding insult to injury, even this is not guaranteed, as the 2024 increases are contingent on state funding. It has yet to be announced when the deal will be voted on.

"This is a betrayal of all the faculty, and the students and staff who have tried to fight for something important," one CSU faculty member told the WSW. "It's 'historic' only in the sense that it happened so quickly. This tentative agreement is almost exactly what the CSU administration proposed as its last best offer. The CFA seems to be even more scared of the power of its members acting in unity than the CSU management. Shocking, yet predictable."

Rank-and-file control is needed now more than ever to prevent this betrayal from the CFA bureaucracy. Faculty and lecturers must discuss with their coworkers and come together independently of the CFA to reject this betrayal and organize to continue the strike and expand their struggle.

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A strike of 29,000 professors, lecturers, counselors and coaches across the California State University (CSU) system began Monday, demanding sharp increases in wages in the face of record inflation and the casualization of much of the university system's labor force.

The strike is one of the opening salvos of the class struggle in 2024, both among educators and the working class as a whole, following explosive struggles last year. California

alone witnessed a six-week struggle by 48,000 academic workers at the University of California, the four-month-long strike of 11,000 writers and 65,000 actors and numerous other strikes across the state. The strike at CSU joins this wave of militancy of ever broader layers of the working class.

The demands of CSU workers echo those of every section of the working class. Since 2020, prices overall have increased by 17.9 percent, with food going up 24 percent, energy costs going up 38 percent and gas prices soaring by 42 percent. During that same period, wages for the university system's workforce have been largely stagnant.

A striking professor at San Diego State University told the WSW, "This situation is untenable. Faculty salaries have fallen farther and farther behind over the past few years. Younger faculty members speak of being unable to afford rent and fears of going into even more credit card debt. Older faculty can only hang on if they don't have dependents—and these are tenured and tenure track faculty. The situation is even worse for lecturers, many of whom have to teach across multiple campuses to eke out even a bare living."

"The fact that this is happening when administrators seem to be growing in numbers and enjoying massive salary hikes as a matter of course is just obscene."

The strike has also evoked immense sympathy and support from CSU students on social media. Reddit threads show that the university has emailed students to get them to report on which instructors have canceled classes because of the strike, emails which have been universally ridiculed for trying to get students to "narc on their professors."

One student noted, "The admin are not your friends. Most profs get paid peanuts because most uni classes are taught by adjunct faculty, glorified part-timers that have to teach at 2 or 3 separate campuses to make ends meet. ... And then they go and increase your tuition every year, only to turn around and blame the profs for wanting a living wage. ... No

snitching. Poison their data.”

Another made clear, “[P]rofessors aren’t making bank from your tuition, *admin* is. [A]dmin is your true enemy here, not the teachers who are barely getting anything in comparison.”

Josh Grisetti, a member of the Department of Theater and Dance at CSU Fullerton, further expanded on the inequality across CSU on his personal TikTok. “Between 2007 and 2022, the average salary has increased for full-time professors in the California State University system by about 22 percent. The Chancellor’s salary has increased 43 percent over that same time. Presidential salaries on each campus has increased between 40 and 70 percent.”

Grisetti also noted that CSU Chancellor Mildred Garcia is “making a million dollars a year.” This does not include the position’s car and housing allowance.

Moreover, an analysis of the university system’s finances from October by Howard Bunsis, a professor at Eastern Michigan University, shows that CSU has an estimated \$8 billion in reserve that it could use to fund higher salaries for its professors, as well as helping lower tuition for its students. Instead, the Board of Trustees has consistently elected to use these funds to invest in Wall Street, inflating this reserve for their own personal gain.

University campuses are increasingly treated as corporations from which to extract enormous sums of money from their staff and the students that attend them. Flatlined wages have been accompanied by tuition hikes over the past 15 years that have doubled the cost of going to college. At CSU Fullerton, the estimated cost for a student living on campus for the current academic year is nearly \$31,000.

The corporatization of education also poses immediate political questions. The striking academic workers are, by simply going on strike, directly challenging the state government of California and the Democratic Party establishment. They face not just Garcia and the Board of Trustees, but Governor Gavin Newsom and President “Genocide Joe” Biden.

The success of the strike also requires a fight against the CFA bureaucracy, which has proposed a paltry 12 percent increase in wages and has indicated it is willing to go lower. It has also prevented any joint action among the 10,000 academic workers as well as 14,500 university employees with the California State University Employees Union who recently had concession agreements pushed on them. The CFA also worked with the Teamsters union to keep 1,100 skilled trades workers off the current picket lines. In total, the 29,000 on strike are only about half of the total number of workers who could have been called out.

In other words, the union is not oriented towards the workers, but working alongside the university administrators

to work out a sellout deal, in collaboration with the Democratic Party.

In contrast to this bankrupt outlook, the network of rank-and-file committees must continue to expand. One was already established this past fall among academic workers at San Diego State who led a fight to oppose the concession contract which the United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 4123 bureaucracy had just imposed on academic workers that included an insufficient 5 percent annual raise tied to the CSU’s budget.

A member of the Academic Workers Rank-and-File Committee at SDSU provided this perspective for the striking workers:

It is necessary that all sectors of workers at the CSU break from their bureaucracies and work in a united struggle across manufactured boundaries, through democratically established Rank-and-File control. It is through this organic working class organization and collaboration, in which we are capable of leveraging an expansion of the strike indefinitely—as has been historically required by the working class—to win the truly transformative demands they rightfully deserve, as the generators of value for this institution.

Reach out to the WSWs today about setting up rank-and-file strike committees at each campus and to unite the struggle of CSU workers with broader sections of the working class to halt the continued attacks on public education.



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