

“This is an outrage! The marshal should be arrested for assault”

Massive outpouring of support for victimized Louisiana teacher

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In the last several days, there has been a massive outpouring of support to Deyshia Hargrave, the English language arts teacher who was arrested, manhandled and jailed for speaking out on the wages and working conditions of teachers at a public school board meeting in Vermilion Parish, Louisiana.

A petition entitled “I Stand With Deyshia Hargrave—Teacher arrested for voicing her opinion” has, at this writing, over 20,000 signatures, and increasing every minute. Thousands across Louisiana have signed. Even more impressively, workers from virtually every American state and countries across six continents are represented. The petition demands an apology from the school board, the answer to her questions, the dismissal of all charges and the firing of the marshal who arrested her.

The plight of low-paid educators and the brutal disregard of elementary democratic rights have clearly touched a raw nerve internationally. Workers have spoken out, signing the petition from the following countries: France, Ireland, Mexico, Spain, Denmark, Chile, Australia, Brazil, Greece, Germany, Canada, Italy, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Poland, Netherlands, Slovakia, Russia, Switzerland, Belgium, India, Uruguay, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, Puerto Rico, Portugal, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sweden, South Africa, Venezuela, Kuwait, Israel, Austria, the Cook Islands, Serbia, Ukraine, Argentina and Colombia.

Hargrave produced, with help from the Louisiana Association of Educators, a short video thanking her supporters, emphasizing that they should not be intimidated by the brutality of the authorities. Instead she urged her supporters to spread the struggle utilizing their First Amendment rights.

After explaining the circumstances of her arrest, she states, “By silencing my voice, they tried to take away my First Amendment right to speak. I am appalled at this and you should be too. This particular issue involved me, my fellow educators, my support staff, cafeteria workers, citizens outside the school system even, so I chose to speak out.”

Addressing the thousands who have come to her defense, she emphasized, “I am hoping you chose to speak out after seeing what happened to me and you don’t let it be an intimidation to you. [I hope you will] let it become your strength. It is slowly becoming mine....”

In summation, Hargrave stressed that the fight was far from over,

“Please don’t let the conversation end with me ... Join me—use your First Amendment right to speak. A lot of people who came before you worked really hard to ensure that that was there for you.”

This is a timely injunction. The victimization of Deyshia Hargrave takes place during a major fiscal crisis gripping the state of Louisiana. Officials have proclaimed a “billion-dollar budget deficit” and threatened to gut education funding in the state, citing a decline in oil revenues and related sales tax income. Both K-12 and higher education are targeted for cuts.

Even more fundamentally, the Trump administration’s tax cuts for the superrich presage big struggles over education, and all social rights, throughout the US. New Orleans, just 150 miles from Vermilion Parish, became the national prototype for the destruction of public schools as virtually the entire district was converted into charter schools following Hurricane Katrina.

During the eight years of the Obama administration, an unprecedented 300,000 educators lost their jobs and federal dollars for Title I and special education were axed. Both the Democrats and Republicans have pursued a privatization agenda, as they plunder the public schools in the interests of hedge funds and other profiteers.

These fundamental attacks on the right to a high quality public education are not simply a national concern. Capitalist governments throughout the world are implementing sharp attacks on schools, healthcare, and all forms of public infrastructure alongside the destruction of democratic rights. It is no wonder that Hargrave’s treatment has evoked such heartfelt solidarity around the world.

Christina from British Columbia writes alongside her signature on the petition, “The police who arrested her are the real criminals here. Whatever happened to ‘Freedom of Speech’? This good lady did nothing wrong. Shame on them all!”

“Deyshia Hargrave should not have been arrested for standing up for what she believes in. As a fellow teacher, she has my support and admiration for being an advocate for her colleagues and her students,” stated Christine from Connecticut.

Among the many comments from Louisiana were: “Educators are the foundation of our future. They are invaluable. Teaching doesn’t happen at the top,” writes Michelle. Ashley, noted, “She voiced her opinion and got arrested for it. I stand for Deyshia.” Another worker noted, “She did nothing wrong. The school board

didn't like what she was saying. Teachers should all get raises. Freedom of speech!!!! BULLIES!!!!!"

