

Response to CSU Furlough Proposal

Steve Teixeira

Dear Unit 4 community –

What guides me on this issue are three core lessons from labor’s history:

- 1. When individual unions act as part of a *movement*, they get stronger than when each one acts alone.**
- 2. The labor *movement* is strongest when it organizes on an all-employee basis, resisting management attempts to divide workers by divisions of craft, skill, timebase, or permanency.**
- 3. This vote is just one battle in a struggle over the future of CSU and its employees, to continue as long as the budget crisis does – which will clearly be for some years.**

Historical Background

Since public service unions and the laws regulating them came after industrial unions, for us this recession/depression is posing similar challenges to what those unions faced in the 1930’s. At that time, AFL leaders organized the most-senior, most-skilled workers into separate unions. Their approach to the Depression was to protect their skilled base, and wait till it “blew over” (sound familiar?). Others started organizing all skill groups of the same employer. In just a few years they had organized whole industries, and even won Social Security (once a radical welfare idea) and unions rights (Wagner Act).

As the global economy undermined U.S. industry, those unions shrank. Public service unions became the fastest-growing labor sector. However, the same global economic changes that undermined industry are now battering tax flows and public budgets. Public unions are at a crossroads, like industrial unions in the 1930’s, and to me, those 3 core lessons from labor history apply to the furlough issue:

1. When individual unions act as part of a *movement*, they get stronger.

We need a summit of CSU unions to lay out some strategy for the next year/s, including issues like layoffs and future furloughs. The old strategy of fairly passive members paying for union leaders to go win them goodies in bargaining or in court is only successful in good economic times. We need a new strategy for these times, regardless of the furlough vote.

2. The labor *movement* is strongest when it organizes on an all-employee basis.

For me, uniting the most Unit 4 people means choosing the shared-sacrifice Furlough, instead of having a bigger than necessary number of members be thrown off the jobs lifeboat through layoffs.

I don’t see temporaries as people who should be grateful just to have gotten a job, and deserve whatever fate management gives them. Some federally-funded staff have did Unit 4-type work for CSU over 20 years without having union rights. When some were finally “allowed” into Unit 4, they didn’t get seniority time for all their service years. That wasn’t the fair thing, but we couldn’t make CSU do what was right, and I’ll be damned if I’m going to speak or act now like it was. Unit 4 temps are to permanent employees like faculty lecturers are to tenured professors – people who get less rights but do doing the same work. People we’re told not to worry about, because nothing can be done about it. But the furlough at least protects their families’ jobs.

Some members also didn’t want people to be able to join APC and vote, at the same time. What does it say about our thinking when we become afraid to welcome new people, because they may influence a vote (democratically)? Likewise, instead of rushing to applaud the laying off of student workers, let’s remember that

1) many of us once held those jobs as a step to Unit 4 jobs, 2) If APC had the vision to organize student workers, as UAW did, we'd have to work out a different approach to their rights now than just pitching them off the jobs lifeboat. Just like in the old AFL, fear can make us work against each other, instead of pursuing new ways of organizing and uniting working people.

Finally, some members say they are at a "good campus", whose president spent wisely and looked out for their security more than at "bad" campuses. But I notice that most of the "bad" campuses with severe fiscal problems just happen to be the campuses that serve larger percentages of poor and minority students. Their enrollment is always low because their local high schools graduate fewer students and send fewer to CSU. This good/bad campus business is just the regional economic and ethnic inequality, all dressed up so that no one has to get embarrassed by going along with it. If finances at some campuses have been allowed to deteriorate, shouldn't we have fought as a union against that?

3. Just one battle in a struggle over the future of CSU and its employees –

Maybe people are hoping that after we vote on the furlough, either some of the temps will have to make a total sacrifice, or we'll all make a smaller sacrifice, so that the budget pain will stop. But the trends expected in the global and U.S. economy are that California's economy and public budgets will undergo a real restructuring for more than one or two years. APC has long been a fairly passive organization about the larger struggle of budgets and jobs, while CFA organized the "Future of CSU Hearings", the "People's University" video, and legislative action on issues like the budget, CSU executive pay, CMS, etc. As a result, they developed active support from members and legislators, and we can choose to follow that example. That's actually a more important decision for the future of our jobs than this furlough vote, though the furlough would buy us some time and Unit 4 staffing for launching our next steps.

But if we accept the furlough, the question has been asked: how will we know that our sacrifice will help us, rather than be used to prop up managers or other schemes we would oppose? The answer to that and to all issues ahead in this new era is: we'll have to organize numbers of members to fight for it! APC will have to start doing the kind of management-monitoring that CFA has, whether our future is one of furloughs or Article 33. I choose not to trust either campus or statewide CSU management, until there is more openness about budgetary issues they have chosen not to share with us. I'll work with both, but never blindly trust them. What I do trust in is us, the people of Unit 4. Whether we go for or against furloughs, we are capable of uniting to become a stronger union, as other Americans have.

(A version of this with more history is available on request)