

Academic Workers Rank-and-File Committee at SDSU holds successful online meeting in opposition to union betrayal of Cal State strike

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The Academic Workers Rank-and-File Committee at San Diego State University (AWRFC-SDSU) and the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) held a successful public online meeting Thursday evening in opposition to the betrayal of California State University (CSU) lecturers and faculty by their union, the California State Faculty Association (CFA).

Nearly 60 academic workers and students attended the call and dozens more registered and were unable to attend. Attendees participated from across the CSU system, including from Stanislaus, Humboldt, Long Beach, Fresno State, Fullerton, Cal Poly SLO, and SDSU. There were also workers of the CSU Employees Union (CSUEU) and the United Auto Workers present, breaking through the artificial barriers between different sections of workers set up by the CFA and other unions at the state universities.

Throughout the meeting, these workers gave voice to the immense anger that erupted Monday evening, when the CFA undemocratically called off its announced week-long strike after only a single day based on claims that a tentative agreement had been reached. They at the same time expressed the need to unite their struggles with other sections of workers, particularly other sections of academic workers, in a common fight.

The opening report was given by Norisa Diaz, a writer for the *World Socialist Web Site*, which placed the CFA's betrayal in its political context. "This contract and the one-day strike was the plan all along. CSU workers are beginning to see firsthand the role of the corporatist trade union bureaucracies that are really only unions in name and are working against the interests of workers. How could it be any other way? The bureaucracy is dependent on its close ties to the state and the Democratic Party, a capitalist party that serves the ruling class; the state of California is run from head to toe by the Democratic Party."

"It oversees the most extreme wealth inequality in the state; record levels of homelessness, child poverty, immigration detention centers, and a vast array of prisons. The Democratic Party is the party of Wall Street, war and austerity, whose mask has been torn off and exposed in their full support for the destruction of the Gaza Strip, and full support for the genocidal actions of the Netanyahu government. This party has also spearheaded privatization and charterization of K-12 schools, attacking the very right to public education. They have overseen the growth of class sizes, crumbling infrastructure, and the lack of health and safety protections, especially in light of a lethal and debilitating pandemic that has resulted in a widespread exodus of educators."

Following her report, professors, lecturers and students spoke powerfully on the need to continue their struggle in the face of the CFA betrayal.

A CSU professor commented, "People were really looking forward to getting back on the picket on Tuesday and we know from our conversations our students and staff were also interested in joining in. It came as a shock to everyone that the CFA folded.

"Many consider the CFA's acceptance of the 5 percent salary increase cap as a betrayal of not just the faculty, but other unions, because a lot of faculty now really are making the point that our connection is with the staff and with the students. And so we are all looking for a way to build something together. So thank you for having this meeting."

A professor at San Diego State University spoke on the history of broken promises by the CFA, as far back as the mid-2000s. "At one point, I really was involved in the local CFA chapter, it seemed like we were about to go on strike. I think this was 2006 or 2007. At that time, we settled shortly before the strike was going to happen. And there was a similar pattern as to what just happened: If one looked closely at the prior proposal for the CFA and the prior proposal for the CSU, the substance of the agreement that was reached was very close

to the CSU proposal. But the CFA presented it as an overwhelming victory.

Scott, a California State employee, noted the immense social crisis facing students, staff and faculty. “We need solidarity with all the unreleased unions, we need to stop the theft of student tuition dollars for Wall Street hedge funds, we need to end high prices and bring all that money back and reinvest it in our university, including subsidized housing for graduate students, and subsidized housing for new faculty. We need to end homelessness and hunger among our students. And we need to move towards free tuition for every California resident paid by the egregious salaries of all those people we’re going to fire.”

Among the “egregious salaries” he was referring to includes that of CSU Chancellor Mildred Garcia, whose annual salary and benefits amounts to an estimated \$1 million each year.

Andreas, a member of the AWRFC-SDSU, exposed how little a 5 percent raise really is. “If you’re a TA making \$17 per hour, it amounts to \$17.85 per hour, which over four weeks at 20 hours a week, is an increase of only \$73.67 for the month.

He continued, “It was due to the anti-democratic and conciliatory nature of our trade union that we formed the academic worker rank and file committee. These agreements from the CFA, and the UAW, with CSU have been consciously adopted and accepted to keep workers from a united struggle to rightfully seek ways that raise their wages in the face of rabid attacks on public education.

“In fact, as the other professors have mentioned, if the CFA had actually sought to fight for and meet the rank-and-file members demands of 12 percent, CSU would be obligated to reopen wage negotiations for us academic workers and other unions with similar contracts. This not only exposes the lack of solidarity and collaboration between both trade union bureaucracies, but also the ultimate betrayal of the CFA leadership and its conceding to the 5 percent.”

Andreas concluded his remarks with a call to workers to continue to build the network of rank-and-file committees. “It is therefore up to the rank-and-file to take advantage of the rising labor action to organize an independent and unified struggle composed of all CSU workers. That means all of you here on this call, through this organic working class, organization and collaboration, we will be capable of leveraging the labor action that has been historically required to win truly transformative demands that we rightfully deserve.”

Marcus Day, a writer for the WSW, who focuses on autoworkers struggles, addressed several questions that had emerged about the bankruptcy of trade unions as a form of organization. “It’s important to understand that you are all part of the developing international struggle of the working class against many different life and death problems, enormous social inequality, continuing attacks on democratic rights, the destruction of public education. And this is, of course, taking place, certainly within the United States under both of the

capitalist parties, the pro-corporate parties, but it’s a process which is taking place internationally.”

This international process is why the trade unions, which are fundamentally nationalist organizations, are a “major obstacle to workers advancing their interests.”

Maria, a graduate student at SDSU, spoke on her experiences during the betrayal by the United Auto Workers (UAW) during the strike in the fall of 2022 of 48,000 academic workers. “What happened to the CSU faculty is exactly what happened to us. The UAW’s slogan was “more than four” and the contract they gave us was just 5 percent. We’re all bifurcated, but if we can form our own committees and work against the unions, because we’re all going through such similar things, I’m just really excited about that prospect.”

Critical lessons must be drawn from the struggle, in particular the role of trade unions. It is not merely this or that rotten bargaining committee or leadership slate of the CFA, but the fact that, as Day noted, unions are nationally-based organizations in an increasingly globalized economy.

The next stage of the struggle now begins, and it must be led by the working class. The first task is to decisively break with the CFA at every campus and form new rank-and-file committees. These are democratically controlled organizations of workers, by workers and for workers where demands can be raised and discussed, and a genuine fight can be organized to win those demands.

The WSW urges every worker that agrees with this strategy must also agree to fight for it. Campaign among your coworkers, explain how the tentative agreement threatens public education and is a betrayal of both faculty and lecturers, as well as staff and students, make clear the need for new independent forms of organization. In the coming days, the WSW will be announcing another rank-and-file committee meeting to organize a campaign for a “No” vote on the tentative agreement. Every worker must be prepared not just to vote down the TA, but to renew and build the fight.



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