California State University workers rally as 29,000 faculty vote on strike authorization

Kimie Saito, Joshua Rodriguez
2 November 2026

Several hundred California State University (CSU) workers rallied at the Long Beach campus on Tuesday, October 27, demanding higher wages, job security and relief from mounting workloads. The action, held under the slogan "Five Unions, One Fight," was part of a series of campus protests as 29,000 California Faculty Association (CFA) members began voting to authorize a strike.

The five unions cover close to 80,000 faculty, staff, student workers and academic professionals across the CSU system. Workers at the Long Beach rally described salaries that fail to cover basic expenses, exhausting hours and years of temporary employment that prevent them from securing housing near their jobs.

Jonathan, a CFA member and geography lecturer at CSU Long Beach, told WSWS reporters:

"I'm now in my third year and salaries are still depressed. We still have pay compression happening," Jonathan said. "Cost of living has gone up way faster than salaries have over the last 20 to 25 years ... People are feeling the effects, the effects of inflation, current political climate, but this has been an ongoing issue for a couple decades now.

"I'm putting in 60 to 80 hours a week, but we're only paid for nine months ... Our freedoms are being restricted, and our salaries are being depressed. People are feeling the effects down to their grocery bills, down to the gas pump. It's not just at the faculty level. It's happening to staff, janitorial, everywhere."

Asked if campus funding has been depleted, Jonathan replied: "Oh, yeah, definitely. And it's not just at the university level. It's at the federal agencies as well. They're bringing in political appointees to review science grants, which is insane... NASA JPL [Jet Propulsion Lab] had a bunch of layoffs. NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] ... they're facing a lot of cuts. It's affecting our weather predictions. It's affecting everything. It's not a great situation for science right now."

Cristal, a California State University Employees Union (CSUEU) member and museum worker at CSULB, said:

"For me my biggest struggle is job security and earning a living from a temporary employment and earning a living wage. I've been a temporary employee for three years ... I have a master's degree in museum studies, and I can't even move to Long Beach because I don't want to move unless I have a secure job.

"I commute about 22 miles one way from Gardena ... I really love Long Beach, and I want to move here. But without a raise, I can't afford it. And without job security, I'm worried about moving here, losing my job, and then being stuck.

"I've been told that 52 percent of the staff here are temporary. So the majority of workers at CSULB are temporary ... Right now they're trying to also put our healthcare back on the table, so some of those benefits might even go.

"What's really special about this time is that we have five unions coming together rather than negotiating as individual unions. Our contract expired in July, and we're still in negotiations."

The CFA strike authorization vote runs from October 26 through November 19, following 16 months of stalled negotiations and the union's declaration of impasse in July. Its members, including professors, lecturers, librarians, counselors and coaches, are demanding salary increases, workload caps, job security, academic freedom protections and safeguards over artificial intelligence. Their contract expired on December 31, 2025. Fact-finding hearings were

© World Socialist Web Site

scheduled for November, with a possible strike as early as December.

Alongside the CFA are 36,000 members of CSUEU, 10,000 academic student workers in United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 4123, 3,700 members of the Academic Professionals of California (APC) and 1,100 skilled trades workers in Teamsters Local 2010. Other campus actions took place at Sacramento State, Fresno State, San Jose State, Cal Poly Pomona, San Francisco State, Cal State LA and CSU San Bernardino.

The fight for a unified struggle

The workers' determination to fight together stands in conflict with the actions of the union leadership. APC and UAW Local 4123 have already reached separate tentative agreements with CSU management providing an 8 percent raise over two years, before the CFA strike vote has even concluded.

APC President Mario Baeza insisted, "We will continue to be out there with the other unions ... even though we have tentatively agreed, their fight is still our fight." But separate settlements serve to divide workers confronting the same employer and undermine the possibility of a common strike across the university system.

The experience of 2024 bears directly on this danger. After faculty delivered a 95 percent strike authorization vote, the CFA leadership organized separate one-day campus strikes. When a five-day systemwide strike finally began in January 2024, the union called it off after a single day and announced a tentative agreement offering two 5 percent annual increases, the second contingent on state funding, instead of the 12 percent workers had demanded.

The ratification ballot presented rejection of the agreement as a vote to "accept the terms imposed by Management." Despite substantial opposition, including a poll at San Francisco State showing 70 percent intended to vote against the deal, the union announced a 76 percent "yes" vote and refused to release a breakdown of the results.

At the Long Beach rally, CFA chapter co-president Claire Garrido-Ortega declared, "It's time for all of us to show our power. Why? Because rent is up, groceries are up, healthcare is up, everything is up, except our pay. Faculty have gone without a raise since 2024 ... One job should be enough."

But the CFA leadership bears responsibility for the contract that left workers in this position. Another strike mandate will not resolve the question of who controls the struggle. In 2024, the apparatus shut down the walkout before members could vote on the agreement. Workers must have the power to determine their demands, coordinate their action and decide whether any proposed settlement justifies ending a strike.

This requires independent rank-and-file committees across all five unions, democratically controlled by workers themselves. Such committees must fight for cost-of-living adjustments, an end to pay compression and temporary employment, fully funded campuses and the defense of academic freedom and scientific research.

The struggle also requires a political break with the Democratic Party, to which the union bureaucracies are tied. Governor Gavin Newsom and the Democratic-controlled state government bear responsibility for the funding and conditions of California's public universities. Workers' needs cannot be subordinated to what this government and the CSU administration declare affordable.

CSU workers confront attacks on public education shared by workers and young people internationally, including students protesting underfunding and overcrowding in France. A unified CSU strike would provide a powerful basis for a broader struggle. Rank-and-file committees must establish direct links with workers and students across California's schools and internationally, mobilizing the strength of the working class against the subordination of education and every social need to capitalist profit and war.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site