

Facebook censors Arizona educators' rank-and-file committee group

By Jerry White
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Facebook has disabled the Arizona Educators Rank and File Committee group, which was initiated by the WSWs *Teacher Newsletter* to provide a forum for teachers in Arizona and other states to communicate and oppose the betrayal of their struggles by the unions.

The social media company posted a notice Sunday morning saying, "Group Has Been Disabled" and alleging that "Arizona Educators Rank and File Committee has content that goes against our Community Standards on fraud and spam." It continued, "Using misleading or inaccurate information to artificially collect likes, followers, or shares is not allowed. Contacting people for commercial purposes without their consent is also not allowed."

These claims are unsubstantiated and patently false. Scores of teachers joined the rank-and-file social media group after the Arizona Education Association (AEA) and its front group, Arizona Educators United (AEU), abruptly announced they were shutting down the strike and accepting the Republican governor's pay and school funding plan, which teachers just a week previously had overwhelmingly rejected.

Teachers joined the rank-and-file group after the ostensibly "grassroots" AEU began scrubbing any critical comments of teachers from its Facebook page. This followed the AEU's decision to censor any postings from the *World Socialist Web Site* and WSWs articles shared by teachers.

The rank-and-file group is currently disabled and under review after group administrators challenged the decision. According to Facebook, groups are only allowed to request a review once. If the company finds the groups still does not meet its "Community Standards," it will be permanently deleted.

In a letter of protest to Facebook, the WSWs wrote: "We have reviewed your community standards and we are not in violation of any of them. We demand to know in detail what specific standards you alleged we have violated.

"The Arizona Educators Rank and File Committee includes more than 100 members and has provided teachers in Arizona and other states a forum to discuss their fight to defend public education. On what grounds has our Facebook group been flagged and by whom? In particular, was Facebook contacted by the Arizona Education Association and/or the Arizona Educators United Facebook group and told the Arizona Educators Rank and File Committee was guilty of 'spamming,' 'misrepresentation' or disseminating 'false news'?"

"You have not substantiated any of the charges against us. That is because the most likely explanation for your actions is you were contacted by the unions, which feel threatened by the growing movement of teachers. Facebook has no right to arbitrate on behalf of the unions to decide who is the 'authentic representative' of educators. Nor do you have the right to censor the voices of teachers who are critical of the unions' capitulation to Governor Doug Ducey.

"We demand that you immediately reverse your undemocratic decision and allow the Arizona Educators Rank and File group to continue to be a forum for teachers to communicate and coordinate their struggles."

Denouncing the threat to permanently delete the Arizona Educators Rank and File Committee group, a teacher from Phoenix, said, "As an international mode of free expression for individuals, groups, and communities, Facebook should not decide what is acceptable for communication, since we live in a country that values all points of view and where it is

acceptable and encouraged to voice all opinions and biases. To do otherwise is a form of oppression which should not be tolerated in a democracy that protects free speech.

“I have begun to make connections by speaking and listening to members on this group. I am on board. Censorship cannot be tolerated or ignored. I believe the unions are afraid of a powerful force that is agitated and frustrated. They shut down the AZ teachers walk out when they had no authorization to do so.”

“As a history teacher,” another member of the rank-and-file group from Arizona said, “you don’t have to look too far to see how censorship has been used in this country to suppress critical thought, to consider various points of view— and to control the masses into taking on a certain position. The fact that Facebook shut down this site only further reinforces my suspicions that there are some larger, very powerful structures at work here that are looking to dismantle public education.”

In the name of fighting “fake news,” “Russian meddling” and “divisiveness,” Facebook, Google and other technology monopolies, along with the Democratic Party and the military-intelligence apparatus, are engaging a sweeping attack on free speech on the Internet.

The WSWS has been a particular target because it has increasingly become the center of working-class opposition among autoworkers, teachers and other sections of the working class in the US and internationally. Teachers, all workers and all those opposed to this attack on democratic rights must demand that Facebook reverse its decision and stop its censorship.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>