“If the workers united we would be a dominating force”

Arizona teachers oppose union sellout and call for nationwide strike

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Schools reopened across Arizona on Friday, as teachers returned to work following the betrayal of their courageous week-long strike by the unions, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, and the nominally “independent” union front group, Arizona Educators United.

The deal is virtually identical to the proposal of Republican governor Doug Ducey that teachers rejected before the strike began, and meets none of the main demands of teachers or support staff.

The unions’ sellout is the latest in a series of betrayals of strikes by teachers, including in West Virginia and Oklahoma. They have worked to isolate the expanding strike wave on a state-by-state basis. The unions were all the more determined to end the Arizona strike yesterday, with teachers in Pueblo, in neighboring Colorado, set to walk out on Monday. On May 16, teachers will shut down schools across North Carolina, after thousands of teachers have already called off work.

Teachers spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* yesterday and denounced the sellout of the strike by the Arizona Education Association and AEU.

Amy, a seventh- and eight-grade teacher in Mesa, told the WSWS that the union had been determined to stop the strike on Wednesday “when the teachers got really angry and began to take the power away from the union leaders.”

Amy noted that on Tuesday, the AEU had instructed teachers to return to work on Thursday. “They didn’t send out a poll or survey. I thought: ‘How do you know we’re ready?”

“The teachers were chanting angrily on Wednesday, circling inside and outside the capital. The union leaders weren’t anywhere to be seen. Then later in the afternoon, the AEA and AEU leaders appeared, and broke us all into districts. Our leader was super agitated. They told us to vote on returning to school. He tried to guilt us into it. He said the certified workers were not getting paid for the day off, and that we were depriving them of money by not going back to school.

“We thought, ‘this is ridiculous! Why are you making us feel bad when we’re out here fighting for them?!’ My school actually put together a GoFundMe page and raised $1,500 to give to our certified staff.

“I started making negative comments about him to the people around us. People were listening … We all voted to not go back to work on Thursday.” This “really freaked the union leaders out.”

Amy explained that the following day, as teachers arrived at the capitol, the AEU and AEA had a “whole new spin.” It was “like a pep rally at high school: They said it was ‘historic.’ The punch line was, ‘go back to your schools, welcome your students.’”

Within 30 minutes, teachers began receiving emails that schools were reopening the following day. “They had to have coordinated it the night before,” she said. “There was also a news conference. They told the media to come. It was an agreement with the school districts and the legislature to put an end to it ‘before the teachers completely take the power away from us.’ It’s disgusting. A lot of us felt betrayed by the union.

“I said to my colleague: What would happen if someone else had the microphone, and said, ‘we are not done; we have not got what we want.’ It would have been totally different. I heard snippets of others in the crowd making pissed-off comments, like ‘what’s going on?’”

Amy rejected the lie promoted by the AEU and AEA, that the strike had to be brought to an end because teachers risked losing public support. “It had become extremely powerful,” she said. “The public were all

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behind us. We had the momentum and the numbers to tell them: 'Take your budget, and we will stay out of school until you make it what we want.' But the union and AEU said: 'We've gotten as much as we can.'"

Instead, the unions insisted that teachers could only vote for Democrats in November. "The slogan, 'Remember in November' was really heavily promoted," Amy noted. "Then today they kept putting things on the Facebook saying this is 'Red for November.' Voting will not do anything. The legislators have been taking $1 billion from education funding since 2008."

When the union and AEU announced the shutdown of the strike, however, there was no alternative organization, independent of the union and democratically run by the teachers, that could take the strike into its own hands. This allowed the unions to impose their sellout despite widespread opposition.

Amy said that "everyone was following those who had been our cheerleaders," but that "they turned on us and we didn't have any way to bring it back together." She said that a rank-and-file committee, which the *World Socialist Web Site* called for from the beginning of the strike, is "what needs to happen. You need to have multiple voices all along the stage so that no one individual is really leading it; it's the group leading together.

"It needs to be nationwide strike. That's what it would take. And it needs to be just run by the teachers: a teacher force doing it, and the parents getting involved. They're actually interested in their children and grandchildren getting a public education. It could be huge for teachers through all the nation to all strike together and refuse to stop until we get what we want.

"I think that the workers are more powerful than the state and even the federal government. The majority of America is the working class. They [the ruling class] are a very small population. If the workers united, together, we're a much more powerful force than the small minority that's wealthy that dominates our country. But we could be a dominating force just in sheer numbers. We're the ones that struggle. We're the ones that fight every day—not them. And we produce all of the wealth—for them."

Amy said she had heard about the upcoming online May Day Online Rally being held by the *World Socialist Web Site*. "I plan on being there. I'm interested in hearing what you have to say."

Roger, a teacher in western Phoenix, told the WSWS, "There are a lot of people who are upset. We won nothing. It's the same deal that essentially we went on strike against. We did all this effort to make the biggest strike in modern history and then went home.

"On Tuesday night, I look on my phone and Noah [Karvelis], Dylan [Wegala] and all the others from the AEU were on video saying, 'we're going back to school on Thursday.' I thought: 'What?!'"

Roger said that he had heard "rumors" that the union "would sell us out by using a ballot initiative" to channel teachers' opposition. "An Oklahoma teacher hit me up and warned that in Oklahoma, the unions convinced them to go back to school and say, 'vote Democrat in November.' Then sure enough, that's what happened."

Roger said that while the drive for the strike came from rank-and-file teachers, who "at every school began organizing on their own," the AEU had "piggy-backed on that and tried to get everybody to join the union.

"The union now is just 'pay dues and vote Democrat,'" he said. "The Democrats were trying to embrace us in the capitol. But when Obama was president, his secretary, Arne Duncan, was all about private schools."

Roger said he thought there needed to be a united struggle by the whole working class. "It's not just teachers; it's everybody," he said. "It's every person, in every job. They don't get paid enough; they don't get enough benefits. We have to organize and strike. It would be revolutionary. When we were in the legislature, what was going through my mind the whole time was: 'If this was a representative democracy, these people would listen to us.' But it's not."

Roger said he intended to attend the upcoming International Online May Day Rally hosted by the WSWS. "I want to hear what you guys have to say."

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