

Arizona Educators United Facebook group censors teachers, WSWS

Will Morrow
30 April 2018

In the past two days, the administrators of the Arizona Educators United (AEU) Discussion Hub Facebook group have begun censoring *World Socialist Web Site* articles, and banning commenters who oppose or warn about the preparations by the Arizona Education Association (AEA) to shut down and sell out the strike.

On Saturday, Carey Zegart, an Oklahoma school teacher, was removed from the group after he published statements warning other workers not to trust the AEA. He pointed to the lessons from the 10-day Oklahoma teachers strike, which the unions shut down on April 13 without any of their demands met.

David Moore, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for the 2018 midterm elections, who is reporting from Arizona for the WSWS, was banned the same day after he shared a link to a WSWS article on the strike.

The page administrators also deleted a post published Friday by another writer for the WSWS, which quoted AEA President Joe Thomas's statements at that day's rally in Arizona. Thomas had stated that if governor Doug Ducey offered no concessions, the union would end the strike and "let the voters decide if they're going to listen to these people." The comment warned that this was a clear indication that the AEA was preparing to sell out the strike and channel opposition behind the election of Democrats.

The post was deleted after it had been "liked" or commented on by more than 30 teachers, indicating opposition to the union's efforts to shut down the strike.

The AEU's censorship measures are a violation of a basic principle of workers' democracy, which upholds the right of all socialist and pro-working-class tendencies to make their views known to workers—and

the right of workers to read and hear these views. When the AEU Discussion Hub group was established, the administrators announced its entire purpose was to allow a free and open debate of ideas among teachers. Now, however, this is being prevented.

The targeting of the WSWS is politically aimed at silencing the only organization that has warned teachers that the unions will betray them. The WSWS has been alone in calling on teachers to form democratically controlled rank-and-file committees, independent of the strikebreaking unions, to link up with teachers and other workers throughout the country to prepare a general strike to defend the right to public education and secure good-paying jobs, health care and pensions for all workers.

The WSWS is read by thousands of teachers and recognized as an indefatigable supporter of this strike and the struggle of teachers throughout the country since the beginning of the year.

Laura, a teacher in Phoenix, responded to the censorship of the WSWS by stating, "My opinion is that you guys are the only ones who put out the truth. I think the reasons they're attacking you is because you tell the truth. I know there's a lot of teachers out there who want better for the kids. We're not united enough. People like you say, these union leaders, are coming in and dividing us. We need a national strike; you're the only ones who have said that. Education will not change until we go national, and international actually. But we don't have an organization yet and so the unions are getting control. They lie through their teeth."

A WSWS journalist sent a letter of protest against the censorship measures to the AEU's administrators. One replied by justifying the actions, stating that in her view, "if we are posting things that cause dissension and mistrust among each other, we will soon find a

group divided. People need to understand that without the union we would never have come this far. I think if people want to have those discussions they should maybe happen on their own page.”

In other words, no views will be tolerated that in any way challenge the control of the unions, which have repeatedly divided teachers, sold out strikes and collaborated with the governments to attack public education. Following this reply, the WSWS journalist was banned from the page.

A leader and cofounder of AEU, Noah Karvelis, replied yesterday afternoon, stating, “I was not aware that your post was deleted and encourage our moderator team to not delete posts unless they are personally attacking or disparaging someone. I will talk with our moderator team and see what happened and correct the issue. I am sorry that your post was removed. Thank you for notifying me.”

As of time of writing, however, none of the censorship measures have been overturned.

The AEU Facebook was established at the beginning of March, nominally as “rank-and-file,” but was from the outset in close collaboration with the AEA and its president, Joe Thomas. The AEU has repeated the self-serving claims by the union that it “backs” teachers even as the AEA prepares to betray them.

The AEU’s censorship measures are the clearest sign that a sellout by the AEU and AEA is imminent. The first condition of betraying a strike is silencing critical voices among the workers. This was what took place during the teachers’ strikes in both West Virginia and Oklahoma earlier this year.

In West Virginia, in the days before the unions called off the strike, the BadAss Teachers Facebook page, whose administrators are a faction of the union bureaucracy, censored all postings by the WSWS. In Oklahoma, the administrators of the Oklahoma Teachers United page began removing WSWS articles six days before the strike was shut down.

The AEU’s actions place it in line with the moves by Google, Facebook, and all the forces of the state and corporate America that are trying to control social media and suppress left-wing and socialist organizations in the name of combating “fake news.”

The WSWS *Teacher Newsletter* calls on teachers and other workers to oppose the AEU’s censorship, and to share this article widely. Teachers should demand that

the AEU immediately cease censoring critical voices and allow the freest and most democratic discussion among workers on the page.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact