Straight Talk: The Union Defense Initiative

The following are some answers, examples, and points of discussion about the Union Defense Initiative.

Q: How much are dues increasing?

A: The CFA Board of Directors voted to ask Assembly Delegates to consider increasing dues by 0.3% of a member’s gross monthly income. The possibility of a dues increase was raised as a discussion item at the Board of Directors meeting in Fall 2016. In February 2017, the Board asked for a study to be done, and asked that the information be presented at the 85th Assembly, held in early March.

The study was presented at the Board of Directors meeting at Assembly, and the Board unanimously voted to recommend a 0.3% increase. Two workshops were held at Assembly for delegates to learn more about the situation and process, and a vote was scheduled for three weeks later, to allow delegates time to consider the information, and inform membership.

The vote was held March 28 to March 30, 2017, and the increase was approved.

Currently, union dues are 1.05%. The new dues rate will be 1.35%. Essentially, for every $1,000 in income, a person’s dues rate would increase by an additional $3.

Here’s what that looks like (% increase only):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly Gross Income</th>
<th>0.30%</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>$3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,500</td>
<td>$4.50</td>
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<tr>
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<td>$10.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$4,000</td>
<td>$12.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It’s important to note, however, that CFA members still pay a lower rate than other similar unions, even unions representing other workers in the CSU. UAW 4123 members—grad students in the CSU—pay 1.44% in dues. Non-Senate Faculty in the UC, as well as City College of San Francisco faculty pay 1.50% in dues. AFT 1521 members, who are Los Angeles Community College District faculty, pay 1.60%. 
Here’s what the 1.35% dues rate would look like based on monthly gross income:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly Gross Income</th>
<th>1.35%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>$13.50</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>$54.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q:** Who is making the decision and when will it be made?

**A:** CFA Assembly Delegates who were present at the 85th Assembly held in San Diego on March 10-11, 2017 voted by electronic ballot on the proposal from March 28-30, 2017, in accordance with CFA Bylaws, Article XVIII, Section 2. The adjustment should go into effect with the July 2017 paycheck, with cooperation from the State Controller’s Office.

**Q:** When was the last time dues were increased?

**A:** The CFA dues rate has not been adjusted in 12 years. The last time the rate was adjusted was in 2005, when dues were increased to 1.05%, up from 0.95%. Prior to that, the dues rate had been 0.95% for 16 years. From 1983 to 1989, dues were 0.75% of a member’s gross monthly salary. We waited until there was a solid raise for faculty before this adjustment was even considered.

Just as our salaries hadn’t been keeping up with cost of inflation, neither had CFA dues. Meanwhile, our cost of doing business as a union continued to rise.

**Q:** Why is this needed now?

**A:** With the national landscape shifting dramatically, right-wing attacks on unions and anti-worker legislation increasing, and union-killing court cases reaching the Supreme Court in the near future, we are gearing up for the very real possibility that we could lose agency fee and/or face laws that would strip our union and workers’ rights. Life as we currently know it could change dramatically, and it could mean a massive loss of resources for CFA. And that’s funding we currently use to operate, support and protect members via faculty rights and legal representation, and to support critical functions like negotiating our faculty contract.

When we go back to the bargaining table in the months ahead, it’s critical that we don’t return weakened. CSU management is watching. This is especially important given that we are starting to push the CSU to increase tenure density, which may include creating a pathway to tenure for lecturer faculty, and there’s no way we could conduct, much less win, that enormous battle without adequate resources. We also need to ensure that
we have resources needed to fund negotiating efforts so we can fend off potential take backs at the bargaining table.

**Q: If we lose agency fee, how much money would that be?**

**A:** Loss of agency fee would be a significant blow to CFA’s resources, and our ability to adequately staff, support and defend faculty. Our union currently has a 60-day reserve, meaning that if our funding dropped to $0, we could only continue operating without changes or new revenue for 60 days.

It’s anticipated that if we lost agency fee, it would result in an income loss of roughly $3.8 million per year. That’s money we wouldn’t have to put toward bargaining contracts, defending faculty rights, staffing, member events and resources, etc.

**Q: What’s happened in other states where anti-union legislation has stripped union/worker rights?**

**A:** It ranges from loss of agency fees to miniscule collective bargaining agreements, but we’re not exaggerating when we say the results have been devastating to workers in those states.

**Here’s an example from Wisconsin:**

Gov. Scott Walker’s ‘2011 Wisconsin Act 10’ gutted public sector unions and drastically reduced benefits for public employees. The law barred unions from bargaining over anything but base pay, and prohibited any raises that exceeded inflation.

