

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten's trip to Israel: A cover for genocide against Gaza

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The Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (US) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (US) will be hosting an online meeting December 16 at 3 pm ET to mobilize educators and students in opposition to the genocide against Gaza. We urge all teachers, school workers, parents and students who want to join this fight to register today and attend. Register here.

Last month, as millions of people throughout the world engaged in anti-war demonstrations demanding an immediate end to Israeli's genocide against Gaza, American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten, along with her wife Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, flew to Israel to give political cover to the Zionist regime and the Biden administration.

The genocide in Gaza is a war crime. It has evoked horror and outrage from billions of people, including millions within the United States. Opposition is particularly strong among youth, both college-aged and at the high school level. This opposition has not been silenced by a vast campaign to intimidate and even ban protests against the genocide and slander them as "antisemitic." Those institutions that have lined up with the witch hunt against protesters have discredited themselves in the eyes of workers and youth.

Weingarten, the highest-ranking trade union bureaucrat in the US education system, is also a highly placed Democratic Party operative with close ties to the Clinton family. She is reacting to the popular outrage with a tactical adaptation, pretending to advocate for "peace" in order to capture this opposition and prevent it from escaping the control of the political establishment.

Weingarten postured in Israel as a pacifist with a deep commitment to human life and an advocate of the politics of the golden mean. She billed her visit as a "shiva" trip, a reference to the traditional Jewish mourning period.

"We feel quite shattered," Weingarten told *Haaretz* in an interview. "Both Sharon and I have spent our adult lives fighting for equality for Palestinians, fighting for a shared society... Part of our trip was not only to hug and to witness, but to be there to help for that future again and that hope again."

This is not what Weingarten was saying about the conflict in October, when she opposed a speech by American Postal Workers President Mark Dimonstein at the AFL-CIO Executive Council calling for a ceasefire, with Weingarten justifying the bombing of Gaza on the grounds of "Israel's right to defend itself." Instead, the AFL-CIO passed a resolution siding with Israel, supplemented by a ban on any resolutions by local or state organizations in favor of Palestine.

Knowing that this attempt to bureaucratically impose support for Israel by fiat is doomed to fail, Weingarten has adopted a more nuanced approach.

She visited Israel not to "hug and witness," but to advance the interests

of American imperialism. Perhaps more directly and openly than any other figure, Weingarten personifies the support of the union bureaucracy for imperialism. She has made numerous trips to Ukraine and Eastern Europe, where she has met with the Ukrainian neo-Nazis who constitute the main proxy force for the US in the war against Russia.

Weingarten is also a leading figure in Zionist lobby groups in the US. She was added to J-Street's board of directors in October and was the closing speaker at the organization's fifth annual conference in 2015. A propaganda video of a trip by representatives of J-Street and the AFT to Israel and the West Bank, in which Weingarten participated, was shown before her remarks.

During her most recent trip, Weingarten visited the Histadrut Labor Federation and met with labor bureaucrats in the Israeli Teachers Union and the Israeli Secondary Teachers Union. The latter two unions are both members of Educational International (EI), of which Weingarten is a board member. EI is one of many CIA-backed labor fronts that are heavily involved in operations against regimes targeted by US imperialism, working alongside the AFL-CIO bureaucracy.

Despite her crocodile tears for deaths on "both sides," Weingarten predictably did not meet with any representatives of Palestinian organizations, including the Palestinian trade union federation, whose call for workers around the world to take industrial action to halt the shipment of weapons to Israel has received widespread support from rank-and-file workers.

The purpose of Weingarten's interview in *Haaretz* was to obscure and downplay the reality of the genocide that is clear to people around the world. For example, she claimed that Biden was "a staunch ally of Israeli democracy and also supports Palestinians."

She continued: "He doesn't support Israel to the detriment of the Palestinians, even though people accuse him of that... he cares deeply about Palestine; he cares about both people. That's why he has said over and over again that there has to be a two-state solution."

This is absurd. Biden shows his "deep care" for Palestine by providing the Israel Defense Forces with the bombs and shells they use to massacre civilians. The recent veto by the US of a UN Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire made even more clear that the White House is not merely an enabler of the far-right Netanyahu government in Israel, but an active participant in the genocide.

Weingarten attacked the role of social media in the growth of US popular opposition to the Gaza war, especially among student youth. "Many so-called news sources that are not tethered to the truth" have been "amplified across social media," she said, and have fostered "an utter lack of understanding about this crisis by many Americans, especially the young."

In reality, it is Weingarten herself, together with the corporate media

and the entire political establishment, that is “untethered from the truth” and “amplifying” lies. What she is really denouncing is the fact that this narrative has been undermined by the ability of workers and youth to access information from social media and sources such as the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Significantly, the *Haaretz* interview cites as “far-left” recent coverage by the WSWS that correctly describes Weingarten as green-lighting Zionist war-crimes.

