

Arizona strike enters second week as teacher union president opposes calls for nationwide strike

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On Monday, nearly 50,000 Arizona educators and supporters continued their walkout against underfunded schools and low pay for a third day. Although the teacher unions have done everything to isolate the teachers and wear them down with fruitless appeals to hostile politicians, educators came out to the state capitol in Phoenix *en masse* Monday to demonstrate their determination as the strike began its second week.

Several of the largest districts announced they would remain closed on Tuesday as the Arizona Education Association and the national teacher unions scramble to come up with some justification to end the strike without meeting teachers' demands, as the unions did in West Virginia and Oklahoma.

Over the weekend, AEA President Joe Thomas had called Monday's rally the final "remedial opportunity" for the state legislature to listen to teachers' demands before the union shifted its focus to electing Democrats in the November elections. On Monday, he said, "The real work is getting them to pass a budget and you have to do that today," adding, "Break bread with your legislators and find common ground." But teachers have no common ground with legislators who have cut roughly \$1 billion from Arizona schools over the past decade.

The teacher unions above all want to prevent the strike from spreading across the United States and coalescing into a movement for a nationwide strike. This was made clear by American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten who was questioned by a *World Socialist Web Site* reporter during a press conference in Phoenix Monday. Asked for her response to the growing demands by teachers for a nationwide strike, Weingarten insisted that

"education is a statewide issue." She added, "We want to make sure that these walkouts become walk-ins to the voting booth in November."

The claim that education is a state-by-state issue is absurd on the face of this. Since the early 1980s, the federal government, whether led by Democrats or Republicans, has waged an unending war against schoolteachers and public education. The Obama administration, with the assistance of the AFT and the National Education Association (NEA) sharply expanded for-profit charter schools, and used standardized tests to scapegoat teachers, cut their pay and fire them. Trump and his education secretary, Betsy DeVos, a billionaire enemy of public education, are escalating the attack.

It is also the case that states are subjected to relentless demands for tax cuts by corporations that operate nationally and internationally. Governor Ducey, his predecessor Jan Brewer, both Republicans, and Democratic Governor Janet Napolitano all slashed taxes for corporations and the richest Arizonans, resulting in falling revenue that has been paid for through slashing education and other vital services.

Weingarten's reference to transforming teacher walkouts into "walk-ins to the voting booth in November" describes precisely how the unions are trying to crush the wave of teacher rebellions and divert it into a campaign for Democrats. Weingarten, who is a member of the Democratic National Committee, would like educators to forget about Obama's anti-teacher Race to the Top program and the attack on education in New York, California, Colorado and other states run by the Democrats.

The unions have been aided in their efforts by the

Facebook group Arizona Educators United (AEU), which has promoted the unions and state Democrats. Although teachers are demanding a 20 percent pay raise and the restoration of funding to pre-2008 levels, the AEU organizers have avoided setting specific conditions for ending the strike. AEU was even uncertain about continuing the protest into Monday but a poll of over 1,100 site liaisons showed 93 percent in favor of the Monday protest.

On Sunday AEU leader Rebecca Garelli published a video where she said the decision to continue the walkout will be a “day-to-day call,” and that the AEU leadership will have to make these decisions without polling teachers. She made it clear the AEU has no perspective to carry the strike forward and would only react to the governor and legislators: “Every day, it’s going to be reactionary [sic]. They’re going to do something—or not do something, which means we’re going to do something... There is no play book for this; there is no ‘extended plan’ in our minds.”

It is harder to think of a clearer declaration of political bankruptcy. It is clear that both big-business parties and the unions have an “extended plan,” and that is to crush the resistance of teachers. This must be opposed. Teachers should take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the unions and the AEU and elect rank-and-file committees to reach out to every section of the working class and to teachers across the US to fight for a nationwide strike to defend public education. Such a movement must be completely independent of both big-business parties and insist that the social rights of the working class, including for high quality public education, take priority over the profit interests of the corporations and super-wealthy.

In contrast to the union officials, regular teachers have growing hostility to all the big-business politicians who have been carrying out attacks on social services. Many teachers expressed support for uniting teachers across the country in a common fight.

Jonathan, a teacher from Tucson told the WSWS, “I don’t think we should appeal to Democrats or Republicans. I don’t think we should compromise. Otherwise, I feel like I’m wasting my time.” Matt, whose fiancé is a teacher, added, “This has been a long time coming; I don’t think being either Republican or Democrat has anything to do with it.”



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