

California Faculty Association ratifies sellout contract for 29,000 Cal State educators through sham vote

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The CSU Academic Workers Rank-and-File Committee is hosting an emergency meeting on Wednesday, February 21, at 7 p.m. PST to discuss the need to organize against this ballot that produced sham results. Register for the meeting here.

On Monday, the California Faculty Association (CFA) announced the ratification of a new contract covering 29,000 faculty, lecturers, librarians, counselors and coaches throughout the 23 campuses of the California State University system.

The contract is a massive sellout, announced after the union called off a planned five-day strike after only one day. It does not come close to faculty members' wages demands, with two 5 percent annual increases—with the second pay hike contingent on state funding—instead of an immediate 12 percent hike which workers struck for.

The contract did not address other fundamental demands, such as mental health counseling for students, although the CFA said that the agreement “acknowledges the importance of moving all campuses to a 1,500:1 students-to-counselor ratio.” Nor does it address the casualization of university educators through the use of lecturers and adjunct professors, grossly oversized classes, the need for more teaching assistants or other demands.

Worst of all, the contract vote itself was a travesty, designed to prevent even the possibility of members expressing their support for a better contract. The wording on the ballots presented voters with either the option of accepting the deal or voting “no” and “[accepting] the terms imposed by Management January 2024.”

According to the union, “76% of voting CFA members approved our Tentative Agreement (TA).” Even if this margin is true—and it is significant that the union did not give a breakdown of the results, including how many votes were cast or how many abstained—it is meaningless because the vote was constructed to exclude any genuine opposition. Through the false “choice” presented on the ballot, CSU faculty were being given their marching orders: either accept the contract, or reject it and get something even worse. Either way, according to the CFA bureaucracy, this struggle is over.

There is ample reason to be skeptical of the declared results.

Various polls were taken since the strike was shut down by the CFA last month, which showed overwhelming opposition to the deal. The San Francisco State union chapter polled 360 of its members, with 70 percent planning to vote “no” and only 3 percent voting “yes.” Similar polls took place at CSULA and CSULB, with most choosing a “no” vote.

However, there can be no doubt that many who were opposed to the contract voted with gritted teeth to accept the deal or abstained under conditions where the CFA officialdom made clear that it had no intention of organizing a real fight.

Then, the union presented a tentative agreement that satisfied the demands of the CSU Board of Trustees, not those of workers. It never had any intention of fighting for a 12 percent wage increase, because anything more than 5 percent a year would have automatically reopened wages in the sellout contracts rammed through by other campus unions.

In other words, the 12 percent was never on the table. The TA accepted a 5 percent raise for year 2023–2024 and an additional 5 percent for 2024–2025 contingent upon state funding. Effectively, these are pay cuts in light of record inflation.

The vote was a sham, of the type normally associated with dictators and totalitarian regimes, designed to create a false “mandate” for policies already decided in advance. It is a self-indictment of the union, which effectively made clear that it would refuse to carry forward a real struggle in the interests of the membership.

This underscores the need for faculty to take the fight out of the hands of the union apparatus, which so flagrantly violated the clear mandate they were sent with a near-unanimous strike vote. The California State University Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which involves faculty and students across the Cal State system, is holding an emergency meeting to discuss the way forward. “No contract ‘passed’ under such circumstances should be considered binding,” the committee said in a statement Monday night.

The committee also proposed three basic initial demands on the basis of which the struggle must be taken forward:

- The current ballot must be thrown out, and a genuine vote must be organized and overseen by trusted rank-and-file

faculty.

¶The entire CFA bargaining committee and all those involved in organizing this sham vote must resign. They must be replaced by trusted, rank-and-file faculty without connections to the union apparatus.

¶If workers vote to reject the contract in a real, democratically organized vote, last month's strike must be immediately resumed on an indefinite basis rather than limited in advance to one week. A strike fund must be made available to allow faculty to stay out until all of their demands are met.

Guillaume, an assistant professor at SFSU, expressed skepticism on the vote outcome: "a part of me do[es] believe the vote [result] was No, but the CFA was probably bribed, although I have no proof of that." Guillaume criticized the CFA for betraying the strike: "A strike needs to disrupt business to be effective. I showed the strikes pictures to people in my network who are managers and above in industry. They told me they would never take such things seriously."

Faye Linda Wachs, sociology professor at CalPoly Pomona, emphasized: "The way that vote was worded was unacceptable. I feel ashamed as a member of the union that they asked us the questions in that way, and even though I'm literally on the board on my campus, I thought about quitting over how that vote was worded."

Many CFA members on social media recognize the treacherous role played by the CFA. Andrew Byrne, associate professor at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, expressed his contempt: "This is not a union. CFA should put more pressure on management than they do their own dues-paying members. What a theater production this has been. I believe in unions. This isn't one."

Josh Grisetti, a professor of the Department of Theater and Dance at CSU Fullerton, told the WSWS that the dilemma many students face is "most crippling to us right now. That was not touched at all. Just completely taken out of the equation."

He further emphasized the social problems facing youth: "We are drowning in it because these students need a lot and they've lived through some things that the rest of us don't even totally comprehend. We didn't grow up during a pandemic. We didn't grow up in a world where everybody is telling them these [student] loans are impossible. The housing market is impossible. The American dream is gone. Like we haven't lived through a version of that type of childhood."

Jonathan, another faculty member, said, "Recall the advice Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg gave to Truman in the late 1940s to justify the Truman Doctrine to a skeptical public, 'Scare the hell out of the American people.' There was also 'confuse the hell out of them' by constantly invoking the Red menace. Note that this was a thoroughly bipartisan effort.

"The CFA leadership did a version of this. People worried that no would mean an imposition contract and some were confused to think that a no vote was ratifying the CSU imposition contract. Combine this with the fact that only the

leadership could communicate to the whole membership, this was a stacked election. Ultimately, the CFA leadership was in sync with the CSU leadership in praising the agreement and discrediting opponents. The 24 percent no vote is actually pretty impressive given the structural impediments of having to do a very quick and ad-hoc outreach that couldn't come close to reaching even a majority of members."

"I have no confidence in the vote as reported by the union," said another professor who wished to remain anonymous. "95 percent of the faculty voted to authorize the strike. When the strike was called off after one day, there was immense frustration among the colleagues I talked to and in the various online meetings. The union's fraudulent wording of the ballot could only have aggravated those sentiments.

"I don't believe that 76 percent figure, and the point is that the union bureaucracy entirely controlled the voting process while openly advocating for a yes vote. There should be no confidence in the result so long as the fox is guarding the henhouse."

Another professor who wished to remain anonymous said, "Whether or not the vote counting was conducted properly is almost irrelevant at this point. What cannot be forgotten is the deceptive framing of the ballot itself and everything that led up to it. This result will no doubt be spun as a major victory. It is up to the rank-and-file to make sure it is not and that the next round will be fought on a whole different plane."

The struggle is not over. Faculty cannot accept a contract "passed" in such a manner and which does nothing to defend against the corporate attack on the right to a quality university education.

But the next phase of the struggle requires a new strategy, based on a rebellion against the apparatus and the mobilization of all workers and students in defense of education.

The CSU Academic Workers Rank-and-File Committee is urging all faculty, lecturers, counselors, coaches and librarians to join an emergency meeting on Wednesday, February 21, at 7 p.m. PST to discuss the way forward. Register for the meeting [here](#).



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