

Teachers in Pueblo, Colorado to strike Monday

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5 May 2018

Teachers in Pueblo, Colorado will begin a strike on Monday, the first strike by teachers in the state since 1994.

The Colorado Department of Labor issued a memo May 2, to both the Colorado Education Association (CEA) and Pueblo City Schools (District 60), stating that it will not intervene with the planned teacher strike, which was approved by teachers 471-24 in April.

Teachers in the city located south of Denver have been staging protests for weeks, including organizing sick-outs that have forced schools to close. On Wednesday, the district threatened consequences for further job action, stating, “[W]e have been notified by the leadership of PEA [Pueblo Educators Association] and PPEA [Pueblo Paraprofessional Educators Association] that they intend to call for a District-wide strike, presumably within the week and potentially in violation of state law.”

It declares that “members of the professional staff who use excused leave to participate in either sick-outs or a strike will be subject to a full salary-deduction for each day of absence based on the staff member’s current daily rate of pay. Also, during any period of salary deduction, staff members will be subject to a suspension of benefits.”

The salary-deductions will impact the teachers heavily. They are some of the most underpaid teachers in the country and cannot afford to lose any pay in a state where the cost of living is increasing.

However, teachers are determined to fight. “If I need to lose my pay for however long it takes, I’ve kind of been planning on it, my wife and I have been planning for it, we’ve got money scrolled away, we’ve got resources,” Jim, a Pueblo teacher told a local NBC affiliate.

A bill introduced in the Colorado House during the

walkouts last month, threatening teachers with injunctions, fines, and possible jail time, has been pulled since widespread publicity drew fire from educators and students.

As in other states that have been centers of opposition from teachers, the union—in this case, the CEA, the state affiliate of the National Education Association—has done everything it could to prevent a walkout. The series of sickouts have been initiated by rank-and-file teachers, not the union.

Now that the union has been forced to call a strike, it is limiting it to Pueblo, isolating the relatively small group of teachers not only from teachers throughout the country—as the unions did in West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona—but even from other teachers in the state of Colorado.

The union is also limiting teachers’ demands to a meager two percent pay increase, which the school district is claiming it can’t afford.

Last month, the school board rejected a third-party suggestion for a tiny cost of living increase. The Fact-Finding study, an annual study funded by District 60, suggested a two percent cost of living raise along with increased contributions to teacher health insurance plans. The plan would have cost the school district an extra \$1.2 million.

The situation in Colorado also exposes the unions’ claims that the crisis of public education is due solely to the policies of Republicans, and that the solution is to elect Democrats. The Colorado House of Representatives is controlled by Democrats, and Democrats hold the governorship as well as a large minority in the Senate.

As in the Republican-controlled states of West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona, the public education funding crisis in Colorado is the result of the state

government bowing to the wishes of big energy and the military industry located in the state, to keep taxes down and boost corporate profits.



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