

Texas Senate bill requires Ten Commandments to be displayed in every public school classroom

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The Texas state Senate has passed a bill that would require every public school classroom to prominently display the Ten Commandments. Another bill passed by the Senate would allow schools districts to require every campus to provide students and employees a time “to participate in a period of prayer and reading of the Bible or other religious text on each school day.” Each bill now moves on to the state House.

This is only the latest move by the extreme right to force Christian religious indoctrination into Texas public schools. In 2021 a law went into effect allowing schools to display signs saying, “In God We Trust,” but only if the sign was donated or paid for with private donations. The new laws go further than the earlier law and it can be expected that future laws regarding religion in public schools will go beyond the bills in this year’s legislative session.

These laws have support at the highest levels of the state government. Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick said, “I believe that you cannot change the culture of the country until you change the culture of mankind. Bringing the Ten Commandments and prayer back to our public schools will enable our students to become better Texans.”

The hypocrisy of the political forces involved is so brazen it hardly warrants comment. While insisting that students be confronted every day with the words, “Thou shalt not kill,” the same state government has presided over more executions of prisoners than any other state. Since 1976, over 500 executions have been carried out in Texas, over one third of the total in the country.

Every war that the United States has fought since the Civil War has involved war crimes and mass killing as

a matter of policy. From the Philippine insurrection at the turn of the 20th century, to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to the carpet bombing and massacres in the Vietnam War, to the atrocities committed in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States military conducts war by killing large numbers of people on a near-genocidal scale and destroying societies.

Notwithstanding all the pious religious rhetoric about the “sanctity of human life,” the same far-right state government in Texas has done everything in its power to encourage the spread of the COVID virus, which has killed around 1 in 300 people in the state and has responded to the epidemic of school shootings with demands for “more guns.” This week the Texas House passed a bill calling for the hiring of at least one armed guard at each campus and allowing for school employees to become certified to carry a weapon.

The Texas state government is in a competition with states like Florida in a stampede to enact the most extreme right-wing policies. The Texas state government has imposed a ban on abortions throughout the state, endangering the lives of countless women and children, and Texas Republicans have worked assiduously to create a climate of fear and hatred targeting immigrants. The border with Mexico has become militarized, with the Texas National Guard deployed alongside the federal Border Patrol in hunting down refugees like animals and housing them in detention camps where they are subjected to humiliation and abuse.

Religious provocations have long played a role in Texas politics. A monument with the Ten Commandments stands outside the Texas state capitol

building, an open affront to the democratic principle of separation of church and state that is affirmed in the Bill of Rights. (There are also three monuments to the Confederate army on the capitol grounds.)

The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment prohibits the “establishment of religion,” or the use of state power or resources to favor or disfavor any particular religion. The Texas bills violate that principle openly and directly.

Similar efforts to flout the Establishment Clause were struck down repeatedly in federal courts over the past half-century, but the Texas Republicans are emboldened by the far-right Christian fundamentalist majority on the Supreme Court, which is poised to roll back and abrogate democratic norms across the board.

The proposed law has been met with opposition from teachers on social media. One post to a Texas teachers’ group asked, “Is anyone else going to resign rather than post the Ten Commandments in their classroom or is it just me?” and received nearly 300 replies in 12 hours.

Teachers opposed to these measures should not resign but should stand up and organize to fight back. The only way to defend and expand democratic rights is through the collective action of the working class, which will also win broad support among parents and students.

It is important to note that neither the Texas AFT (the Texas affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers) nor the Texas State Teachers Association (affiliated with the National Education Association) has released any comment regarding the bills to date. This follows a pattern of the Democrat-aligned unions in the state cowering in the face of religious fundamentalist provocations or responding in the most limited, inadequate and ineffective fashion.

Teachers interested joining a rank-and-file committee at their workplace, or creating one if it does not yet exist, should contact the Educators Rank-and-File Committee.



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