

Cal State professors, lecturers, counselors and coaches irate over sham contract vote, where “no” means imposing of management's offer

Norisa Diaz
16 February 2024

Anger is boiling over among 29,000 faculty, lecturers, coaches and counselors at California State University in response to the sham vote being organized by the California Faculty Association (CFA) on a new tentative agreement.

The electronic ballot presented workers with a false choice between either accepting the concessionary agreement or allowing the previous offer to be imposed by management. It posed the choice in these terms:

YES—I vote YES to accept the Tentative Agreement terms reached January 2024 with scheduled raises in 2023 and 2024 and other terms and conditions negotiated in the reopener bargaining of 2023.

NO—I vote NO to reject the Tentative Agreement. In voting NO, I accept the terms imposed by Management January 2024.

There is widespread sentiment among workers to reject the deal, which does not meet the demands for which workers voted overwhelmingly to strike. Central to the demands was an immediate 12 percent raise, concrete staffing improvements for mental health counselors, workloads and class size reductions. After a single day of a planned one-week strike from January 22 to 26, the CFA undemocratically called off the strike and accepted the TA that offered a 5 percent raise for the 2023-2024 year and a 5 percent raise in 2024-2025, contingent on state funding.

The WSWs referred to this as a sham ballot, “of the kind typically associated with dictatorships, which occasionally organize votes with no way of expressing opposition to official policies...The CFA bureaucrats know that, in any democratically run vote, their contract would go down in flames. They are responding by running roughshod over the faculty’s basic democratic rights, including the right to vote in a meaningful election.”

On Wednesday evening, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality at San Diego State University and the

Academic Workers Rank-and-File Committee at SDSU held an important meeting titled “Why voting ‘NO’ is not enough: The case for rank and file control of the CFA struggle.”

Significantly, the meeting was attended by faculty, lecturers, undergraduate, and graduate students who discussed the betrayal of the CFA. They also discussed the isolation of CFA members by the other Cal State unions, including the United Auto Workers, CSU-EU and the Teamsters.

An academic worker who addressed the meeting said, “The CFA states it had to accept the 5 percent wage increase, so as to avoid reopening negotiations with other union contracts who received the same percentage or less. Whose side they are on?”

“The CFA, UAW and CSU fear the very likely possibility of facing a workforce united in solidarity, under the formation of democratic, independent, and interdependent rank-and-file committees from all sectors of the CSU workforce. Students and workers have been ready to express solidarity with their faculty and wish to unify together in a shared struggle.”

Other critical questions were raised at the meeting, including the defense of the right to a university education which is being undermined by the shift towards a low-wage, casualized teaching workforce on campuses. They also discussed the role of the Democratic Party, which in addition to controlling the White House and California state government which also controls the CSU Board of Trustees, and is also involved in the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Other faculty and students made the following statements on the contract:

Latha Varadarajan, a Professor at SDSU said, “The wording on the ballot is deceptive, and it is hard to believe that such a tactic is merely a naive oversight. Every single step taken by the CFA, from the craven signing of the TA to the conduct of the various town halls (when much of the time was taken up by pointless slides and any real questions were simply not answered) in the past few weeks have made it obvious that they are not only incapable of representing the interests of the rank and file, but actually are not interested in doing so. Regardless of what happens with the vote, here’s hoping that this wake up call will lead to a real change in perspective”

Dr. André Skupin, Professor of Geography at SDSU said, “Paying members of the CFA are facing crucial questions: Who benefits from a union that is on-its-face weak, ineffective, disingenuous and, as sadly demonstrated in recent weeks, largely incompetent and tone-deaf? Analysis of university administrator salaries and raises shows that management takes care of its own quite well and I personally don’t mind that. Hard-working administrators should be appropriately compensated. But who is taking care of faculty with equal vigor and focus? What is the purpose of a union?”

Jonathan Graubart, a Political Science Professor at SDSU told the WSWS, “The appalling wording of the ballot by the CFA leadership is emblematic of a decaying regime. It realizes that it must stoop to new levels of deceit and contempt for the rank-and-file in order to retain its status and power. The urgent questions are when will the current CFA regime dissolve and what will replace it? The former could not come soon enough. The challenge for the rank-and-file is to find a much-needed transformation rather than new leaders with the same underlying regime.”

Emanuele Saccarelli, a Political Science Professor at SDSU said “The phrasing of the TA ballot officially certifies that the CFA has never had any intention of fighting for its members. It is such a brazen attempt to ram through their sellout agreement as to also constitute an insult to the intelligence of the faculty. Let anyone who thought that this rotten bureaucracy was acting in good faith try to explain this one.”

Nakai, an SDSU graduate student and academic worker, said “The CFA’s recent ballot verbiage has been one their most explicit expression of their betrayal of the class struggle. They have blatantly sought to strong-arm their rank-and-file members through what can only be interpreted as a threat to their livelihoods in an effort to manipulate a ‘yes’ vote on concessions.

“Their options are: acceptance of concessions, or the imposition of CSU’s original offer, and with it, the CFA’s implicit abandonment in fighting for their workers. For an organization that repeatedly insists to represent and fight for its workers, this ballot is one of many proofs that the CFA will not only disregard its rank-and-file’s interest, but will actively work against it to influence the avoidance of a ‘no’ vote, that would ultimately result in re-opened struggle with an agitated and discontented rank-and-file.”

Maria, an SDSU graduate student and academic worker said “I was not aware of this ballot measure and am shocked. Given the genuine anger and wide calls for a ‘No’ vote, this is a transparent tactic to quell any meaningful organizing amongst workers.

“As a student, this agreement does nothing to help our quality of education, with concern over increasing class sizes and a lack of mental health care being completely ignored. As an academic worker, this agreement means that we have no means

to reopen our contract which was also voted through at the 5 percent rate.”

Sarah, an SDSU undergraduate said, “The effort to suppress opposition is ridiculous. There is not any choice. If there was information the students would strike too. The meeting was important because it was a truthful perspective, we don’t have to read between the lines.

“Education has become a business, the rising tuition is a financial barrier limiting access to education. Any claims that they are an institution dedicated to affordable education is a lie! Everything is more and more elitist. It shouldn’t be a choice between staying afloat financially or academically.”

Ross, a former academic worker who has been following the struggle said this was “Certainly a sham vote. I had seen on the CFA website ‘that people should be aware of what a yes and no vote signify’, before the implications were laid out. That was before the vote opened, and I didn’t actually believe that it would be so explicitly laid out on the ballot itself.

If there was any doubt on the need for the demand for an independent running of the vote by the rank and file, there can be no question now as to the necessity for the demand. I think its pretty shameful how they’ve gone about it, probably owing to the bureaucracy’s recognition of the widespread anger toward the TA and the way the strike was called off, if not in answer to the Rank and File Committee’s call for a no vote.

* * *

To join the committee and get involved, fill out the form below.

We encourage all our readers attend an important meeting hosted by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality at SDSU, “The 2024 Elections and the Crisis of American Democracy.” The meeting will be held Tuesday, February 20th at 7pm Scripps Cottage, San Diego State University and the main speaker will be Socialist Equality Party National Secretary Joseph Kishore.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact