

“If we did this nationally, we'd have greater success”

Striking Arizona teachers speak out

Our reporters
27 April 2018

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with striking Arizona teachers today at a march on the state capitol that drew approximately 75,000 people. Teachers rejected the efforts to divide them from school support staff, and called for a united struggle with teachers across the country.

Susan, a seventh grade mathematics teacher for an online charter school in Arizona, called for the strike to be expanded. “It’s one thing for states to do individual protests, but if we did this on a national level, we’d have a greater success rate.”

Susan described the critical role played by school support staff. “There’s a lot of things we do because we don’t have support staff,” she said. “I probably work 100 hours per week, between grading, lesson planning and administrative tasks, not to mention actually being in a classroom, and calling 150 families each week.”

“When I first started seven years ago, I had support staff,” she added. “I worked sometimes less than 40 hours a week. I want there to be funding in our budget so teachers don’t have to keep doing everything themselves.”

“I live by myself and I barely make ends meet,” said Ashley, a fourth-grade teacher in the Cartwright school district. “We’re here to fund our schools and get higher pay for teachers.”

Ashley described the impact of decades of funding cuts on the conditions in her school. “Our books are all torn up, and it’s been years since we got our materials replaced,” she said. “Our toilets are horrible. The bathrooms for the kids are disgusting. When it rains, the roof leaks at the end of the building.”

Ashley explained that the strike by West Virginia teachers, who initially rebelled against the efforts by the unions to shut down the strike mid-way through,

had inspired the expanding wave of teacher walkouts. “They started it all. They got us confident enough to go out. I mean I was scared, at first. They got us out and fighting, for ourselves and for our students.”

Referring to today’s planned walkout by teachers in neighboring Colorado, Ashley added, “A friend of mine is in Colorado now. They’re doing this tomorrow and they’re threatened with being fired. That’s real bravery right there. The conditions there are about the same as here.”

Lucy LiBosha, a mathematics teacher at Catalina High School in Tucson, denounced Republican governor Doug Ducey’s offer of a 20 percent wage increase, which provides nothing for school employees and provides no additional funding to make up the more than \$1 billion that has been cut from the budget over the past decade.

“It’s divisive,” Lucy said. “It only addresses teachers and gives nothing to support staff. A divided, fragmented, 20 percent raise for teachers is not reasonable, and could drive a wedge between us.”

Many students also attended the demonstration to support their teachers. Isabella, a high school student, said, “It’s affected us personally. We’re part of our school’s drama club and there’s very little funding for the fine arts program and our school in general. We see the lack of funding in the materials in our science classroom, and we have very old textbooks.” Her classmate, Zoe, added, “We’re out here to support a movement that’s bigger than ourselves.”

Dr. Lisa Castenita, who teaches second grade in the Cartwright school district, said, “This is a human rights issue. All of our children, nationwide, deserve the best possible education. Education is the great equalizer.

“We have a lot of people making decisions for us that have no idea what we do on a daily basis,” Lisa said.

“They, like [Education Secretary Betsy] DeVos, come from the privileged upper class. Why should I listen to her make decisions about things I do on a daily basis, or about my students, who live in abject poverty? I think not! I think I know better for my students than her. You get other teachers angry, on a roll like this, and they’ll all tell you the same thing.”

Lisa added: “The issue is per-pupil funding, teacher pay, a lot of other outside circumstance that we don’t have control over. It’s not our students’ performance. Therein lies the propaganda that’s spread by our government. They want people to believe that it’s the teachers’ fault, and it is not our fault.”

“Their kids don’t go to public education, they go to private schools,” Lisa said. “They only give the appearance that they care. One of our rights as American citizens is to ‘reformat’ our government. We need a ‘reboot.’ I think there’s a lot of corruption on all sides, not just the Democrats and not just the Republicans.”



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