

“Teachers across this country need to organize a national strike”

A letter from an Arizona teacher

14 May 2018

The WSWS is publishing a letter it received from an Arizona teacher who participated in the state-wide walkout from April 26 to May 3.

Arizona teachers have been punished by their local school districts this past week for their walkout. On Friday, May 4, teachers returned to their classrooms knowing the decision had been made to close schools for the summer on the same scheduled date. Local school districts emailed staff on Monday to let us know that students do not have to make up days missed from the walkout, but the teachers do.

Mesa Public Schools, which is the largest district in Arizona, announced that teachers will be held accountable to work the extended six days. School principals advised staff that we are not allowed to use personal or sick days during the six-day time period. Staff will be required to make up every day missed due to illness, planned vacations, or doctor appointments. Teachers will also have to sign in when they arrive to school and sign out at the end of the day. Staff that teaches summer school will lose 20 percent of their pay because the district states they cannot be paid simultaneously for two different jobs.

At a recent school meeting, we were told Arizona school districts will be monitoring our personal Facebook pages as well. Teachers were warned that we need to delete any reference of working for our specific school districts on our personal Facebook site if we have posted photos, comments, or videos of the RedforEd movement. A school principal warned that the district is looking for anything on teachers' Facebook that would discredit us personally and give them reason to fire or sue us.

Last Friday, Mesa Public School (MPS) employees received another district email written by the MPS General Counsel warning teachers that we could not wear RedforEd T-shirts or any other message T-shirt

that may replace it as the RedforEd movement transitions to a ballot-measure campaign. The school district's reason for this ban is to avoid objections from students, parents, and co-workers who disagree with the message, and MPS also stated in their email that the walkout is now over.

I can vouch as a teacher who participated in the RedforEd movement at the Capitol every day that we did not want to end the movement. The RedforEd Movement had 30,000 to 75,000 teachers, staff, and parents rallying at the state Capitol every day of the walkout. People camped out in tents on the front lawn, groups set up canopies and chairs each day that spread the entirety of the common area surrounding the Capitol, and food trucks lined the streets.

The Capitol grounds were literally a sea of red with T-shirts, banners, signs, and the spirit band. It was awe-inspiring, and you could feel the power of unity. There was no inkling of the notion that any of these people were ready to back down the movement. The RedforEd movement was stopped by the Arizona Educators United (AEU) and the Arizona Education Association (AEA). It is my personal opinion that the power of the movement scared the union and caused them to quickly put an end to the walkout.

For this reason, I believe the teachers of this country need to organize a rank-and-file committee run by teachers and elected by teachers. The lesson I have learned from Arizona's walkout is that teachers need to create, organize, and run a labor movement controlled by the teachers to prevent the intervention of and manipulation by the unions. During the walkout, the AEA and the AEU deleted any Facebook posts to their site that were contradictory or negative to their agenda; therefore, censoring the movement and dividing the movement itself.

I believe if the unions had not abruptly ended the

RedforEd Movement we had the momentum and the will to continue the walkout until our demands were met. As of now, NONE of RedforEd's demands have been achieved. The union leaders told the thousands strong crowd at the Capitol that our movement's successes were historic and that this was as much as we could possibly ever get from this legislature. We were told this budget was a victory and we should continue our victory at the voting polls in November. However, we are precisely at the exact same spot we were before the movement began. Nothing has been gained for teachers, for education, for staff, or for our students.

With the betrayal of the unions ending the RedforEd Movement plus the additional punishing and censoring of teachers that occurred this week I feel as though I can no longer sit! I can no longer wait! I will no longer be silenced! Teachers across this country need to organize a national walkout that will not stop until we have our demands met. This is just the beginning!



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