

DSA-aligned teachers unions’ “Day of Resistance”: a pathetic appeal to Biden and the Democrats

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On Tuesday, an umbrella group of ostensibly “left” teachers unions and organizations known as “Demand Safe Schools” held a protest, which they billed as a “Day of Resistance.” The group includes the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and various local unions tied to the DSA, including the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), Oakland Education Association (OEA), Movement of Rank and File Educators (MORE) and the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA).

There is immense opposition of teachers, parents and students to the deadly reopening of the schools as the pandemic continues to rage. The “Day of Resistance,” however, has nothing to do with mobilizing teachers and broader sections of the working class against this homicidal policy, which is being spearheaded by Democratic governors and mayors in major urban areas, like Chicago, New York City, and California.

Underscoring the political bankruptcy of the event, it largely consisted of organizers issuing a series of tweets based on the slogan #BidenBeBold, which begged the Democrats for more funding to open the schools “safely.” The leaders of the CTU, UTLA, OEA and other DSA-aligned unions had previously signed a love letter to Biden congratulating him for his electoral victory and saying nothing about Biden’s commitment to reopen the majority of schools within his first 100 days in office.

The event included various political scoundrels who employ “left” sounding phrases to fool teachers and keep them tied to the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association and their state and local affiliates, which have spent decades collaborating in government attacks on teachers and public education, and are now working with Biden and the Democrats to restart in-person instruction. This includes DSA member Rebecca Garelli, the founder of National Educators United (NEU), who played an instrumental role in suppressing the revolt by Arizona teachers in 2018 and helping the Arizona Education Association (AEA) and national teacher unions isolate and defeat the powerful strike.

Garelli set the political tone of the event: “Now that we know that Joe Biden is the President-elect, it is time to raise our voices together to the national level, to really demand the safe schools that we need, since opening schools is one of his three top priorities. And in order to do that, we need massive investment in our schools and communities.”

She added, “We now have a new administration between Biden, Harris, and the new nominee of Secretary of Ed., [Miguel] Cardona, and we are here to make our voices heard together. And that’s it, that’s what we’re doing, we’re just going to uplift it to the national level, still continue organizing locally.”

The group echoes the false claims by the Democrats, the unions and the corporate media that schools can be “safely” reopened before the deadly disease is fully contained. Their official list of demands does not include the most fundamental ones for saving lives: that all schools and nonessential workplaces be closed with full compensation to workers and remote learning be fully funded. This is not a mistake. To raise these demands, which have mass support, would put the organization into a direct conflict with Biden and the Democrats who are rushing to restart in-person learning in order to get the parents of school children back to work making corporate profit.

In comments Wednesday, Biden’s chief economic adviser, financier Brian Deese said, “We need to get the schools open, so that parents, and particularly women, who are being disproportionately hurt in this economy, can get back to work.” Of course, Biden has made no proposal to redirect some of the trillions of government bailout money to Wall Street to provide income protection to working-class mothers so they can stay safely at home with their children.

Underscoring the complete unseriousness of the event organizers and their contempt for the rights of teachers, Garelli and others were completely silent on the January 6 fascist coup attempt in Washington D.C., which was orchestrated by Donald Trump in alliance with a majority of Republican Party congressmen, and sections of the Capitol Police and the Pentagon. This is completely in line with Biden’s own call for “unity” with the Republican conspirators who will continue to play a prominent role during a Biden administration in shifting bourgeois politics to the right.

The last thing the Democrats and their pseudo-left supporters want is to alert the working class to the dangers of fascism and reveal the connection between the promotion of far-right forces and the ruling class’s demand to force workers back to work and lift every last restriction on the exploitation of the working class. This is because such an exposure would spark a movement of genuine resistance not only against the fascist threat but the interests of the corporate and financial oligarchy, which the

Democrats defend just as much as the Republicans.

