

Pseudo-left National Educators United “understands” Biden’s diktat that schools stay open

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The National Educators United (NEU), a pseudo-left teachers group in the United States, is currently collecting signatures on a petition to President Biden. The petition supports the diktat of the Biden administration that schools stay open despite an explosive growth of COVID-19 and child infections as a result of school reopenings.

Headlined “Science, Supplies, & Safety for Schools,” the petition endorses the basic lie of the Democratic Party and the teachers unions—that in-person instruction can be carried out safely in the midst of the highly contagious and deadly virus. Ignoring genuine science, which explains that SARS-CoV-2 is spread by tiny aerosols that can remain suspended in the air for hours, the petition advises the government and the union bureaucrats to improve their propaganda campaign by agreeing to supply a bit more PPE to understaffed and poorly ventilated classrooms.

Unsurprisingly, this dirty business begins with a lie. The petition states: “Educators, Parents, Students, and Community members across the nation stand united in the desire to keep schools **open** for safe in-person learning.” [Emphasis in the original]

If the NEU were honest, the passage would read: “Wall Street, big business, investors, unions, Democrats and Republicans across the nation stand united in the desire to keep schools open, no matter how many children, parents and workers die. Everyone knows schools are highly significant vectors of transmission. But it is essential to keep parents on the job. Otherwise the investment holdings of the oligarchs will sharply decline.”

Just one day before the petition was launched on January 12, over 1,000 New York City students walked out of school to demand remote learning. The following day, an estimated 75 percent of all primary school teachers across France went on strike. Thousands of students and educators across the US—from Chicago to New York, Oakland, St. Paul, Seattle, Portland and Montgomery County, Maryland, and other cities—have joined in, striking and protesting against the deadly return to schools, a linchpin of the government’s “herd immunity” policies.

The NEU was established by Rebecca Garelli, a national committeeperson and labor organizer of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). Garelli first came to prominence when, as co-founder of Arizona Educators United (AEU), she played a decisive role in the betrayal of the six-day Arizona teachers’ strike in 2018.

In 2019, Garelli cobbled together the NEU as an umbrella group

of pseudo-left supporters of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA), bringing together those who had worked with the unions in suppressing the nationwide walkouts in 2018-19. This included members of the Badass Teachers Association (BATS), *Labor Notes*, and the since-dissolved International Socialist Organization (ISO).

The petition now being circulated is addressed to a group that could be called, without much exaggeration, today’s “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse”: Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris, Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Rochelle Walensky. The NEU addresses them sympathetically, writing: “We understand President Biden’s Covid mitigation strategy ‘test to stay’ in order to ‘Stay in School’... and more protections are required immediately.”

What precisely are they endorsing? Biden’s “Test to Stay” program was developed with the CDC in order to limit student quarantines and provide a phony scientific fig leaf to the requirement that sick or exposed children remain in school. It does not—and never aimed to—mitigate infections. Rather, it “mitigates” absences from work by parents, who in many cases are not even being notified that their child has been exposed to the virus.

The NEU continues: “The current struggle over balancing the need for education with covid safety will continue if additional efforts at the federal level are not taken.”

With these words, the NEU identifies itself as an apologist for the policy of mass death, suffering and child infections, which have reached horrific proportions. Last week, pediatric infections hit a staggering 1.15 million cases.

As Dr. Benjamin Mateus has written on the *World Socialist Web Site*, “Such a level of mass infection can only happen as a matter of deliberate policy. The US ruling elite is forcing working people to ‘live with the virus,’ which means sacrificing their children to a potentially deadly infection in order to fulfill the demands of the capitalists to produce surplus value.”

Educators across the US succumb to COVID-19 almost every day, part of the more than 2,000 grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins who are now dying each day amid the ongoing Omicron surge. That total also includes a rising number of child deaths—virtually all of which are preventable.

On January 21 alone, the Twitter profile School Personnel Lost

To Covid posted the following educator deaths: Enrique Garcia, 22, a wrestling coach at Fairview Park City Schools, Ohio; Arnold Mickens, Jr., 49, a guidance counselor at Crispus Attucks High School, Indianapolis, Indiana; Sandy Harnois, 63, a school bus driver in Springfield, Massachusetts; Roger Woolard, 57, a technology teacher and assistant baseball coach in Moore County Schools, North Carolina; and Kevin “Catbird” Hampton, 50, a teacher of criminal justice at Johnson County High School, Mountain City, Tennessee.

