

What is American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten doing in Poland?

Jerry White
6 April 2022

The president of the American Federation of Teachers, Randi Weingarten, has been traveling throughout Poland, including towns on the Ukrainian border, over the last several days. Weingarten has tweeted about her exploits, which have also been reported by CBS News and *Politico*.

“Weingarten touched down at Poland’s border with Ukraine on Sunday as the first U.S. union official to visit the conflict-torn region,” *Politico* reported Monday, in a piece titled “Organized labor hits the ground in Ukraine.”

The AFT president has portrayed her trip as a humanitarian mission at the invitation of the Polish Teachers Union ZNP to distribute money and educational materials to help the children of Ukrainian refugees fleeing the Russian invasion. The trip would also serve as a “fact-finding mission to help understand how we continue to support and assist kids and teachers and communities whose lives have been completely torn apart,” Weingarten said. *Politico* reported, “Weingarten will brief the Biden administration, as well as AFL-CIO and others after she returns to the US.”

In a CBS News interview recorded from inside a van as she was returning from the border town of Medyka Tuesday, Weingarten said, “We’ve met with humanitarian agencies, mayors and teachers,” adding, “we are doing what we can as Americans to help refugees.”

Her comments quickly shifted, however, to the unsubstantiated claims of Russian atrocities and “war crimes” that the Biden administration is churning out to torpedo any peace talks and justify the escalation of US-NATO proxy war.

“One of the kids yesterday said to me, ‘Did you hear what happened in Bucha?’ A Ukrainian kid, and with the terror in her face at the atrocities that happened to her, to people in Ukraine.”

The AFT president traveled to the Polish-Ukrainian border not as a humanitarian but as a long-time operative of the US State Department. Her aim was not to provide relief to refugees but to promote the war propaganda of the Biden administration and the geo-political interests of US imperialism.

In statement after statement in her weekly column in the *New York Times* and other media outlets, Weingarten has repeated Biden’s lies about an “unprovoked” Russian invasion. The US-NATO arming of Ukraine and right-wing paramilitary forces, according to the AFT president, represents the defense of “democracy” and “self-determination” against “an oppressive, autocratic dictator who seeks to establish Russian hegemony and military domination in Eastern Europe,” as she wrote in a *Times* column hours after the February 24 invasion.

Of course, Weingarten says nothing about NATO’s 800-mile eastward expansion since the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and military encirclement of Russia, which provoked Putin into his desperate and reactionary invasion. As a member of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and former board member with the late Madeleine Albright on the State Department-funded National Democratic Institute (NDI) think tank, Weingarten has long supported this anti-Russian policy.

On April 4, Weingarten tweeted a photo of herself with the US Ambassador to Poland Mark Brzezinski taken at the American embassy in Warsaw. The ambassador is the son of Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former US National Security Advisor to President Jimmy Carter from 1977-1981 and Cold War anti-communist who helped shape the aggressive foreign and military policy of both parties against the USSR and then Russia.

The elder Brzezinski was the architect of the plan to arm Islamic fundamentalist insurgents in Afghanistan to involve the Soviet Union into a drawn-out occupation, which would inflict unsustainable military casualties and destabilize the USSR. The current US-NATO proxy war is based on the same playbook, using the US-armed ultra-nationalist and neo-Nazis paramilitary forces like the Azov Battalion. The latter are described by Weingarten as “Ukrainian freedom fighters.”

In a March 20 *Times* column, Weingarten notes, “In 2014, I went to Ukraine on a solidarity mission with other labor leaders shortly after dozens of demonstrators were fatally

shot there during a pro-democracy uprising. The uprising ousted Ukraine's Russian-backed president and ushered in a new era of freedom and democracy that the Ukrainian people have long wanted."

The main purpose of her trip in 2014 was to provide a "democratic" veneer for the Western-backed coup, which relied on neo-Nazi shock troops from the Svoboda Party and Right Sector to install an anti-Russian government. In her public tweets at the time, Weingarten denounced as "Russian propaganda" any talk about Ukraine's "fascist" protesters.

In a display of utter cynicism, Weingarten and other representatives of teacher unions in Europe visited the memorial at Babi Yar, where between 100,000 and 150,000 people were murdered by the Nazis, including tens of thousands of Jews and Soviet prisoners of war.

At the time, the WSWS wrote, the forces Weingarten traveled to Ukraine to support "are the political descendants of those who helped perpetrate this horrific crime. The Svoboda party, which was the major political force in the protests that overthrew [former Ukrainian president] Yanukovich, was originally called the Social-National Party of Ukraine (SNPU) and its members wore swastika-style insignias. It was compelled to change its name because its open association with fascism complicated the US effort to integrate it into the 'Orange Revolution' of 2004-2005."

It is noteworthy that in this week's tweets from Poland, Weingarten includes the hashtag, #SlavaUkraini or "Glory to Ukraine!" The slogan was first used by Ukrainian nationalists in the 1930s, most notably the anti-Semite and Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera and his Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN-B) and Ukrainian Insurgent Army, which carried out the mass extermination of Jews, Poles and left-wing opponents.

Like Biden, Weingarten presents the US-NATO war against Russia as a twilight struggle of the "free world" against "autocracy." But the Polish regime, which is part of this so-called democratic front, is ruled by the extreme right-wing, nationalist Law and Justice Party (PiS). It has completely banned abortion, criminalized the exposure of Polish complicity in the Holocaust and scapegoated immigrants, especially refugees fleeing from America's wars in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Polish government is also notorious for persecuting the LGBT community. This is something Weingarten neglected to mention in her tweet from Poland Tuesday denouncing similar actions by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis: "Let's show DeSantis and the forces behind this bill that the American people won't stand for this. Show your support for LGBTQIA+ teachers now."

It is also noteworthy that Weingarten's trip was hosted by

the Polish Teachers Union. The ZNP, along with the AFL-CIO-backed Solidarnosc and other unions, betrayed and shut down a powerful 17-day nationwide strike of 300,000 educators in 2019 against the PiS government, which pays teachers poverty wages of 1,800 to 3,000 zlotys (US\$470 to US\$780) per month, forcing many to work second jobs to make ends meet.

Over the course of many decades, the AFL-CIO trade union federation has funded and promoted far-right and fascist forces against left-wing trade unions around the world. The former longtime president of the AFT, Albert Shanker, was a particularly rabid anti-communist who supported the Vietnam War and CIA subversion campaigns.

Organizations such as the Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers (ORIT) and the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), the predecessors of the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center, functioned as labor fronts for CIA-organized coups in Guatemala (1954), British Guiana (1963), Brazil (1964), the Dominican Republic (1965) and Chile (1973). Solidarity Center was a conduit for money from the National Endowment for Democracy to right-wing trade unions active in the failed attempt to overthrow Venezuela's Hugo Chavez in 2002.

Weingarten, who pulls in a salary of over half a million dollars, is a hated figure among US educators who have seen her betray strike after strike, collaborate with school privatizers like Bill Gates, and force teachers and students into schools infected with COVID-19 as part of Biden's policy of prioritizing profits over human life. Now, after the pandemic has taken the lives of 1 million in the US, the AFT president is supporting a reckless conflict with nuclear-armed Russia.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact