

Cal State workers: Vote “No” on the CFA’s sell out agreement!

Opposition grows to strike betrayal by California Faculty Association

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The Rank-and-File Committee of Academic Workers will be holding an emergency online meeting this Thursday, January 25 at 7 pm Pacific to discuss the way forward against the CFA’s sellout. Details and registration can be found here. We urge all academic workers and their supporters to attend this vital meeting.

More than 29,000 faculty, staff and support workers in the California State University system were called off picket lines on Tuesday morning after completing only a single day of an initially scheduled five-day-long strike action.

The cancellation was announced by the California Faculty Association (CFA) following a snap tentative agreement with university administration Monday evening. The CFA claimed that “this historic agreement was won because of members’ solidarity, collective action, bravery, and love for each other and our students.”

If there is anything at all “historic” about this rotten agreement, it is the speed at which the CFA defied its membership and completely capitulated to the demands of the university. University workers had initially voted in favor of the strike by 95 percent with the full expectation that they would remain on strike until their wholly justified demands were met.

In opposition to this rotten betrayal, the Rank-and-File Committee of Academic Workers at California State University is calling for a “No” vote on the agreement. The “No” vote is only a starting point, however. If the struggle were to then remain in the hands of the CFA after the vote, the union would only work to shove another rotten deal down workers’ throats.

Instead, teachers and staff should join the Rank-and-File Committee in order to expand the struggle to all 55,000 Cal State workers and beyond, to fight for what workers and students actually need and not what the university and state Democratic Party say that they can afford.

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Pacific to discuss the way forward. Details and registration can be found here. We urge all academic workers and their supporters to attend this vital meeting.

During the course of the latest negotiations, both sides acted as partners, not adversaries. The CFA’s initial demand for a 12 percent across the board wage increase, which would only partially offset record inflation and years of stagnating wages, was dropped to a mere 5 percent in the tentative agreement, the same amount CSU had initially offered.

The CFA is claiming the agreement contains a 10 percent raise, dishonestly lumping together the two annual 5 percent wage increases. This is doubly deceptive because the only guaranteed raise is the single 5 percent for 2023-2024 academic year. The CFA’s own highlights make clear that the 5 percent increase for July 2024 is “contingent on the state not reducing base funding to the CSU.”

Teachers and university workers have almost universally condemned the new agreement on social media.

One teacher wrote on Twitter/X, “How is it that after only one day of the CSU strike, the agreement is abysmal? ‘Strikes work’ but not if the end result means nothing. Do more, push for more. Faculty deserve more than 5%, and students deserve something too!”

Another wrote, “Strikes work, but they work if you use them correctly. There was more to win. I plan to vote no on this TA.”

Moreover, as both sides were well aware, any contractual offer of greater than 5 percent per year would have reopened salary talks with other unions at Cal State, due to clauses included in their contracts. But far from welcoming such an outcome as an opportunity to wage a joint struggle for pay increases across the board, the CFA instead worked deliberately to prevent it.

Among those workers who would have been subject to such a contract reopener were the more than 10,000 TA’s and Graduate Assistants working at Cal State, who were the

subjects of a massive betrayal by the United Auto Workers union last September. Most of these workers make poverty wages averaging less than \$40,000 a year, conditions which are the result of a massive drive to defund public education and turn highly skilled and educated instructors into a casualized labor force.

A similar agreement was reached with Teamster Local 2010, which nominally represents 1,100 skilled trade workers at Cal State. The Teamsters agreement was announced three days before the CFA strike was scheduled to begin, preventing Teamsters from participating in the strike. The 1,100 workers are also currently voting on their agreement, and the Rank-and-File committee of Academic Workers urges the widest possible “No” vote on this agreement as well.

The Cal State system itself is effectively run by the California Democratic Party. On the board of trustees is Governor Gavin Newsom, Lieutenant Governor Eleni Kounaliakis, Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond.

As part of the governor’s proposed budget for fiscal year 2024-2025, the University of California and California State University systems would each receive 5 percent base funding increases for the next year. In other words, the salary “increases” are effectively being imposed by the state of California itself.

This is despite the fact that a tuition increase was passed at Cal State last September amounting to 34 percent over the course of the next 5 years. Moreover, the limited funds alleged by the administration did not prevent university administrators from receiving hefty increases to their salary and benefits.

Mildred Garcia, Cal State University Chancellor, receives a salary of a million dollars every year in addition to paid housing. Campus presidents across the 23 campus system receive an average salary of \$417,000. Full time lecturers make an average of \$71,000, which is often not enough to make ends meet, especially in the state’s expensive metropolitan areas.

Funding adequate salaries for lecturers, professors, teaching assistants and campus staff is not simply a question of the funding at the disposal of the Cal State system itself. It speaks directly to issues of social inequality, which are pervasive throughout the state, the country and world capitalism as a whole.

In an environment where five individuals own close to a trillion dollars in assets, the provision of decent wages and needed social services, not to mention the maintenance of democratic rights and safeguards against the decent into catastrophic world wars, becomes an impossibility.

Not only did the CFA completely abandon its initial 12

percent wage increase demand, it completely ignored the other demands it had raised and which were supported by the rank and file, including more counselors and class size reductions. The counseling issue was of particular importance to members as each CSU counselor is expected to provide care to 1,800 CSU students.

One CSU contact wrote in to the *World Socialist Web Site* to note the immense anger among rank and file workers. “For what it’s worth, the two dozen or so folks I’m in contact with are PISSED about this new agreement. We’re hoping there is more explanation later, but there is nothing in the [CFA] email about more mental health counselors for the students.”

The worker continued, “Each single mental health provider has 1,800+ students to serve, meaning most students get no services at all. I have walked students in crisis over to counseling and have been turned away.”

Another teacher at Cal State University Fullerton told the WWS, “What I believe as a teacher is that you’re bridging the gap between adolescence and adulthood for these young people and doing everything we can to make them good citizens of the globe. And what I think that takes is making them capable of truly thinking critically.

“I can’t stomach teaching in a place where students will walk out with \$250,000 of student loan debt. There’s a part of me that would simply like to have a more comfortable life and not have to clamor with the union and the administration to try to get five percent raises here and there that still won’t help me.

“We’re letting state schools sort of move into the same territory as private colleges and universities. Everything is moving into the private sector.

“There seems to be two classes here. You have the class of the Wall Street brigands, who work to the tune of a million dollars a year, who don’t like universities being accessible to all. But that’s a sign of a democratic society, and this is an attack on democracy as I view it.”



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