

Students and faculty protest layoffs at California State University system

Norisa Diaz, David Benson
13 December 2024

Students, lecturers and faculty at San Francisco State University (SF State) held a “funeral march” on campus Wednesday to protest the mass layoffs of lecturers planned for the 2025-2026 academic year. The layoffs are the product of major budget cuts in the broader California State University (CSU) system.

The layoffs are being attributed to supposedly lower enrollment figures, which faculty and lecturers dispute. Many report full and growing class sizes, with any alleged decline in enrollment offset by a sharper decline in classes being offered. Claims of “lower enrollment” or “chronic absenteeism” are being utilized to justify defunding public education in districts across the country.

The CSU system is the world’s largest four-year public university, including 23 campuses and seven off-campus centers with an enrollment of nearly half a million students and 55,000 employees. It faces disaster in the 2025-2026 budget—a deficit of between \$400 to \$800 million. This is nearly 10 percent of the operating budget, and it is projected the system will attempt to slash \$400 million this upcoming academic year.

The job cuts at SF State are just a portion of the layoffs which are underway across numerous campuses. According to the LAist, job cuts are also underway at CSU campuses in Chico, East Bay, Humboldt, Los Angeles, Monterey Bay, San Bernardino and Sonoma.

The University of California system is also facing more than a \$500 million budget gap next summer. With 295,000 students, they have already announced significant tuition hikes to out-of-state students, increasing costs from \$48,000 to \$53,000 per year. Meanwhile the budget for community colleges has a current deficit of \$45 billion, to be followed in 2025-2026 by a \$30 billion shortfall.

Massive cuts are also underway in K-12 schools across America. Nearby Oakland Unified School District faces a \$95 million deficit and plans on merging 10 schools. Santa Rosa City Schools has a \$30 million shortfall and is planning to close at least four schools.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to a number of protesters at Wednesday’s rally.

Ramon, a third-year undergraduate student, told our reporters:

Our school and the CSU in general, is facing massive budget cuts. Our professors are being fired, laid off. Our departments are being gutted. And we understand that student solidarity is necessary because faculty working conditions are student learning conditions.

And we understand that, you know, as they raise our tuition, they’re just giving that money to administrators. They’re putting that money into investment funds that go to war and genocide abroad. And at the same time, they make excuses saying they don’t have the money for faculty. They don’t have the money for faculty or a functional education system. So the students are here because we don’t want our faculty to go. We want a functioning

school. We pay good money for that.

Brian and Jennifer, SF State faculty members for 30 years and 17 years respectively, commented on the steady shrinking of staff they have seen over the years. Brian stated:

They’re basically being forced into retirement. It’s a tragedy. Some of these people have been teaching for 30 years. It’s a funereal atmosphere. Three semesters ago there were 60 lecturers in our department. Now there’s only 11.

Jennifer explained the tier system that splits faculty into full-time, 3-year contracts and 1-year contracts. Thirty of the latter were laid off during the previous year. She added, “We need to invest in education, ensure that students get the education they deserve.”

A retired faculty member who worked for 17 years said:

I’m terribly saddened at the loss of the liberal arts program. SF State was renowned in the flourishing of art at the intersection of culture and politics. But this is all being eroded at the expense of career training.

A number of demonstrators at the SF State protest expressed concern over the incoming Trump administration and the further erosion of education and attacks on democratic rights. **Bella**, a psychology student, said, “I’m very afraid of what is to come,” referring to the assault on democratic rights being prepared by the incoming Trump administration.

Ramon added:

We understand that under Trump, there will be heightened repression against student organizers and activists. He’s already said he’s going to use the FBI to repress us, especially pro-Palestinian activists. We know that. You know, Kamala Harris wouldn’t have been much better, but Donald Trump is just going to heighten the repression and the oppression of the American people.

On his selection of wrestling billionaire Linda McMahon to head the Department of Education, Trump recently said, “We will send education back to the states, and Linda will spearhead that effort.” There is

widespread fear among educators that the Trump administration will attempt to carry out the deepest attacks on public education the country has ever seen, with his promise to dissolve the Department of Education.

