

Arizona teachers oppose union efforts to end strike

By David Moore and Adam McLean
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Nearly 20,000 striking Arizona teachers returned to the state capitol for a fifth day Wednesday, despite efforts by the union to shut down the walkout. Teachers expressed widespread hostility to Governor Doug Ducey's school funding plan, which would, over five years, barely restore a third of the \$1.1 billion school funding cuts made by the state over the last decade. While the union is rushing to end the strike, teacher after teacher has emphasized, "This is not over."

On Tuesday, the Arizona Education Association (AEA) and its auxiliary organization, the Arizona Educators United Facebook group (AEU), held a joint press conference where they endorsed the budget plan as a great step forward. Both organizations promised that teachers would be back to work Thursday if the legislature passed the budget.

Teachers immediately took to social media to denounce the sellout deal and criticize the AEU for calling the struggle off without a vote. Amy, a history teacher, summed up the sentiment, telling WSWS reporters "Last night things were off, they didn't ask us to vote on anything. Our voices were being ignored."

Confronted by the large teacher turnout and mass opposition, the AEA/AEU scrambled to regain credibility and find a way to shut down the walkout. In a video posted early Wednesday, the AEU leaders tried to distance themselves from the budget while insisting that nothing more could be gained. In a statement of utter bankruptcy, AEU leader Noah Karvelis declared, "The legislature has already decided, that is the reality of the situation. They have refused to listen to your voices, to the needs of our students, but they don't listen to us." The AEU leaders all told teachers they had to maintain "solidarity" and return to work as soon as the legislature voted to back the budget.

In other words, with nearly 60,000 educators on strike, with overwhelming popular support from workers throughout the states, and a growing movement of teachers across the country and internationally, now is the time to throw in the towel because the corporate-controlled politicians ignored the impotent appeals of the unions.

The AEA/AEU, however, have faced a torrent of opposition by rank-and-file teachers. Some districts used the union's capitulation to try to reopen Wednesday but they were forced to close due to widespread sickouts. By 2 p.m., the AEA/AEU were forced to hold a press conference to reverse their decision and tell teachers to stay out again on Thursday. By 5 p.m., they reversed again and declared, "It is up to you and your sites to decide to go in or not before the budget is passed."

By encouraging individual sites to return to work, the AEA/AEU is opening up teachers who stay out to victimization. Several state legislators have already stated they consider the teachers' walkout to be illegal and would be glad to make an example of any teachers they can isolate.

Ducey's budget proposal remains essentially the same as what he proposed before the walkout began. It satisfies none of the five demands that teachers raised. Instead of a 20 percent raise for teachers, the budget would give each district the choice where to spend more funds. The total amount would not even cover the raise in at least 58 districts. In addition, that money only covers teachers with a class roster, so special education resource teachers, literacy coaches and other certified teachers would not be included.

Over five years, the budget would only add \$400 million, \$700 million less than teachers are demanding be restored. Moreover, what little the budget would

provide is dependent for 85 percent of its funding on hopes the Arizona economy will keep booming over the next few years. The deal accepted by the union also ignores teachers' other demands, including a significant raise for custodians, school aides, cafeteria workers, school bus drivers and other support staff, many who now subsist on poverty level wages.

"I am frustrated and angry about the narrow framework they are trying to get teachers to accept," Sarah, a Phoenix area teacher, told the *World Socialist Web Site*. "They're saying, 'Don't go back until the bill is passed. This is a betrayal on the part of the leaders and teachers are resisting because we know this won't address the needs of our children, and our needs.'"

"When we came on Monday," Amy told the WSWS, "I didn't know how it was going to be. And then there were a ton of people here, it was incredible. It made me realize that people are done. People are ready. We had that momentum, and it made me realize how strong the movement is. For them to just shut it down last night without talking to the masses doesn't make any sense to me."

The AEA/AEU tried to sell the rotten deal to teachers by claiming their Democrat "allies" in the legislature were introducing amendments to improve the budget. This is a cynical ploy by the unions and the state Democrats, who are in the minority and could not get this passed in the Republican-controlled legislature. The Democrats' pathetic proposals, which include reducing the student to counselor ratio to 250-to-1, are aimed at boosting illusions in the state legislature and keeping teachers focused on impotent lobbying campaigns and the election of Democrats in November.

At both the federal and state level, the Democrats have attacked public education no less than Republicans. Before Arizona had Republicans Doug Ducey and Jan Brewer as governor, they had the Democrat Janet Napolitano who cut both taxes and education funding. After the Republican Bush administration launched No Child Left Behind, the Democratic president, Barack Obama, continued the attack with Race to the Top. Under the guise of 'school reform,' both parties have diverted resources from public education into privately run for-profit charter schools.

Throughout the day teachers spoke with and wrote to

the WSWS about the developing situation. Sarah explained the impact of the AEU's efforts. "I woke up really disheartened, I think everyone did. Then I saw the WSWS article and there was this glimmer of hope. We can't just let these people win, you know? That's why I'm talking to you. We can't let this happen.

"It's an attack an attack on public education. There's no other way of looking at it. It's all geared towards big business and privatization, so a fight back has to take place on a nation-wide level."

The WSWS Teacher Newsletter urges teachers to elect rank-and-file committees to take the conduct of the strike out of the hands of the AEA/AEU strikebreakers. These committees should organize votes to reject the back to work order and the insulting pay and funding proposal. They should issue an appeal to workers throughout the state to actively rally against any threats against teachers who refuse to return to work.

At the same time, Arizona teachers should appeal to teachers in Colorado, Kentucky, the Carolinas, West Virginia, Oklahoma and throughout the US to link up and prepare a nationwide strike to fight for the right to high quality public education.

Teachers across the country share a common experience of low wages and overwork. With every hungry or tired student, they see concentrated in their classroom the broader social crisis affecting the working class. The way forward in this fight is through educating, organizing, and mobilizing those broad layers of workers suffering under growing inequality to wage a political fight against both big business parties and the capitalist profit system they defend.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>