The NEU’s and DSA’s support for Biden, like that of the AFT and NEA, has been unwavering throughout the pandemic. More than a year ago, Garelli and a group of “left” union presidents in Chicago, Los Angeles and Oakland congratulated Biden and endorsed his plan to reopen schools as his number one priority. Despite the deaths of 475,000 Americans since Inauguration Day, the unions and the pseudo-lefts persist in their call for keeping schools open.

One educator’s tweet indicated the growing hostility of workers to the unions, stating, “I wrote a strongly worded letter to my local @AFTNM and they told me that the policy to ‘keep schools open no matter what’ is federal. Even the GD union doesn’t care if I die. It’s so upsetting & demoralizing.”

Over the past four decades, coinciding with the globalization of production and the unrelenting social counterrevolution against the working class, the unions have been fully integrated into the capitalist system, and union leaders have joined the well-heeled upper middle class. AFT President Randi Weingarten, the self-appointed apostle of “safe” school reopenings, nets an annual income of roughly \$500,000. She adamantly opposes lockdowns or remote-only learning, which are necessary to stop the pandemic.

Demanding schools reopen as early as April 2020 when Trump was in office, Weingarten has been the most loyal and active proponent of school reopenings, proving her reliability to the ruling elites of both Democratic and Republican persuasions. The pseudo-left, comprised largely of lower-level or aspiring union officials, specializes in providing a racialist or gender-focused twist to the unions’ pro-capitalist policies—an approach which has not limited their support to the unions’ drive to keep schools open.

Revealingly, at the end of the last year, the NEU posted a petition calling for a “minimum two-week pause” to in-person learning. This limited demand was jettisoned after January 5. Have schools become safer? On the contrary! On January 7, 1 million Americans tested positive for COVID-19, while deaths have increased by 14.7 percent in the past seven days.

One can only assume that the change in tactics occurred after Weingarten or one of her underlings called Garelli to order. This would be similar to the full-court press Weingarten and then-NEA President Lily Eskelsen Garcia executed during the 2018-19 teachers strikes to isolate and betray rank-and-file struggles. There is no line the unions will not cross to keep their “seat at the table,” a fact that was underscored by the Chicago Teachers Union’s betrayal of a mass walkout for remote learning by educators earlier this month.

In recent days, the NEU has doubled down on its pleas to Biden, holding a jointly sponsored panel with Parents for Responsive Equitable and Safe Schools (PRESS NYC) on January 19, titled

“Covid Safety and Schools.” The event was purportedly held to allow scientists to explain “what sustainable protections are possible.”

Scientists on the panel presented critical information on the virus, how it spreads and how transmission can be mitigated. However, none outlined a comprehensive plan to eliminate the virus and stop the pandemic. That necessitates the temporary closure of all schools and nonessential workplaces, with full income protection for all affected workers and fully-funded remote learning for all students, combined with the deployment of all necessary public health measures on a world scale.

The forum was constrained by the organizers, with participants asked to focus on the “possible,” e.g., to petition for additional PPE and test kits. They were invited to tell their stories on “Worked Up!” and get involved in an upcoming phone bank to “decision makers.”

They were told, in other words, to accept the ruling class policy of mass infection and mass death and take up no independent struggle against the political establishment and the billionaire oligarchs it serves.

To the extent that the event detailed the dangers of aerosolization and new mutations, it demonstrated that workers need science. But it also showed that scientists need the working class and a new political orientation that is independent of the unions and the politicians, opposing the prioritization of profit over lives by both the Democrats and Republicans.

No matter what the unions and pseudo-lefts say, millions of workers do not, cannot and will not “understand” the government’s complete indifference and brutal demand that they send their children into unsafe schools to be sickened and bring the virus home. Nor are they interested in begging the enforcers of “herd immunity” for a bit more PPE.

Workers and young people are learning the inescapable political lessons of the last two years of crisis. They are drawing conclusions about the capitalist system, its twin parties of death, and their loyal union and pseudo-left accomplices, all of which are responsible for a policy of social murder.

We urge educators, students, workers and scientists to take the next step today to join and build the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees, independent of the unions and capitalist parties, in order to mobilize the international working class and stop the pandemic in its tracks. Sign up today to get involved.



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