

After defeating union-backed deal, Long Beach, California teachers must take the struggle into their own hands!

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2 October 2025

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The Teachers Association of Long Beach (TALB) in California has announced the formation of a new bargaining team to resume negotiations with school district officials after educators took the unprecedented step of rejecting a union-backed deal on September 25. By a decisive margin of 61 to 39 percent, rank-and-file educators rejected the tentative agreement with the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD), which included a zero percent raise despite surging living costs.

Union officials have kept 3,700 teachers and support staff on the job under the terms of the old contract, which expired in June. LBUSD, located 25 miles south of Los Angeles, is the fourth largest school district in California with 64,000 K-12 students, about two-thirds of whom come from low-income households.

This vote is part of a growing statewide and national struggle. Across California and the US, teachers face not only attacks on wages and benefits but the drive, spearheaded by the Trump administration, to destroy public education, stifle academic freedom, and convert schools into centers of religious and fascistic indoctrination.

The California Teachers Association (CTA), TALB's parent union, has worked systematically to smother opposition and promote the Democrats who have functioned as Trump's enablers and themselves spent decades imposing austerity and promoting charters and other privatization schemes.

The decisive rejection of the union-backed deal in Long Beach underscores the urgent necessity for teachers to take matters into their own hands. This means the formation of independent rank-and-file committees in every school to enforce the democratic decision of educators, link up with colleagues across California and nationally, and prepare a united struggle in defense of public education and against bipartisan budget cutting.

The TALB bureaucracy has responded not with abiding by the will of its membership but by resetting negotiations in an attempt to nullify the vote and reassert the control of the union apparatus. TALB President Gerry Morrison admitted the rejection had thrown the bureaucracy into "turmoil" and moved swiftly to handpick a new bargaining team charged with "starting from scratch." The outcome of such a maneuver would be another sellout agreement

crafted behind closed doors.

Long Beach teachers must take this as a serious warning: the union apparatus is working not to defend teachers but to contain and suffocate their struggle. The rejection vote has revealed both the determination of educators to fight and the necessity of new, independent organizations of rank-and-file power to prevent their demands from being overridden by bureaucratic fiat.

The depth of teacher anger

The zero percent raise was a non-starter and raised many concerns among educators. As one teacher wrote on the TALB Facebook page, it is "essentially a pay cut." More fundamentally, it represents an attempt to normalize the lack of wage increases under the banner of budget austerity.

The lopsided rejection reflects grievances that go well beyond salaries. Teachers cite exploding class sizes, underfunded programs, decaying infrastructure, and the district's aggressive attempts to cut retiree health care. For decades, LBUSD provided transitional medical coverage to retirees until they reached Medicare eligibility, a benefit funded by teachers themselves. Now, the district proposes to eliminate this coverage, effectively forcing educators to remain on the job until age 65 regardless of burnout or physical exhaustion.

Such attacks come after years of sacrifices already imposed on teachers. Since the 2008 financial crash, TALB secured modest raises in successive contracts (4 percent in the last deal) but these were insufficient even then to offset the rising cost of living in Long Beach, one of California's most expensive housing markets. The district's refusal to provide even a minimal Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) in the new contract shattered any remaining patience among teachers.

LBUSD justifies its hard line by citing dire budget projections: a \$54.2 million deficit for the current fiscal year (2024-25) and more than \$101 million for 2025-26. District officials insist that drawing down reserves to cover ongoing expenses would risk insolvency, making a zero percent raise unavoidable.

But this narrative collapses under scrutiny. In 2017, Public

Advocates accused LBUSD of misusing \$40 million in Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) money earmarked for disadvantaged students, instead diverting it into general operations. More broadly, the state of California itself, controlled by the Democratic Party, has consistently underfunded public schools even as it hands out tax breaks to corporations and pours billions into militarized police forces.

At the same time, the Biden administration decision to allow COVID school funding (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, or ESSER) to expire has created a “fiscal cliff” for school districts throughout the country. LBUSD received \$212 million in such funds over the last few years. Now the Trump administration is slashing billions in federal spending, including Title I and Title III money for low-income and English learners.

Thus, these deliberately manufactured “deficits” are being used to condition the population to endless cuts in the name of fiscal discipline, while immense resources are funneled to the wealthy and imperialist war abroad.

The last and only strike in LBUSD’s 140-year history was not even by teachers but by 100 school bus drivers in 2021. TALB itself has never called a strike, while functioning as a labor police force, dedicated to keeping struggles within the framework acceptable to the district and the state.

The bureaucracy’s current strategy is to channel anger into the state’s impasse and fact-finding process, a legalistic mechanism designed to defuse militancy. If invoked, outside “neutral” mediators will review LBUSD’s finances to determine what is “affordable.” In reality, such procedures only serve to reinforce the framework of austerity, accepting as unchallengeable the lie that “there is no money” for public education.

While TALB officials criticize the district’s budgetary “priorities,” they fully accept the broader framework that education funding must remain capped. They present the issue as one of reallocating existing dollars, rather than demanding a massive increase in funding for public schools at the expense of corporate wealth and military spending.

This false framework ensures that teachers’ demands are always presented as unrealistic. It conceals the real issue: both Democrats and Republicans have overseen a massive redistribution of wealth from the bottom to the top, slashing funding for education, healthcare, housing and pensions while handing trillions to Wall Street and the Pentagon.

In California, where the Democratic Party controls every lever of state government, this policy has been pursued no less ruthlessly. The “progressive” veneer of equity workshops and social justice rhetoric cannot conceal the fact that students and teachers alike are being denied the most basic resources.

A national attack on education

In the face of the existential threat to public education, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Education Association (NEA) and their state and local affiliates have done

everything to prevent the eruption of strikes, which could become a catalyst for a far broader movement of the working class against Trump’s drive for dictatorship.

The blocking of a walkout earlier this year by Chicago teachers, and in recent months across California, has only emboldened the Trump administration to accelerate its war against public education and teachers.

The California Teachers Association (CTA), TALB’s parent union, has postured with its “We Can’t Wait” campaign, supposedly uniting more than 80,000 teachers across districts with expired contracts.

Yet not a single strike authorization vote has been held, and LBUSD itself is not even included in the campaign, along with a slew of other districts (Santa Ana, Elk Grove, Capistrano, Garden Grove, Moreno Valley and San Ramon Valley) where teachers have been working without a contract for as long as two years.

Like Governor Gavin Newsom and the Democrats, the union bureaucracy is far more frightened of a movement from below, which would quickly escape its control and threaten the corporate and financial elite they serve, than of accommodating themselves to Trump.

This bureaucratic stranglehold must be broken through the formation of rank-and-file committees in every school and district. The 61 percent rejection of the wage-cutting deal demonstrates Long Beach teachers are ready to fight. Now the will of the membership has to be taken forward by drawing up a list of non-negotiable demands, including inflation-busting raises, enforceable class size reductions and secure retirements.

The lie that there is no money must be rejected and the full power of educators in Long Beach and across the state must be mobilized to win these demands. The resources to guarantee high-quality public education can only be secured by massively increasing taxes on the corporations and wealthy and expropriating the ill-gotten gains of the oligarchy.

The fight to defend public education must be fused with the defense of immigrant students and families, the struggle against the deployment of ICE agents and military troops in cities, so that it can become part of the development of a powerful industrial and political counter-offensive by the whole working class to drive Trump and his fascist cabal out of power.

To get information about building rank-and-file committees, fill out the form below.



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