

The next stage in the fight of educators against the pandemic, school cuts and the danger of war

Renaë Cassimeda, Jerry White
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The struggle of educators in the United States has reached a new stage with the Biden administration's abandonment of any measures to stop the COVID-19 pandemic, new demands for school cuts and now the looming danger of a military confrontation with Russia.

The recent strikes by teachers and school employees in Minneapolis and Sacramento over wages ravaged by inflation are only the beginning of a new wave of struggles. In the coming months, hundreds of thousands of educators in New York City, Los Angeles and other major cities will be involved in major contract battles.

But the fight goes far beyond the terms of new labor agreements. Educators and all workers in the US and around the world are in an existential struggle against a new surge of infections and death. At the same time, workers are confronting the demands by capitalist governments, including the Biden administration, that they bear the full cost of the global economic crisis and drive towards world war.

Educators and other workers in the US are being thrust into a struggle alongside tens of millions of workers and youth in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Tunisia, Iran, Greece, France, Peru, Brazil, Indonesia and other countries who are currently engaging in mass protests and strikes against inflation, food and fuel shortages, and government austerity.

The pandemic is not over

With the more transmissible and immune-evading BA.2 subvariant sweeping across the US, federal, state and local authorities have dropped masking mandates and other protective measures, insisting the population "learn to live with the virus." A third of US states—with nearly 100 million residents—have stopped daily case reporting. Many have curtailed testing sites, meaning the severity of the BA.2 surge will be more difficult to determine than any other spike since the pandemic began.

More than 1 million people have already died from COVID in the US. With the excess death count of another 200,000, the toll is roughly equivalent to all those killed in the country's wars since 1776. At least 200,000 children have lost a parent or caregiver. More than 1,300 children have died from the virus, according to the CDC, with an additional 7,880 cases of the devastating MIS-C and tens of thousands of cases of Long-COVID.

According to an unofficial tracker, more than 2,000 American educators have succumbed to the virus. That no official count of the deaths of teachers and school employees exists is a measure of the value the ruling class places on "essential workers."

None of these deaths were necessary. From the beginning of the

pandemic, the US government prioritized profits over human life. The Trump administration and then Biden and the Democratic-led Congress funneled trillions of dollars in "pandemic relief" to the major corporations and financial markets. As a result, America's 735 billionaires saw their net worth jump 62 percent to \$4.7 trillion since the pandemic began.

Trillions for the super-rich, inflation and austerity for workers

Wages for workers have barely moved, meanwhile, and incomes are being eaten up by record high price increases for food, fuel and other basic necessities. Funding for the uninsured to get COVID tests and treatments has also been eliminated.

In Biden's new budget, more money is allocated to the military (\$813 billion) than all other discretionary spending combined (\$730 billion). In the final budget, the Democratic-led Congress significantly reduced spending from the president's original proposal, including billions of dollars for low-income students, children with disabilities, mental health services and Head Start.

With one-time federal CARES Act money for schools drying up, districts across the country are preparing deep budget cuts. In New York City—the country's largest school district—Democratic Party Mayor Eric Adams is cutting nearly \$1 billion to schools over the next three years, starting with a \$215 million cut next year. Minneapolis Public Schools recently announced \$25 million in cuts supposedly to pay for a meager 2-3 percent pay increase for teachers and support staff.

These savage budget cuts expose the hypocrisy of Biden and the rest of the corporate-backed politicians who insisted that children had to go back to infected schools to protect their emotional and academic well-being. There was, and is, only one reason to open the schools during the pandemic: to get parents back to work producing corporate profit.

Over the last several years, teachers have been in the forefront of the growing resistance of the working class to austerity, social inequality and, since March 2020, the reckless reopening of the schools.

The role of the AFT and NEA

The biggest obstacle to uniting educators nationally and expanding the fight to save lives and livelihoods to broader sections of the working class has been the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National

Education Association (NEA).

The AFT and NEA isolated and suppressed these struggles and diverted opposition to Trump behind the campaign to elect Biden, claiming a Democratic president would “follow the science” regarding the pandemic and increase funding for public education. But the reality has been the opposite: Biden has rushed to reopen schools and has deepened the attack on public education while funneling trillions more to the corporations and the military preparations for war against Russia and China.

The pro-capitalist and pro-war unions have been aided by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and other pseudo-left organizations whose members hold top positions in the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) and other unions. All their talk about “social justice unionism,” has only been a cover for the collaboration with the Democratic Party in the deadly reopening of schools and the imposition of austerity.