Garelli was followed by Kelley Fisher, another leader of Arizona Educators United (AEU), who claimed to have helped organize a recent sickout by teachers in Arizona. Although she didn't specifically name the district involved, she was clearly referring to the developments in Gilbert and Chandler, Arizona last week. Fisher said nothing about the miserable role played by the Gilbert Education Association (GEA) in siding with the school district and threatening teachers in order to enforce the resumption of in-person learning.

After Fisher, Garelli invited CTU member Quentin Washington to speak. He injected racial politics into the event, stating, "Black and brown people are dying at disproportionate rates in this virus. And in Chicago the majority of the students that are coming back into this building, even there are some black and brown students whose families have opted to send them back, a good portion of them are not black and brown. They're the white students, whose parents wanted their kids back in school."

This disgusting racialist narrative is used to conceal the class interests behind the school openings. Washington said nothing of the role played by the CTU in facilitating the reopening of schools. Nor did he note the fact that the women spearheading the reopening of schools in Chicago—Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) CEO Janice Jackson—are African American.

Earlier this month, Carlos Ramirez-Rosa, a member of the DSA, acknowledged that the Latino caucus on the City Council had met with Mayor Lightfoot and asked her why she was opening schools. According to Ramirez-Rosa, she replied, "One, I'm hearing from employers that they want their employees back in the workplace, two, I'm hearing from downtown businesses that they don't have any customers and three, because I'm worried about the kids."

Chicago schools began reopening last week through a phased-in process under which the majority of students will be eligible for in-person instruction by February 1. The CTU has refused to call for any coordinated strike action to prevent this, isolating teachers to individually decide whether or not to return and doing nothing to defend those who have been victimized. Their only demand is that CPS reach "accommodation, partnership and clarity," in the words of union vice president Stacy Davis Gates.

The rest of the meeting involved attendees simultaneously listening to jazz music while issuing pre-prepared tweets appealing directly to Biden, Harris and their reactionary nominee for Education Secretary Miguel Cardona, who was nominated primarily due to his role enforcing school reopenings this fall as Connecticut's commissioner of education.

Less than 24 hours before the "Day of Resistance," the Boston Teachers Union (BTU)—one of the participants in the event—struck a deal with Boston Public Schools to reopen in the coming weeks. Under the plan, most students are slated to return to classrooms by March 15, as new daily cases across Massachusetts have reached record levels in the past month and will continue to surge in the weeks ahead.

The central purpose of Tuesday's stunt protest was to try to dissipate the enormous anger among educators to the deepening drive to reopen schools that is now being spearheaded by the

Democratic Party at the behest of the incoming Biden administration. But they will not be able to stop the inevitable conflict between teachers and ever broader sections of the working class against Biden and the Democrats and the capitalist system, which has been responsible for so much death and inequality, and now the danger of fascist dictatorship.

The only organization that has waged a determined struggle against the homicidal drive to reopen schools during the pandemic has been the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, which was formed in August and now has affiliates across the US, including in New York City, Los Angeles, Michigan, Texas, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Northern California and San Diego, with plans to form committees in Illinois and Alabama in the coming days.

Our committees are wholly independent of the unions, as well as their pseudo-left hangers-on, including all those affiliated with the Demand Safe Schools coalition. Our committees call for the immediate closure of all schools and nonessential workplaces, which are the primary vectors for the spread of COVID-19. Full funding must be provided for remote learning so that every student and teacher has access to state-of-the-art technology. Economic relief must be given to all parents and other workers to enable them to stay home until the pandemic is fully contained. There must be a massive escalation of testing, contact tracing and health care systems, and the creation of a highly planned program to rapidly disseminate the vaccine globally.

These programs must be paid for through the expropriation of the pandemic profiteers, who have amassed trillions over the past year in tandem with mass death and social misery in the working class. Preparations must be made for a nationwide political general strike, both to contain the pandemic and to stop the growing threat of fascism, which sections of the ruling class are turning to amid this unprecedented crisis.

We urge all educators, school workers, parents and students who genuinely wish to fight for these policies to join and help build the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee today. Join our Facebook group and contact us today at wsws.org/edsafety to establish a rank-and-file committee in your school or neighborhood.



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