Jacobin, Socialist Alternative and the ISO hailed union deal rejected by West Virginia teachers

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2 March 2018

Political parties reveal their true colors in the course of social struggle. In their response to the West Virginia teachers' strike, *Jacobin* magazine, Socialist Alternative and the International Socialist Organization (ISO) have exposed themselves as defenders of the efforts by the government, the two parties and the trade unions to force 30,000 teachers and school employees back to work.

On Tuesday, teachers and staff erupted in anger as the West Virginia Education Association (WVEA) and American Federation of Teachers-West Virginia (AFT-WV) called off the strike and told teachers to report for duty Thursday. The unions praised a paltry wage increase proposal from Democrat-turned-Republican Governor Jim Justice plus a promise to form a commission to investigate long-term funding for the workers' healthcare program, the Public Employees Insurance Agency (PEIA).

Teachers knew the promises were worth nothing. Some of the most popular comments on the AFT-WV's Facebook page read: "Sad! You sold out these teachers!" "If this is true, I'm dropping my 10 year membership. This is NOT representative of your members' desires!" "Why won't AFT fight for us!?!?!" "YOU SOLD US OUT!" "Every individual should drop their membership." "AFT, WVSSPA, WVEA…You people are just as pathetic as any other politician in the capital!!!!!!"

Teachers held impromptu meetings where they voted to continue the strike.

Jacobin, Socialist Alternative, and the ISO took an entirely different view than the rebellious striking teachers.

Shortly after details of the rotten deal and the back-to-work order were announced, *Jacobin*, which is associated with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), declared on its Facebook page that "strikes get the goods." The DSA then shared the post, declaring that the sellout deal overwhelmingly rejected by the workers proved "why strikes matter!"

Kshama Sawant, a city councilperson in Seattle and leading member of Socialist Alternative, used her Twitter account Wednesday morning to declare that the backroom deal between the unions and the coal baron governor proved that "when workers organize a united struggle against bosses and corporate politicians, we can win!" Sawant provided a link to a *New York Times* article which announced the end of the strike.

Sawant's words echoed those of national AFT President Randi Weingarten (annual income $500,000+), who said the announced deal "showed what is possible when working people come together, united in their unions and joined by their communities."

Sawant's Socialist Alternative accepted the end of the strike as an accomplished fact, publishing an article Wednesday morning which spoke of the strike in the past tense, praising the "heroic four-day strike" which was "100% solid across all 55 counties to the end."

The ISO praised "union leaders" in a February 27 article, and elevated WVEA President Dale Lee and AFT-WV President Christine Campbell to hero status, claiming the bureaucrats led "thousands of other teachers and other public service employees" to a mass demonstration last week. According to the ISO, it was Lee who decided "to continue the walkouts" this week. The ISO paints the union leadership as lions fighting for the workers: "union leaders are bargaining for a 5

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percent increase over the next five years, amounting to almost $10,000 in raises over the next half decade," as if $2,000 a year does much for the teachers who spend that much on out-of-pocket classroom expenses.

The ISO claims the union wants "a permanent funding source for all PEIA-related concerns," which is a lie, considering the unions told workers to go back to work without any fix to PEIA. Their article concludes by claiming that the strike "has no clear trajectory" and that "perhaps that is ultimately a good thing." Without a strategy, the ISO claims, the situation will allow "for flexibility among workers to determine how to respond in each new situation."

In other words, the ISO wants to keep workers tethered to the very unions who betrayed them and tried to sell out their strike. They fear the fact that workers will develop a strategy of their own *against* the trade unions and the Democrats.

The eagerness with which these organizations declared the sellout a victory exposes the fact that they exist to provide cover for the unions. As pseudo-left organizations, they use populist slogans and phrases to promote the interests of a privileged layer of the upper-middle class, many of whom, like ISO leader Sherry Wolf, are employed by the unions.

These groups have nothing to do with the working class. Just like the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and Bloomberg News, they all assumed the strike would be over and that the workers would accept the sellout agreement. This demonstrates the vast material chasm that separates these organizations from the working class.

What's more, the struggle of West Virginia teachers and school employees explodes the whole racialist narrative of the pseudo-left. *Jacobin*, Socialist Alternative and the ISO are all purveyors of the notion that the white working class in the United States is the beneficiary of what they call "white privilege." But West Virginia is among the most impoverished states in the country, and it is overwhelmingly white. One sixth of the state does not have enough to eat, and 25 percent of children live below the federal poverty line.

The positions of *Jacobin*, Socialist Alternative and the ISO on the West Virginia teachers strike prove that they are pro-capitalist, anti-working-class organizations whose aim is to block the development of the class struggle, prop up the trade unions and divert the growth of social opposition over poverty, inequality and war into the safe channels of the Democratic Party and identity politics.

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