In 2008-09, the state employees' union contract with the state was a 353-page CBA that covered benefits, safety, layoffs, wages, and grievances. The 2013-14 version was a 5-page contract that had one article on wages.

Health care costs doubled, with contributions increasing to 12% from 6%, and state employees also began contributing 50% of the annual pension payment in 2011, which meant a 5.8% contribution from their salaries.

The impact on membership? The Wisconsin State Employees Union lost 60% of its members. The impact on the union’s budget, which went from $6 million to $2 million, was devastating.

**In Higher Ed within Right-to-Work states:**

Tenure has and continues to come under attack. In Wisconsin, tenure was gutted back thanks to a budget slashing that gave the University of Wisconsin’s administration the ability to dismiss professors when deemed “necessary due to a budget or program decision.”
In January 2017, lawmakers in two Right-to-Work states introduced legislation that would eliminate tenure for public university professors. In Missouri, tenure for all new faculty hires would end starting in 2018. In Iowa, a Republican state senator introduced a bill prohibiting all public institutions of higher learning from continuing or instituting tenure for faculty members. Grounds for firing faculty would include but not be to “just cause, program discontinuance and financial exigency.”

Academic freedom also continues to be widely attacked in Right-to-Work states. In Wisconsin, legislators have threatened to link funding for The University of Wisconsin at Madison to the discontinuation of a course on whiteness. And in Arizona, there’s legislation aimed at prohibiting state colleges and universities from offering courses that “promote division, resentment or social justice toward a race, gender, religion or political affiliation, social class or other class of people,” according to Inside Higher Education.

As you can see, these threats are real, and they are aimed not only at destroying unions and protections for faculty in public higher education, but also aimed at stripping academic and intellectual freedoms. And as the example from Arizona shows, are riddled with systemic racism.

**Q:** What does this ‘Union Defense Initiative’ protect against?

**A:** It protects the faculty—and our union—against a host of potential attacks and bolsters our current ability to protect and support faculty.

In addition to helping preserve CFA’s resources, the dues adjustment would help the fund the union’s efforts to protect faculty at the bargaining table. It could help us protect wages, pension and benefits, and FERP.

It will help protect us from national Right-to-Work legislation and attacks on unions, as well as Trump Administration impacts on public higher education. In short, it helps fund the resistance against maneuvers that seek to strip faculty of pay, benefits, proper working conditions, and attacks on our intellectual property and academic freedom. Like our coaches say, the best defense is a good offense.

**Q:** What would CFA do with the additional resources?

**A:** Bolstering union resources for the possibility of losing agency fee is one of the primary considerations for how to appropriate the additional income. By having more of a cushion, we would be better equipped to stave off drastic cuts to the union’s operations. Other priorities for using the additional resources include increased funding to help fight anti-union legislation or combat fallout from anti-union Supreme Court decisions, increasing representation staff and member support, and funding for membership efforts.

With more resources, we could consider increasing our support for state lawmakers who would ensure Right-to-Work legislation is kept out of California, or minimize the
impact of national Right-to-Work. We also could consider increasing support for Labor-friendly members of Congress and lobbying at the federal level.

**Q:** What are we doing to increase our membership now, in light of impending threats to agency fee?

**A:** CFA is working hard to add members to our union, and our Membership & Organizing Committee and its members are dedicating countless hours to organizing as well as reaching faculty who primarily work off-campus or have a low time-base. With increased resources, we could reimburse faculty activists for their hours spent finding and organizing faculty who may be unreachable on campus.

It’s important for faculty to understand that we wouldn’t have the wages, health and retirement benefits, and working conditions/rights that we do if not for our strength as a union. There is a reason why faculty organizing efforts are happening throughout the country—we’re stronger together. As is the case now for Wisconsin public sector workers, without a union, we could be converted to ‘at will’ employees facing a tiny contract that only defines wages.

Unions gave us weekends and workers’ rights. Our union protects and fights for fair working conditions, which are also our student learning conditions, for all faculty in the CSU.

**Q:** Shouldn’t CFA be focused on the upcoming contract fight?

**A:** We are, and resources are critical to our work at the bargaining table. Negotiating a fair contract for faculty is always at the center of everything we do, but we would be hard-pressed to fund bargaining efforts if our finances drop due to loss of agency fee. What’s more, the landscape we’d be facing if that happened also would look far different. We must have the financial stability it takes to maintain a steady course and fight against the backlash that anti-worker rulings and legislation may have on our union.

In this current political climate, we are pushing back against more than just management; we are pushing back against the will to eliminate unions completely. We must not let that happen, and we will fight to prevent that from happening in California.