

“We want him to come to graduation!”

Arizona students demand release of classmate detained by immigration agents

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On Monday, over 200 high school students in Tucson, Arizona walked out of school to protest the detention and deportation of their classmate, Thomas Torres, an 18-year-old senior just two weeks away from graduating.

Torres was pulled over by a police officer while driving on May 2 and was handed over to Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers. He is currently being held in an immigration detention center in Florence, Arizona, awaiting a court hearing which will take place on May 22, the day he is set to graduate from Desert View High School.

Desert View students walked out Monday morning and marched four miles (6.5 kilometers) to the Pima County Sheriff's Department to demand Torres' immediate release. Students held a morning press conference in front of the police station which was live streamed on social media. The fight to free their classmate has been dubbed “Operation Thomas” by the students.

At the press conference, close friends and classmates spoke in opposition to Torres' arrest and detainment. Torres' friend Daffne Anselmo told reporters “We're here to get our friend back. This shouldn't be happening right now. Thomas should be in class. We all should be in class.”

“ICE and police are tearing families apart. We shouldn't be worrying about ending up in an immigration prison or jail after leaving school. We don't need this to happen again. It's been happening for years. We just want this to stop,” Anselmo said.

An unnamed student slammed police for assisting with the deportation and the school district, which has not led a fight to protect its students. “Let me be clear,

the reason why we decided to gather here is because it was a sheriff's deputy who pulled over Thomas and held him until CBP arrived. The sheriff is asking for more money to collaborate with border patrol. So, this is a call for all the Pima County Supervisors. This is what happens when police collaborate with border patrol! We don't want one more student taken into custody. We don't want another family torn apart. And Sunnyside district knows this! It is not the first time it happened in Desert View. Is not the first it happens in Sunnyside. So, the district needs to stand up for students as well. Do not allow a sheriff on campus. Do not allow them near your students!”

“It's not over after he comes out of detention center. He will have to face immigration judges, he will have to start a legal battle to stay with the community here at Desert View High School. And we want him out! We want him out before May 22! We want him to come to graduation!” she added.

According to the fundraising page established for his legal fees, Torres moved to the United States “from Mexico when he was young, along with his mother and two younger sisters to seek a better future and education.”

Statements of support and donations have begun pouring in, and within three days over \$9,000 has been raised, primarily from small donors.

The organized response by Torres' classmates represent the desire of young people to fight back. Youth in general are moving to the left, as are their educators, who have been at the forefront of the recent upsurge in the class struggle in the United States and internationally.

Educators have been subject to decades of a decline

in living standards, growing attacks on public education, the funneling of their students into the war apparatus, and the assault on youth and their families by Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) and (CBP).

Just one year ago, on April 26, nearly 60,000 Arizona teachers struck for six days in defiance of their union. The action was part of an international wave of strikes and demonstrations by educators throughout the world. Since their wildcat strike, the district has sought to punish teachers with unpaid days and the censoring of social media.

The rebellion by teachers internationally and youth is part of an interconnected phenomenon. According to a February 2019 Harris poll reported by Axios, a larger majority of youth are embracing socialism and policies generally associated with that political philosophy. More than 60 percent of Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 (born after 1995) view socialism in a positive light. Over 70 percent of Millennials, born between 1980 and 1994, and Generation Z—those born after 1995—believe universal health care should be provided, and approximately 67 percent believe college should be tuition-free.

Ellen Holmes Brandis, a Spanish teacher in Durham, North Carolina, created a petition to protest the mass detention of over 100 immigrants in an ICE raid in February. “This is an extra load on both the school professionals and the families affected,” wrote Brandis.

“Students should be enjoying their childhood, having fun learning new things at school, not suffering extreme duress due to ICE. It’s ripping our community apart in many ways, and it’s not only our immigrant students. It’s all students. Our non-immigrant students are frightened for their friends.”

The day after a mass roundup at a meatpacking plant in Hamblen County, Tennessee, NBC reported that 500 children from the district missed school. Jessica Bailiff, a physics teacher, said that when her absent students returned, “There’s just fear and sadness written all over their faces.”

Despite the widespread support for Torres, and immigrants in general, right-wing attacks by state authorities have already begun, in an attempt to discredit the student protest and all parties who stand in defense of immigrants.

Sheriff Mark Napier, concerned by the public outcry

against the use of police as agents of immigration, has made a dangerous allegation against the rally and its students. In a Facebook post Monday, Napier wrote that “Through observation, the Sheriff’s Department identified two members of CLEPC [County Law Enforcement Partnership Commission] as potential organizers of the protest.”

Napier is up for reelection in 2020 has been working to obtain more than \$1 million in federal funds to support collaboration between federal Border Patrol agents and local law enforcement after the CLEPC voted 6-4 against the funding.

The allegation by the sheriff must be taken as a warning to the Desert View students and all who seek to defend the rights of immigrants.

Young people must link up with their teachers and with the working class as a whole, in order to put a stop to deportations, mass raids and the vast system of detention centers. Such a fight must be bound up with the fight for socialism, for internationalism, and the right for everyone to live wherever they want with full rights and without fear of deportation.



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