As part of its sellout of the recent 17-day strike, the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers (MFT) agreed to a reactionary “Educators of Color” memorandum, which explicitly accepts layoffs and divides teachers along racial lines by eliminating the jobs of white teachers first, regardless of seniority.

Build the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee!

The Socialist Equality Party rejects the lies that there is no money to protect lives and vastly improve public education. We call on teachers and school employees to organize and build the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, independent of the corporate-controlled trade unions, to fight for the following demands:

Implement every public health measure necessary to contain and eliminate COVID-19 transmission, including distance learning, masks, vaccines and air filtration!

The experience of China demonstrates that a Zero-COVID strategy, if implemented on a global scale, could end the pandemic in a matter of weeks, saving millions of lives. Educators and all workers should demand the temporary shutdown of schools and non-essential businesses—with full compensation for lost income—along with mass testing, contact tracing and the universal provision of high-quality masks.

Full funding for public education!

We demand universal access to high-speed internet, food security, mental health care, special education support and all other resources necessary to provide the highest quality public education for students and teachers. Billions of dollars must be allocated to hire new teachers and support staff and pay them good wages and benefits so class sizes can be drastically reduced.

An immediate 40 percent raise in pay to make up for the decline in real wages over the last five years and monthly cost-of-living adjustments to protect paychecks from the ravages of inflation.

The Biden administration has issued a national call for districts to use up remaining American Rescue Plan funding to pay teachers and school workers paltry one-time bonuses. With the unions agreeing to minimal raises of 2-3 percent in Minneapolis, Sacramento and other cities, plus one-time bonuses, teachers and school workers are facing cuts to real wages given that inflation is running at a four-decade high of 8.5 percent.

For free speech and the protection of democratic rights from right-wing censorship in the classroom!

The Republicans are carrying out a fascistic campaign of censorship regarding discussion of race, sexual preferences and social inequality. At the same time, there is increasing danger the Biden administration and the Democrats will join the censorship campaign against opponents of war

and socialists.

An immediate halt to the drive toward nuclear war!

Class-conscious workers must oppose Russia’s reactionary invasion of Ukraine. But that does not mean support for the massive arming of Ukraine and the escalation of the US-NATO proxy war against Russia. The US’s long-prepared confrontation with Russia is not driven by humanitarian but imperialist aims, including plans to install a pro-Western regime in Moscow and seize Russia’s vast energy and mineral resources.

Facing an intractable economic and political crisis at home, Biden hopes to use the confrontation with Russia to divert social anger towards an external enemy. The president who said he would end America’s “forever wars,” has announced that America is embarking on a years-long battle that requires even more sacrifice in treasure and blood.

AFT President Randi Weingarten traveled to Poland last month to feign sympathy for Ukrainian refugees and promote Biden’s war propaganda against Russia. It is a matter of historical fact that Weingarten never said a word about the horrors produced by the US wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria over the last three decades, which have left more than 1 million dead and entire societies in ruin.

Over the last two years, the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* have assisted teachers and other school employees in setting up Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees, which are independent of the pro-capitalist and pro-war unions. These committees—which have been active in New York, California, Michigan, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington and other states—have provided a voice for educators, vital scientific information on the pandemic and how to fight it and a means to unite US educators with our brothers and sisters internationally.

For a political struggle against war and social inequality

The development of independent organizations of working class struggle must be connected to the political mobilization of the working class against the two corporate-backed parties, the Democrats and Republicans, and the capitalist system they defend.

Building a fighting leadership means recognizing that society is divided between two contending economic and social classes, the working class and the capitalist ruling class—whose interests are completely irreconcilable.

The fate of humanity cannot be left in the hands of a money-mad ruling elite, which is responsible for the deaths of millions during the pandemic and is now threatening to provoke a world war, which would end life on the planet. Instead, workers of all races and nationalities must be united to take political power in our own hands, redistribute society’s wealth and reorganize economic life along socialist lines, based on the collective ownership and democratic control of the planet’s resources.

Educators, like all workers, face immense political challenges. But a new social force, the global working class, is emerging that has the power to stop the warmongers, end the pandemic and guarantee the needs of all the world’s people.

To build the leadership to convert this emerging spontaneous movement into a conscious struggle for world socialism, the International Committee of the Fourth International, its affiliated Socialist Equality Parties, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees will be holding an online May Day meeting on May 1. We urge educators, parents and students to contact us to form rank-and-file committees and join workers around the world in this common fight.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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