

As April 13 strike deadline approaches

# Struggle at California State University endangered by faculty union's alliance with Democrats

By Evan Blake and Genevieve Leigh  
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Bargaining between the California State University (CSU) Board of Trustees and California Faculty Association (CFA) officially concluded last week after the two parties failed to reach an agreement based on the recommendations of a mandatory fact-finding process. After the fact-finder sided with the union's demand for a 5 percent pay raise and CSU officials dissented, the last stage of the government-enforced bargaining procedure was exhausted, giving faculty the legal right to strike under state law.

While there remains the possibility of a negotiated settlement, the CFA has stepped up its threats to call a limited statewide strike from April 13-15 and April 18-19, involving the 26,000 professors, lecturers, librarians, counselors and coaches employed at 23 CSU campuses. The union has published video and press releases since the fact-finder's announcement and told its members to prepare for a strike.

The driving force behind the strike is the growing anger of workers, who have faced relentless attacks by the Democratic-controlled state government and face constant job insecurity due to the increasing casualization of university workers. CSU faculty have not received a Graduated Salary Increase (GSI) raise of more than 1.6 percent since the 2007-08 school year, nearly 10 years ago. During the 2009-10 school year, at the height of the economic recession, they endured a 10 percent cut in pay through 18 furlough days, as state Democrats shifted the burden of the economic crisis squarely onto the backs of workers. Accounting for inflation, the average CSU faculty member has endured a pay cut of 7.16 percent since 2008.

Last October, over 94 percent of CFA members authorized a strike, expressing their immense opposition to the state's slashing of their wages, benefits and pensions. In the face of this growing militancy, the CFA hopes to limit the walkout to a symbolic protest while doing everything to limit the

scope of the strike and subordinate it to various maneuvers with the state Democratic Party.

Behind the backs of their members the CFA is collaborating with the CSU administration and state Democrats to push through a concessionary contract. It has presented the fact-finder's recommendation as a vindication of its "Fight for Five" while insisting that even this wholly inadequate wage increase will only be achieved by lobbying the state legislature in Sacramento.

The private, closed-door negotiations between the CFA and CSU over the past year have been designed to contain the scope of the demands and prevent the struggle from linking up with students opposing tuition increases and broader sections of the working class to fight the austerity measures imposed by the state government headed by Governor Jerry Brown.

While the CFA promoted the fact-finding mission as a legitimate process, the five-month procedure did little more than delay the inevitable confrontation while giving state and university officials more time to prepare for a strike. The fraudulent character of the process is confirmed in the list of totally impotent recommendations, which rest fully on appealing to the state legislature and Governor Brown for increased funding. The report urges the parties to "Develop a joint strategy and documentation to go to the California Legislature and Governor in order to enhance the CSU budget."

In fact the Trustees and the CFA have long functioned on behalf of the Democratic Party, which dominates the legislative and executive branches of the state government. Since 2011, California has had a "unified Democratic government" with the party controlling both the State Assembly and Senate. Since 1992, the Democrats have controlled the State Senate every year and the State Assembly every year except 1996, making them responsible

for the endless budget cutting and attacks on education during that time.

During the 2009 budget crisis, the Democratic legislature oversaw \$8.1 billion in cuts to public education, including \$2 billion to higher education alone. In 2010-11, the Democrats oversaw the slashing of more than \$650 million from the University of California and CSU systems.

The CFA and its parent union, the California Teachers Association (CTA)—one of the largest financial contributors to the state Democratic Party—are directly aligned with the capitalist austerity party. Speaking at the California Democratic Party Convention in February, CFA President Jennifer Eagen pleaded with the 3,200 delegates, saying, “We need your advocacy and your passion for what’s right. That’s why we’re Democrats, right? So, I want to ask all of you to get active and *help us prevent this strike*” (emphasis added).

In an email blast sent out last Tuesday to CFA membership, Eagan urged faculty to “email Gov. Jerry Brown and ask him to tell CSU Chancellor White to implement the fact finder’s recommendations” in order to “avert the five-day strike.” The CFA web site lists scores of State Assembly members and other Democratic Party officials who allegedly support the fight of faculty members.

During the 2010 state elections, the CTA spent upwards of \$7 million on “independent expenditures,” which largely went toward supporting Brown’s campaign for governor and the campaigns of Democratic state legislators. After his election, Brown appointed or maintained 20 members of the CSU Board of Trustees. He also joined the CSU Board as an ex officio member, becoming personally responsible for imposing spending cuts and tuition increases.

In exchange for political contributions and containing the resistance of workers, the Democrats have provided institutional support to the CFA and other educator unions, which have suffered a sharp decline in membership due to decades of attacks on workers.

The groundwork for potential “compromise” can be seen in the CSU Trustees’ dissent summary, which “welcome[s] CFA’s participation in this process” and “agrees that we can and should craft a multi-year solution to solve the salary lag for our faculty.” It is all but assured that whatever meager increases are granted to faculty will be paid for by CSU students whose tuition has already more than doubled since 2006, rising from \$2,520 to \$5,472. Tuition and fees now cover roughly half of the state’s public higher education costs.

The CFA is more than willing to sanction this reactionary solution, which will allow university officials and the Democrats to drive a wedge between faculty and the working class and lower middle class students who are

already overwhelmed with high tuition costs and unbearable student loan burdens. In an interview with the campus newspaper *Lumberjack*, Michael Camann, Humboldt State CFA chapter president, said that CSU plans to increase tuition next year regardless of the outcome of the current contract negotiations.

Such a “solution” must be rejected and a common fight initiated by faculty and students to guarantee secure and good-paying jobs for university workers and the right to higher education for all students. CSU was originally established in the mid-19th century as a free university system and fees and tuition were not imposed until the national and international economic crisis of the mid-1970s.

There is no reason why faculty should not get an immediate 30 percent raise and the university reestablished as a tuition-free system when the state has more billionaires than any other in the US. Far from being unrealistic, these essential social rights could be paid for through a sharp increase on taxes on California’s billionaires, who own a combined \$560 billion in wealth, more than the GDP of 49 countries, including Argentina, Poland and Taiwan, according to Forbes.

The demands of CSU faculty for a decent standard of living places them on a direct collision course with the Democratic Party, from the Obama administration and Governor Brown’s CSU Board of Trustees to the CFA, the CTA, the SEIU and other unions that are allied with them. In the coming fight, university workers will have to take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands—through the formation of independent rank-and-file committees—to rally the widest support from students and workers, including public school teachers, construction workers, immigrant workers, students and the unemployed.

For this struggle to be successful it must be the beginning of a political mobilization of the entire working class against the two corporate-controlled parties and break the grip of the economic dictatorship of the corporate and financial elite. In this fight to defend university workers and the right to free, quality higher education, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) will fight to rally the broadest support in the working class.

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