In the interview, Weingarten also lined up with the demonization of pro-Palestinian protesters as “antisemitic.” She said she cried listening to Democratic Majority Leader Chuck Schumer’s recent pro-war tirade on the floor of the US Senate, in which he railed against student protesters, using the cynical smear that opposition to the genocide in Gaza is antisemitism.

At multiple points in the *Haaretz* interview, Weingarten downplayed the atrocities in Gaza, equating them with incursions into southern Israel by Hamas fighters in early October. She declared that the decision by the Israeli government to not widely circulate images of the October 7 Hamas raid has “clouded and obscured” public perception, given the horrific footage coming out of Gaza. She claimed that “the trauma, the massacre and the pogrom [are] just not well known and not understood in the same way as what happened to the [Gazan] hospitals and the sheer amount of death in Gaza.”

There is, in fact, no comparison between the violence of the Israeli military, which is aimed at wiping out an entire population already subjected to decades of colonial oppression, and the October 7 incursion, which was an act of resistance against this oppression.

At any rate, there is mounting evidence that a substantial portion of the October 7 death toll was caused by the Israeli military itself. It has also been revealed that Israeli intelligence and the Israel Defense Forces knew far in advance about the looming attack by Hamas—indeed, they had a copy of the exact battle plan—but chose to do nothing in order to use the attack as a pretext for the long-planned ethnic cleansing of Gaza.

In an effort to further muddy the waters, Weingarten and Kleinbaum made use of postmodern identity politics. Highlighting her identity as a lesbian and leader of the largest LGBT synagogue in the world, Congregation Beit Simchat Torah (CBST), Kleinbaum said in the *Haaretz* interview: “You know, the LGBT world is so focused on non-binary thinking. We’ve rejected the binary about sexuality, we’ve rejected the binary about gender identity. And yet at the same time, so many in this world have adopted a very binary approach to Israel-Palestine issues.” She went on to argue, “There is not a good guy or a bad guy here; there is not one victim and one perpetrator.”

This is sheer sophistry! According to them, there is no “right” or “wrong” side when it comes to genocide! Presumably, the Nuremberg Trial verdicts against the Nazi organizers of the Holocaust suffered from a similar “binary” bias and should be reviewed!

Weingarten’s relativism and rejection of a “nonbinary” approach disappears without a trace when it comes to Hamas, whom she denounces without reservation.

The political establishment is similarly leveraging identity politics, and the methods of the #MeToo witch hunt in particular, in denouncing opponents of the genocide as culpable in the totally unsubstantiated and implausible allegations of mass rape of Israeli women by members of Hamas. Weingarten has publicly endorsed these allegations on her Twitter/X account.

What Weingarten presents as an infinitely complex situation for which no one, particularly the Israeli government, can be considered responsible, is in fact not so difficult to understand. It is a textbook case of genocide.

Israeli government ministers have openly declared their intention is to kill or displace into the Sinai Desert all of the Gaza Strip’s 2.2 million inhabitants. Moreover, it has not emerged from nowhere. It represents a

new stage of the apartheid regime imposed on the Palestinians since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 on the basis of the ethnic cleansing of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.

And masses of people do understand this, including many Jewish people around the world who have played a leading role in the protests. This is what Weingarten is attempting to combat by shedding crocodile tears and bemoaning “violence on both sides.”

Throughout its long history as the graveyard of social movements, the Democratic Party relied heavily on an official pacifist wing to capture and neutralize antiwar sentiment before it could become a danger to American imperialism. This was the case, for example, during the Vietnam War, with the elevation of figures such as George McGovern, and earlier, during World War I, with William Jennings Bryan.

But the Democratic Party and capitalist politics as a whole have moved so far to the right that no such pacifist wing exists today. Even “left” figures such as Bernie Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez routinely vote in favor of funding for war, including for the Israeli military.

This renders the whole American bourgeoisie dangerously isolated and without a ready-made mechanism for controlling political opposition to war. Thus, it has sought to conjure up such a wing on the fly through the sudden “conversion” of pro-war figures like Weingarten and UAW president Shawn Fain, who has rammed through sellout contracts in the auto industry and at defense contractors such as General Dynamics. The old standby Bernie Sanders has widely discredited himself with his opposition to a ceasefire.

The support for imperialist war by the trade union bureaucracy is also deeply connected with its role in imposing austerity on the working class. Despite her professed concern for the sanctity of human life, Weingarten has become a hated figure through her role in forcing the reopening of schools during the pandemic against the opposition of teachers, parents and students, which resulted in massive numbers of infections and even deaths. Just as her support for US imperialism has drawn her into an alliance with extreme right forces in Israel and Ukraine, her support for the profit-driven reopening of schools drew Weingarten into an alliance with anti-vaxxers and extreme-right wing conspiracy theorists.

The immense power of the working class can and must be brought to bear, in opposition to all the capitalist parties, to force an end to the war in Gaza. But this is connected to the struggle to break free of the trade union bureaucracy, which functions as an industrial police force for the ruling class. The fight to mobilize the independent strength of the working class to put an end to war and exploitation is the program for which the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* fight.



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