Writing from Oregon, Dinah pointed out, "Teachers need adequate compensation. They also should be valued for the vital work they do. This take down of a citizen in a public meeting is beyond the pale."

Marilyn from Wyoming, wrote, "SHAMEFUL to see this brave woman treated this way. SHAMEFUL to learn of the super's huge raise when teachers haven't had one in a decade. HOW ARE YOU GOING TO CORRECT THESE TRAVESTIES?"

Susan from Alberta, Canada added, "As a retired teacher, I am outraged at the treatment that Deyshia received. She should have been treated in a professional manner. She had every right to ask that question regarding salaries; \$49,000 a year is far less than teachers should be earning for the important work that they do."

"What was done to Ms. Hargrave smacks of Big Brother's 1984, not of what I hoped the United States was," wrote Alan from New York.

Sharon from Missouri writes, "This is an outrage! The Marshal should be arrested for assault. He had no right to throw her to the ground and handcuff her. She was leaving. She did nothing wrong. The superintendent is a greedy person. SHAME ON HIM!! Freedom of speech is a protected amendment! They had no right to do what was done to her!"

Kim from Oregon states, "Deyshia Hargrave is a HERO!!! She should be applauded! Americans have not had a raise for 30 years!!! The middle class is, or has, disappeared, due to GREED!!! Honestly, we need to have Federal guidelines that pay U.S. workers a 'livable' wage, benefits, and Universal Healthcare, then perhaps we can afford childcare, food, housing ... We are heading into becoming a Third World Country!!! I STAND WITH DEYSHIA HARGRAVE!!!"

A teacher from Sri Lanka wrote into the WSWS Teacher Newsletter stating his opposition to the manhandling of Hargrave. "This is a crime—an armed man abusing the right to speak. [It] Shows the brutal face of Trump administration. This will happen not only in Louisiana [but] through out USA. Workers must unite around the flag of Fourth International to re-establish democracy."

Another reader of the WSWS Newsletter commented, "As a member of the teaching profession for over a decade, I was appalled to see the video of Deyshia Hargrave, an English teacher at Rene Rost Middle School being brutalized by a law enforcement officer after sharing her opinion about the disparaging salaries being offered by the Vermilion Parish (La.) School Board at the Monday, January 8, 2018 school board meeting.

"Salary inequality is a major bane of the teaching profession. Superintendents and Assistant Superintendents make exorbitant salaries nationwide, while teachers have to rent rooms, sleep in their cars, buy supplies for their own classrooms or face other horrible forms of inequality based on the inadequate salaries and benefits they receive. Ms. Hargrave was only sharing the obvious: that is morally and ethically wrong for a superintendent or other district big-wig to get salary perks when teachers in the district have not received any all.

"What is so disgusting is the way that Ms. Hargrave has been slandered by the Vermilion Parish school officials. She has been

called 'out of order.' No! Her comments were exactly correct. The situation she condemned is out of order, and there is no place for the brutalization she received. But, this is capitalist America and in capitalist America there will be brutality meted out against those who speak out and expose truth.

"We must organize to defend Deyshia Hargrave and her right to criticize the pay raise of the parish superintendent! We must organize to fight back!"

While Deyshia Hargrave spoke out in "Cajun country," Louisiana, her grievances are universal. Mass protests took place on the same day as Hargrave's arrest in Sarasota, Florida as more than 400 teachers and support workers raised the identical issue: low pay for educators, while administrators enjoy hefty salaries.

The Sarasota teachers were staging their first protest in about 30 years, and told the media that they had some of lowest salaries in the US. One teacher held a sign which read, "I rent out my house to afford health care for my daughter," while another said, "Our staff should not qualify for food stamps," according to a video report in the *Herald-Tribune*.

Teachers stated that they often worked 10-12 hours a day without overtime pay, while others were compelled to take second jobs. Mike Tierney, a high school math teacher said he makes just \$43,000 a year despite 15 years of experience.

"We're not paid enough, but the idea that we will just lay down and accept whatever the board decides to give us is not who we are," said Jan McSween, an aide for the Oak Park School. The Sarasota County Superintendent, who makes between \$185,000 and \$200,000 a year said a proposed 3 percent raise for teachers should go only to "highly effective" teachers, based on standardized tests.



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