

Arizona Supreme Court strikes down “Invest in Ed” ballot initiative

By David Moore
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Last week, the Arizona Supreme Court ruled against Arizona’s Invest in Ed initiative, which would have mandated a modest increase in taxes on high incomes and dedicate the funds to public education. By striking the initiative from the November ballot, the court has trampled on the wishes of 270,000 voters who signed petitions to put the measure on the ballot.

The removal of the measure underscores the fact that the rich will not accept the slightest inroad on their personal wealth no matter how dire the conditions for the state’s more than one million students. While the Invest in Ed proposition has been struck from the ballot, Proposition 305, which would divert more public school money to private schools, remains.

The outcome of the ballot initiative also highlights the treachery of all those forces—the unions, the Democrats and their affiliated organizations—who shut down the statewide walkout by teachers and presented the ballot initiative as the alternative to spreading the strike to other states and developing a powerful political movement of the working class against both corporate-controlled parties.

The Arizona Education Association (AEA) and the Arizona Educators United (AEU) Facebook group, led by Noah Karvelis, both hailed Republican Governor Doug Ducey’s deal to end the strike, and claimed teachers could make up the \$700 million shortfall between their demands and the deal the union agreed to through the Invest in Ed ballot measure.

The state supreme court’s decision overturned an earlier lower court ruling that upheld the ballot initiative. Its ruling is based on specious technicalities raised in the Arizona Chamber of Commerce’s challenge to the measure.

As of this writing the full court opinion has not been published, but the ruling appears to be based on two arguments. First, the measure’s description says it will

raise the tax rate on household incomes over \$500,000 and those over \$1,000,000 by 3.46 and 4.46 *percent* respectively. The chamber of commerce argued that should have read “percentage points.” Second, plaintiffs argued that the measure’s wording would eliminate the indexing of income tax brackets to inflation. The Arizona Supreme Court ruled that these two combined “creates a significant danger of confusion or unfairness.”

The decision came down from the recently expanded supreme court. In 2016, Ducey signed legislation adding two new justices, bringing the total to seven. The governor has appointed three of the current justices.

The president of the AEA, Joe Thomas, responded to the decision by calling on teachers to vote Democrat in the November election. The ruling has “sealed the fate of the governor” because he lacks a plan to restore education funding, Thomas stated in a video to the union’s Facebook page.

The union has endorsed Democrat David Garcia for governor. In response to the decision Garcia tweeted, “The stakes for the race for governor just changed utterly and irrevocably.”

Arizona teachers returned to classrooms in August with none of their demands met. Schools are still chronically underfunded. Teachers continue to struggle with low pay and unsustainable health care costs, even as they spend money out of their pockets for basic supplies. Even as the state government starves the schools it maintains tax giveaways for the corporations and wealthy individuals signed by politicians from both parties, including former Democratic governor Janet Napolitano.

The Arizona strike came on the heels of statewide teacher strikes in West Virginia and Oklahoma and local strikes and protests across several other states. Polls at the time showed overwhelming support nationwide for the teachers’ struggles. A full 80 percent of those who knew of the strikes supported them, according to *AP/NORC*.

The *World Socialist Web Site Teacher Newsletter* intervened in these struggles and received a mass response for our call to unite teachers across state lines and organize a nationwide strike in defense of education. We warned workers that in order to win their demands, teachers had to carry out a struggle against the two big business parties. Teachers, we said, had to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the unions by electing rank-and-file committees in every school and community to mobilize the broadest support in the working class for the struggle.

In opposition to the strikes, the unions carried out a conscious policy of isolating teachers by state and by local and lining them up behind the Democratic Party. When Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers (yearly compensation \$492,563) and member of the Democratic National Committee, spoke in Phoenix during the strike, she opposed a unified struggle, insisting that “education is a state-wide issue.” Instead of uniting teachers in a nationwide strike, she told the WSWS, “We want to make sure these walk-outs become walk-ins to the voting booth in November.”

The AEA and the AEU insisted that the only goal of the strike was to change the minds of the very state legislators that had been cutting education funding in the first place. They told teachers protests would force legislators’ “do their jobs,” when in reality, the jobs of Republicans and Democrats politicians is to protect the interests of the corporate and financial elite, not provide high quality education to working class youth. When the legislators passed the governor’s budget, which underfunded education despite the strike, the AEU told teachers to return to work without even an informal poll.

At every step, the AEU aligned itself with the union and the Democrats. Karvelis, who founded the AEU in consultation with the AEA president, gave a joint press conference with the union chief, announcing their call for a return to work in support of the governor’s budget. The moderators of the AEU Facebook page banned educators who criticized the AEU and deleted comments criticizing the back-to-work call.

Karvelis, Thomas and others then promoted the ballot initiative as the solution to the funding crisis. In doing so they were backed by various pseudo-left organizations, including the International Socialist Organization.

In July, Karvelis was one of the key speakers at the ISO’s Socialism 2018 conference in Chicago. He was given a standing ovation as he defended the sellout of the strike and announced that signatures for the ballot

initiative had just been delivered to the state capitol the day before. “In November,” Karvelis declared to wild applause, “Arizonans will have the option we have been denied for so long: to fully fund our schools. And it looks like it’s going to happen. We are going to get \$700 million from top one percent of income earners,” Karvelis declared as the crowd began chanting, “Tax the rich!”

The ballot initiative was a cynical ploy from the beginning, just as the WSWS warned. The unions and their apologists promoted this scam to demobilize teachers and block the struggle from spreading across the country and developing into a real political challenge to the Democrats and Republicans and the capitalist system they defend.

A vast redistribution of wealth is certainly needed. But it will not be accomplished by ballot initiatives or appeals to bought-and-paid-for politicians. Instead the working class must be mobilized as an independent political force, drawing in ever wider sections of workers and youth to carry out a frontal assault on the entrenched wealth and power of the financial aristocracy that rules America and the world.

In every workplace, school and community committees of workers and young people should discuss and make preparation for a general strike to defend the social rights of the working class, including the right to livable wages and high-quality public education. Such mass action will immediately pose before workers the need to take political power and expropriate the private fortunes of the super-rich. Only through the implementation of a socialist program can the wealth that is collectively created by working people be used to meet society’s needs instead of enriching the few.

We urge educators who agree with this perspective to subscribe to the *WSWS Teacher Newsletter* and contact the Socialist Equality Party.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>