

Strike of Little Lake teachers in California shut down after 10 days

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On April 29, the Little Lake Education Association (LLEA), affiliated with the California Teachers Association and the National Education Association, moved to shut down the strike of roughly 200 educators in the Little Lake City School District (LLCSD) after 10 days on the picket lines. The decision was taken before teachers were given access to the full terms of the tentative agreement and before any meaningful rank-and-file review could take place.

The strike, the first in the district's 154-year history, had overwhelming support: 94 percent of teachers voted to authorize the walkout. Its abrupt termination, before the deal was even presented to teachers, is a violation of the democratic rights of the membership.

The officials of the United Teachers Los Angeles and two other major unions in the Los Angeles school district bear direct responsibility for this outcome. By canceling the threatened walkout of 77,000 Los Angeles Unified School District employees in the dead of night on April 15—two days before Little Lake teachers walked out—it ensured that the strike would begin already isolated, stripped of the citywide leverage that would have forced a rapid settlement.

UTLA officials then issued calls for “solidarity” appearances at Little Lake pickets after LAUSD schools were already closed, a gesture that functioned as public performance rather than material support.

The LLCSD serves Santa Fe Springs, a heavily working-class and predominantly Hispanic community where nearly 80 percent of students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Around 13 percent of residents live below the poverty line, and roughly one quarter of the population is foreign-born.

The district has lost more than 500 students in the last five years, reflecting broader demographic and economic pressures. Because California school funding

is tied to average daily attendance, declining enrollment has been used by administrators to justify austerity measures and demand concessions from educators.

Teachers have opposed this logic, demanding manageable class sizes, adequate special education staffing and healthcare protections. When schools needed to remain open, administrators authorized substitute teachers at a rate of \$500 per day, roughly three times standard pay. The claim that “there is no money” collapses under such decisions.

At the core of the dispute is healthcare. For 55 years, the district covered full premiums. Under the new proposal, a split ratio and cap on contributions has been introduced, shifting costs onto educators. Some teachers now face payments as high as \$1,400 per month, effectively a direct reduction in real wages.

Mabel Manzur, a 56-year-old educator diagnosed with breast cancer, said she would be forced to pay \$580 per month for coverage. She called it a “\$12,000 annual pay cut.” To manage costs, she removed her husband from her plan. “I was never concerned that I should worry about my health insurance,” she said, underscoring the abrupt transformation of healthcare from a basic guarantee into a financial burden.

Key economic terms remain undisclosed. Other than the announcement of a one-time bonus of \$1,000, a 90-10 split of healthcare premium costs, a vague reference to added support to special education and unchanged class sizes, teachers have been sent back to work before knowing any salary adjustments, step increases, or the full healthcare cap structure, basic contractual language has not been fully released. Yet educators are being pushed toward a ratification vote.

On its Facebook page, the union told this reporter that “This negotiation process has been more transparent than ever before and will continue on this same path.”

This is an extraordinary claim given the near-total blackout surrounding the agreement, the absence of any publicly released financial terms and the evident expectation that teachers remain silent and fall into line while being asked to ratify a deal they have yet to independently study.

The California Teachers Association and National Education Association, like their affiliates, are deeply integrated into the Democratic Party. The union bureaucracy functions as a transmission belt for fiscal austerity, ensuring that struggles over resources are contained within acceptable boundaries.

On April 21, the Little Lake Educators Association launched a recall campaign against members of the Little Lake City School District board during the ongoing strike. This shifted attention away from the strike itself toward elections to replace individual officials, rather than addressing the policies behind the dispute. Presented as an escalation, it focused on changing personnel in the same system responsible for healthcare cuts and budget austerity, leaving those policies in place.

Even more revealing was the use of police power during bargaining sessions. When three mothers attempted to speak with Johnson, police were called to remove them. This shows that, behind the official routine of bargaining, the Democratic Party-controlled state apparatus is ready to intervene directly in disputes involving educators and working-class families.

The argument that public education lacks resources is contradicted by reality. Military spending continues to expand dramatically, with the Trump White House proposing a 50 percent increase next year to \$1.5 trillion. Corporate profits remain at record highs.

The issue is not the absence of resources, but the class which controls them. Spending for public education and other basic social needs are systematically subordinated to military expenditure, financial accumulation and corporate profit. Teachers in Little Lake are being asked to absorb costs not because society cannot afford education, but because its priorities are set elsewhere.

The Little Lake struggle is part of a wider breakdown in public services under conditions of deepening social inequality. Across education, healthcare and infrastructure, workers are confronting the consequences of a system in which vast resources are

concentrated at the top while essential services are subjected to continual cuts.

These conditions cannot be resolved at the district level alone. It requires a fight against an entire political and economic system oriented toward war, financial speculation and corporate enrichment.

Educators now face a critical stage. Teachers should demand a full disclosure of the contract and adequate time to review and discuss it before any vote.

The experience of the strike demonstrates the necessity of independent organization: rank-and-file committees under the democratic control of workers themselves, free from the union bureaucracy and both corporate-backed parties.

Such committees would be capable of linking educators across schools, bus yards, and food service workplaces, unifying demands for living wages, stable employment, full-time staffing and protections for immigrant workers, while coordinating nationally. They would serve as the means through which workers could override last-minute sellouts and enforce their democratic decisions.

The tentative agreement must be rejected, but a “no” vote is only the starting point of a broader struggle rather than its end. The independent organization of rank-and-file committees coordinated across the country and worldwide through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) has now become an urgent necessity.



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