

# U-T San Diego

## No Recession for Teachers Unions

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**By Larry Sand, California Teachers Empowerment Network**

It is obvious that tough economic times have come to the United States, with California being the hardest hit of all states. We hear almost daily how California's budget crisis threatens to devastate a public education system that once led the nation. However, the California Teachers Association, the state's 340,000-member teachers union and state affiliate of the National Education Association, seems unfazed by this grim reality.

California has more than 300,000 teachers on its payroll. However, when September rolls around, this number could be diminished by thousands and many of the still-employed will face a decrease in salary or cuts in benefits. In such a rocky economic climate you might think that CTA would accordingly not raise, or might even lower, its dues. But no, it has decided to raise dues. The dollar amount has not yet been announced, but several sources have it at \$22 for 2009-2010. (CTA uses a rather arcane formula to ascertain members' dues; it is tied to the state's average teachers' salaries and since teachers' salaries almost always rise, so do the dues.)

The NEA has already announced a \$4-a-year increase for its 3.4 million members. Hence, in California, a non-right-to-work state (payment of union dues is a condition of employment), teachers will be forced to pay their unions an additional \$26 a year. While that amount might not break anyone, isn't the nearly \$1,000 a year that a teacher already pays to the unions enough?

When a teacher enters the field, he or she joins three unions — a local, state and national, which divvy up the dues pie. CTA gets the bulk, over \$600, with the rest distributed between the NEA and the local union. CTA will tell you that it needs this money to function at an optimal level to fight for its members. Hogwash.

While CTA will not divulge the amount it pays its employees, its income tax form lets us know what its officers make. David Sanchez, CTA's president, makes close to \$200,000 a year, or about three times what the average teacher in California makes — yes, his salary is based on another union formula. And the other union officers make very close to that amount; these salaries are ascertained by yet another formula.

Perhaps more important than what CTA pays in salaries is what else it spends its members' dues money on. Many millions go to candidates and causes that have nothing to do with teachers or education. And the only thing a teacher can do to protest this spending is to "resign" from the union. In that case, a teacher gets a \$300 rebate — the part of union dues that is not used for collective bargaining, such as union political expenditures — but is still forced to pay about \$700 a year to the union even after they resign from it. Teachers almost caught a break last month when, at a CTA state council meeting, a new business item came up for a vote. The proposal

stipulated that a teacher could opt out of the “initiative fund” (every teacher pays \$36 into this fund every year; it is part of the \$300 not used for collective bargaining) without having to resign from the union. After a rather contentious debate, the item was voted down. Hence, whether or not teachers approve, the CTA will continue to spend millions of their dollars trying to approve such contentious measures as the recently doomed Proposition 1A or quash the controversial but successful Proposition 8 this past November.

Neither is the NEA a shining example of fairness in action. Its former president, Reg Weaver, made well over \$500,000 in 2008 and Vice President Dennis Van Roekel made more than \$300,000. And then there is a staff of thousands, including an army of lobbyists who make hefty six-figure salaries.

And as with CTA, these high-paid political operatives frequently are involved with issues and causes unrelated to education. For example, NEA has recently given thousands to MALDEF, ACORN, the Democratic Leadership Council and many other left-leaning organizations — this in spite of the fact that teachers are equally represented across the political spectrum. Other areas of interest and largesse for the NEA include universal health care, statehood for Washington, D.C., and Planned Parenthood.

The 2009-2010 budget for NEA will be voted on at its yearly national convention, now under way in San Diego. Think they might pull back a bit due to the recession? Nope. According to teachers union watchdog, Mike Antonucci, “virtually every NEA program will receive more funding, and spending on salaries and benefits for employees will increase 7.7 percent.”

Finally, it is important to note the way the teachers unions collect dues from members. No, it’s not like paying rent or a credit card bill — members do not send a monthly payment to the union. Dues money is typically deducted from the employee’s paycheck, just as state and federal taxes are. This means that individual school districts collect dues from teachers and then turn the money over to the union. Hence, the public is paying for the right of the unions to use the school districts as bagmen. Perhaps, especially in these tough times, already heavily taxed Californians should insist that these affluent unions collect their own dues.

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