Tell UC: We can’t afford cuts to already below-market pay, or to lose retirement savings

ast month’s regents’ meeting made it official: UC plans to cut nearly every pay raise (unless, perhaps, you are one of the lucky UC executives), and employees’ existing 2% retirement savings will be redirected to pay for the UCRP pension fund. And on top of that, some benefits costs will increase in 2009.

Those who are not represented by a union have no choice. For those who do have union representation, UC must bargain. But UPTE-CWA, the researcher and tech (RX/PTK) bargaining team is finding that the university is taking a hard line against cost-of-living adjustments and against longstanding step increases for campus-based employees.

UPTE opposes employee contributions to the UCRP pension fund at this time because:

- UC has been diverting money intended for the pension plan for 20 years. UC stopped making any contributions to the pension fund in 1989, but nevertheless kept collecting the money from the state and other sources. That money was diverted to other expenses. UC should have been planning for the future and saving this money for this very scenario.

- The pension is healthy and requires no immediate contribution. The pension fund is more than 100% funded, and even UC’s actuaries state that it would not be a problem if such a robust and large fund occasionally dipped to as low as 85% funded.

- UC has been unfairly prioritizing executive compensation, including giving special pension perks. We object to UC’s priorities, such as doubling the UC president’s pay and offering more than standard pension compensation to some executives. UC has also more than doubled the number of executives who make more than $200,000.

- UC workers will have no say over the money. Despite legislative resolutions and the fact that every other public pension plan has employee representatives on the governing board, UC refuses to give those who make the contributions and count on the pension at retirement any say in how the fund is run and invested. We want joint governance.

If UC believes contributions to the pension fund are so urgently needed, it is welcome to resume payments into it.”

“Of course we recognize the importance of a secure and well-funded pension plan,” said Brooks. “After 18 years of UC’s ‘contribution holiday’ where it did not contribute anything to the fund, if the plan needs contributions to remain, much of those should come from UC.” And, he added, meaningful reform to the pension governance system is needed so that

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Published by UPTE-CWA Local 9119, AFL-CIO ★ PO Box 4443, Berkeley, CA 94704 ★ (510) 704-UPTE ★ info@upte-cwa.org ★ www.upte.org
Pensions and paychecks
CONTINUED FROM FRONT

employees have a voice at the table. UPTE and other UC unions want to make sure there is public accountability for how funds are managed, and have proposed that faculty, staff, and the regents jointly govern the UCRP plan, just as at the California state universities.

“Right now,” said Brooks, “we are concerned that UC is using the pension fund to provide excessive perks to executives, and we won’t take a cut from our paychecks to pay for those.”

The unions are starting to collect signatures to qualify a future ballot measure to set up a 13-member board of directors to share governance with employees and state officials.

UPTE’s president Jelger Kalmijn worried that in the context of the ongoing financial crisis, UC employees could not afford to simply sign off and trust that the university knows best. “We need to be part of the decisions,” he said.

Bad faith bargaining 101
UPTE submits proposals, UC has yet to respond

In 6 months of bargaining, UPTE bargainers have worked hard to put comprehensive contract proposals on the table, but to date UC has not responded with a single counter-proposal. In addition, UC has cancelled all or part of four bargaining sessions and has failed to respond fully to critical information requests.

“In short, UC’s engagement in the legally obligated bargaining process has been pro forma at best,” said Kevin Rooney, UPTE’s chief bargainer and an EH&S tech at UC San Francisco. “In order to advance the bargaining process, UC cannot just spend hours at every bargaining session criticizing UPTE’s proposals; it must make substantive counter-proposals,” he said.

Many of UPTE’s proposals, including those about travel time and the grievance procedure, remain without any UC counter offer.

Protecting rank and filers’ rights

“UC also has to take meaningful steps to allow rank-and-file members to actually participate in bargaining,” said Cliff Fried, UPTE’s executive vice president and a retired UCLA researcher.

UPTE has demanded that UC establish a separate bargaining fund to avoid what happened to UPTE’s Berkeley bargaining representative, Paul Haller. His department, claiming “economic hardship” caused by his time away at bargaining, laid him off.

This action is a clear violation of the law, and UPTE is currently prosecuting the case through the state labor board. Although UPTE pressure led to Haller being rehired, his new position is not in the tech bargaining unit, leaving Berkeley members currently without a representative at the bargaining table.

Multi-year agreement not a good deal
UC is demanding that UPTE agree to a multi-year contract that ties our raises to the state budget. UPTE bargainers have resisted, believing that with a state budget likely to be bad for several years, such an agreement could give UC the unilateral ability to refuse wage increases, increase benefits premiums, and make further changes to the pension fund.

The vast majority of funding for RX/TX workers doesn’t come from the state anyway. “Less than eighteen percent of the University of California’s budget comes from the state’s general fund,” wrote State Senator Leland Yee (D-San Francisco) to the UC regents in late August, “yet the UC system continues to inappropriately use that allocation as an excuse to limit the wages and wage increases of some of the system’s most valuable employees.”

Yee’s entire letter is posted at <www.upte.org/Yee_letter.html>

Make a difference
UC must step up to the plate and stop its foot-dragging,” said Fried. “We can’t keep submitting our proposals into the UC void. That’s not going to make the bargaining process work.”

He added that UPTE members are invited to observe the next bargaining sessions and urge UC negotiators to stop wasting taxpayer money and begin bargaining in good faith. Upcoming sessions are scheduled at Davis (October 15-17), Los Angeles (November 5-7), San Francisco (November 19-21) and San Diego (December 3-5).

UPTE-CWA’s versus UC’s contract proposals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISSUES</th>
<th>UPTE’S PROPOSALS</th>
<th>UC’S PROPOSALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Market wages</td>
<td>Equity increases for titles below market</td>
<td>No raises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of living and step increases</td>
<td>Across-the-board increases to keep pace with cost of living</td>
<td>No raises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased steps</td>
<td>Additional steps for “topped out” employees with narrow wage ranges</td>
<td>No additional steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pension governance</td>
<td>Shared governance of pension fund by workers, retirees and UC business</td>
<td>UC makes decisions unilaterally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pension protection</td>
<td>After its 18-year “contribution holiday,” if necessary, UC start making contributions</td>
<td>2% of employees pay which now goes to the DCP will disappear from retirement accounts to fund the UCRP plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care protections</td>
<td>Any employee contribution rates guaranteed for life of contract</td>
<td>UC can set employee contribution rates at whatever it wants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How to contact your bargaining team

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Irvine

MBNL

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Amy Heawek, photo

Santa Cruz union members turn out at a coalition rally to support UPTE’s bargaining team in September.