

Trump regime targets “loser teachers” in red-baiting tirade

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Speaking at the February 11 fascistic rally in El Paso, staged to promote a border wall, Donald Trump, Jr. revved up a hand-picked right-wing crowd for his father by proclaiming that “loser teachers” were indoctrinating “babies from birth” with socialism.

With background chants of “USA, USA,” the president’s oldest son stated, “I love seeing some young conservatives because I know it’s not easy. Keep up that fight. Bring it to your schools. You don’t have to be indoctrinated by these loser teachers that are trying to sell you on socialism from birth. You can think for yourselves. They can’t.”

With teacher strikes continuing to escalate across the US, including West Virginia and California, Trump Jr.’s provocative remarks express the ruling class’s deep fear of the growing popularity of socialism and the rise of the class struggle. Adding teachers to his ever-growing “enemies list,” Trump’s crisis-ridden regime’s turn to McCarthyite red-baiting is inseparably linked with plans for repression, symbolized by the demand for a militarized wall with Mexico. The undercurrent of fascistic violence came to the surface when one of Trump’s supporters attacked a BBC cameraman at the rally.

Hysterical attacks on socialism were a major component of Trump’s State of the Union speech, which was followed by a declaration of a global war on “communism and socialism” in a bellicose speech at Florida International University in Miami. Such fascistic appeals increasingly characterize the administration, with the president reiterating some 36 times in his short Miami speech the words “socialism” or “communism.”

As the WSWs noted at the time of the State of the Union, while the “the anti-socialist nightmares of the ruling elite were [previously] focused on the Soviet Union, China or another foreign country. Under Trump, these fears were directed against an internal enemy, radicalized American workers and youth.”

For good reason, the ruling elites face an increasingly angry and combative working class. In 2018, nearly half a million American workers went on strike—the highest figure

since 1986, the greatest change in a generation. This resurgence of the class struggle is part of a worldwide upsurge—from the Yellow Vests in France and the insurgent strike by maquiladoras workers in Matamoros, Mexico, to massive struggles on virtually every continent.

Teachers, who constituted the majority of strikers in the US last year, represent a danger to the gilded aristocracy not just by force of numbers, but most especially because they have begun to take independent action in defiance of the unions. While the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA) have systematically sought to weaken and divide teachers by preventing or isolating strikes, such struggles are not letting up.

On the contrary, West Virginia teachers—whose courageous strike one year ago galvanized teachers across the country—have walked out again, demanding the withdrawal of a legislative plan to charterize schools in the state, the fulfillment of promises broken over the last year, and real improvements in public education. Arizona teachers, who struck for six days last spring, have been vocally calling for renewed walkouts should the governor fail to deliver on promised pay increases this year. In Oklahoma, the site of a 10-day strike last spring, teachers are demanding at least a \$3,000 additional pay bump this year.

These struggles again are being driven by workers from below, while the unions operate as political police, seeking to contain the class struggle. When asked about a renewed walkout in Oklahoma, the union told local media, “the OEA [Oklahoma Education Association] is aggressively working with lawmakers to make sure that doesn’t happen.”

Nothing has been resolved in any of the previous strikes—as schools continue to reel under the impact of decades of budget cuts. Oakland teachers will strike today, and new struggles threaten to erupt in virtually every school district in the country.

Moreover, parents, young people and the population as a whole have registered their overwhelming approval of these long-overdue struggles, with polls showing upwards of 80

percent in favor of walkouts. In Denver and Los Angeles, the strikes were complemented by sit-down protests and rallies by thousands of students. Young people are indeed increasingly politicized and identifying as socialists.

For Trump and his ilk, public education, like all social rights, is socialism. This oligarchy sees any incursion on their ability to profit as intolerable. It hates educators because they are standing in the way of the financial rewards anticipated in the plundering of the \$4 trillion education market. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos speaks firmly for this policy when demanding “choice”—i.e., the destruction of what she views as “compulsory education.”

Teachers launched a firestorm of anger at Trump’s remarks. One commented on the *Washington Post* report, “‘Socialism’ sounds pretty good to me, especially if it involves health care and retirement security for everyone.” Gina Canevi wrote a blog in *Education Week* emphasizing that teachers will not be intimidated. “I believe in health care for all and higher living wages. I also believe that public education is a social good, not a market-driven exercise. So, if that makes me a socialist, so be it.”

In contrast, American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten has made no comment about Trump’s rant on “loser teachers” preaching socialism. Far from defending teachers against red-baiting, Weingarten (annual salary \$543,000) is a rabid anti-communist and would no doubt agree that “socialist” teachers have no business in the classroom.

There is a long and ugly history to the union’s adoption of anti-communism and its corollary, the suppression of the class struggle. Weingarten was the protégé of the long-time president of the AFT, Albert Shanker, a particularly vicious opponent of socialism who supported the Vietnam War, partnered with the CIA campaign to subvert Latin American unions, and assisted in the illegal US Contra War in Nicaragua. A fervent supporter of the reactionary anti-Russia campaign, Weingarten also held a secret meeting with former Trump strategist and open fascist Stephen Bannon in 2017 to discuss mutual investment projects.

Moreover, the AFT’s “seat at the table” and access to government-sanctioned dues-checkoff was solidified by purging socialist teachers. In 1941, it pulled the charters of three New York and Philadelphia locals citing their socialist and communist leadership, expelling one-third of their membership, approximately 8,000 teachers. When the state of New York enacted the Feinberg Law and summoned hundreds of public school teachers to House Un-American Activities-style hearings between 1949 and 1958, the AFT stood by, allowing educators to be driven from the profession. Alongside this political censorship on behalf of the government, the AFT prevented strikes, abetting the long

legacy of poverty wages for teachers.

In line with the class interests of a union leadership that takes home five or even ten times the income of an ordinary teacher, the AFT is downplaying the significance of the US turn to authoritarian and dictatorial policies. On the occasion of Trump declaring a national state of emergency, the AFT issued a statement complacently describing it as a fake emergency and calling for Congress to “hold Trump accountable.” They suggest that it is merely an election stunt and that Trump is “pouting.”

Friedrich Engels, the co-founder with Karl Marx of scientific socialism, once said: “Bourgeois society stands at the crossroads, either transition to socialism or regression into barbarism.”

These words have never been truer than today. As America teeters on dictatorship, the Trump administration reflects not an aberration, but a worldwide danger of world war and fascism. This phenomenon expresses not the strength of capitalism, but its dead-end and intractable crisis.

Emerging on the scene of history is the mighty international working class. The objective logic of the class struggle is bringing that working class into a direct confrontation with the capitalist profit system. The fascistic threats of the Trump administration are an urgent warning. The defense of all basic rights including public education requires an end to imperialist wars, social inequality and the ever-more rapacious profit system. Teachers, take the next step and join the Socialist Equality Party.



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