However, the sorry state of education, which has long been under attack by both capitalist parties, is the result of protracted bipartisan efforts. This process has been spearheaded by the Democratic Party, particularly in California which has carried out record levels of austerity, privatization and charterization. Under Governor Gavin Newsom's predecessor, Jerry Brown, California took the lead in the number of charter schools in the nation.

The trade union bureaucracies, including in the California Faculty Association (CFA) and the California Teachers Association (CTA), are politically tethered to the Democratic Party, the ruling elite and Wall Street. Despite the widespread support of educators, they have not waged any mass struggles to unite K-12 or university academic workers against the attacks on education, which range from the normalization of pink-slips in K-12, to school closures, tuition hikes, or the current layoff of wide numbers of lecturers across the CSU system.

The CFA has done nothing to inform its 29,000 members of the mass layoffs and will do nothing to wage a fight against them. As of this writing, the union has made no posts on its Instagram about the SF State layoffs. There was one article on X on December 9, which was from the *San Francisco Standard* on the layoffs.

Their silence and lack of organizing and actions around the layoffs, make clear that they will roll over and accept the dictates of the CSU, just as they had betrayed faculty, lecturers and librarians when they called off the one-week strike last January after one day and sought to push through a contract that only benefited the CSU Board of Regents.

Michael, a lecturer at San Diego State University, explained that many lecturers are struggling to get by after the CFA rammed through a new sellout contract earlier this year in a sham vote that asked them to either accept the contract or reject it and therefore "accept the terms imposed by Management January 2024."

Michael noted:

The CFA ignored the will of 95 percent of those who actually wanted to strike and called it off in one day. Many of us tried cancelling our CFA subscriptions to withhold them taking out our dues after they jerked us around. They claim that we got a 10-12 percent raise in their propaganda a year ago, but it's 5 percent here and a 4 percent increase for those who were at the bottom since they raised the floor a bit.

It amounts to very little when you're not making that much to begin with. It's been crickets the past 10 months. It also took them all the way up until October 1 for faculty to see this increase, but given the rising costs of everything—parking, fees and childcare—it doesn't feel like we've gotten much, and I can't help but feel like it's all by design. Childcare is going up, and I pay them \$1,000 a month for them to watch my child a few days a week while I teach for them. It's hard to see at the end of the day because it doesn't cover inflation or cost of living, which rises 9-10 percent each year, especially in San Diego.

Michael says that he has heard nothing from the union about the layoffs, much less that it intends to carry out a fight for the reinstatement of the lecturers.

Earlier this year, academic workers at San Diego State University formed the CSU Academic Workers' Rank-and-File Committee to unify the struggle with staff and faculty colleagues across the CSU campuses in opposition to the trade union apparatuses, which were imposing paltry 5

percent raises. Its founding statement explained, "We founded this rank-and-file committee in opposition to the [union] bureaucracy which made clear it was never going to wage a fight for transformative wage demands."

One of the founding committee members commented to the WSW:

The projected 2025-2026 budget cut that is to be imposed upon the Cal State system is but another conscious attack on students, youth, workers and their institutions of public education.

The 2025-2026 budget proposal openly describes and ominously warns to students and workers that impending cuts will bring layoffs across the system, the reduction of access to critical educational resources, and a deterioration in the quality of education overall. The assault on public education we are experiencing is a bipartisan effort driven by the insatiable profit motive that seeks to continue the commodification of public education.

The increasing austerity students and workers face at home is undoubtedly and most inseparably linked with the wars that both factions of the ruling class continue to pursue abroad. As both sides of the aisle fervently direct major financial spending to escalating wars of a global character, education, healthcare and other critical social services necessary for students, youth and workers will be the first to be eclipsed in the most undemocratic manner.

Students, youth and workers across the Cal State system must take up a positive program of struggle in the defense of living standards and our democratic rights to a public education. This is a struggle that must be uncompromisingly waged on an anti-war basis and which is directed against the poverty and oppression the capitalist system produces.

All lecturers, faculty and students interested in waging a fight against the layoffs and further attacks on the horizon from the Trump administration must begin building rank-and-file committees now at every campus. They must be politically independent of the Democratic Party and link up with K-12 educators and broader layers of workers. Fill out the form below to learn how to get involved.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact