

Joint meeting of US educators and students resolves to mobilize the working class to stop the genocide against Gaza

Our reporters

18 December 2023

On Saturday, December 16, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) and the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (ERFSC) in the US held an online public meeting titled “What educators and students need to know to stop the genocide in Gaza.”

The meeting was widely attended by students and educators across the US, with a number joining internationally. In building for the meeting, IYSSE chapters throughout the country campaigned at college campuses, high schools and reached out to hundreds of workers and youth at protests, distributing posters and leaflets in both English and Arabic.

At the meeting, both Arab and Jewish students spoke powerfully against the US-backed slaughter of the Palestinians and the political campaign to witch-hunt protesters. In that sense, the meeting demonstrated and provided an orientation to the striving by workers and young people to unite internationally against the genocidal war.

Speakers from the IYSSE and ERFSC sought to explain the central historic and political context of the present situation. They addressed the following critical questions: Why are Biden and the US government providing full political and material support to genocide? What stands behind the slander of protesters as “antisemitic”? What can educators and students do to stop the genocide?

The meeting began with a tribute to the life of Helen Halyard, a leading member of the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International who died suddenly last month. She dedicated half a century of her life to building the Trotskyist movement and fighting to establish the political independence and international unity of the working class to overthrow capitalism. Her long fight against all forms of racial politics and nationalism was also an important theme throughout Saturday’s meeting.

Renae Cassimeda, a leading member of the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee and a public school teacher in California, addressed why the Biden administration and the US government were backing this war crime. After outlining the latest developments in the war, she identified the driving issues: US imperialism’s drive for global hegemony and its reliance on Israel as a military beachhead in the Middle East.

She noted that “the genocide in Gaza has not emerged in a vacuum. It represents a new stage of the beginning of a third world war. For the past four decades the United States has faced a global economic decline threatening its hegemony. Fearful of global rivals, including Russia and China, it seeks another redivision of the world in its favor, as in the post-WWII period. With control over more than 750 military bases across 80 countries, Washington relies on its vast military might to achieve its aims. The bloody wars against Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Syria must be seen in this context.

“The Biden administration embraces the bloodbath in Gaza because it sees the state of Israel as an important component of the drive of

American imperialism to maintain its global domination through world war. The battlefronts in this war can already be identified: in Ukraine against Russia; in the Middle East against Iran and its allies, including Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza; and in the vast Indo-Pacific region against China.”

Rather than acceding to the mass protests and broad-based calls for an immediate ceasefire, Biden and the entire US political establishment are escalating their preparations for world war with the recent bipartisan passage of the National Defense Authorization Act, which grants a record \$883.7 billion in military spending in the coming year, an increase of \$145 billion, or 20 percent, since 2020.

David Rye, a member of the IYSSE and also a California public school teacher, addressed the slanderous charges of “antisemitism” used to criminalize the protests against genocide in Gaza.

He explained that this campaign is based on two basic lies: first, that there is a broad-based antisemitic movement on the college campuses and second, that opposition to Israel and Zionism represents antisemitism.

In fact, the very real danger of antisemitism is being enabled and encouraged by the same forces who are carrying out the witch-hunt against antiwar students. Elise Stefanik, the far-right Republican who led the hearing against university presidents, is a known promoter of the antisemitic, xenophobic “Great Replacement Theory,” which claims that Jews are seeking to “replace” the white population with immigrants.

Just as the Democratic Party has armed and funded neo-Nazis in Ukraine to carry out war against Russia, it has “facilitated the growth of the far right in the US ... to suppress the working class here in the face of mass opposition.” The essential aims of the anti-democratic attacks against students, he stressed, are to “create a pretext for the total criminalization of any opposition to the imperialist state’s policies” and “to tie together the operations of the school system and universities to the interests of the state and the military apparatus.”

Clara Weiss, the national secretary of the IYSSE in the US, also spoke about the historical roots of antisemitism and Zionism. She explained that modern antisemitism “was fostered by the ruling class, especially toward the end of the 19th century and especially in Russia by the tsarist regime, as a means to divide the working class and as a means to confront what was an increasingly combative, multi-ethnic working-class movement.”

She urged attendees to listen to the recent lectures by David North on the historical origins of Zionism, which emerged within privileged layers of the middle class and bourgeoisie, and since its earliest days “worked closely with the worst perpetrators of antisemitism,” including the tsarist government.

Following these reports, students and workers in attendance spoke powerfully against the genocide and the anti-democratic attacks on campuses.

Mohammed, a Palestinian American living in San Diego, denounced the double standard of the political establishment on Gaza. At the international cottages exhibit in Balboa Park in San Diego, management did not allow the Palestinian house to post any political material, yet the Israeli house posted photos of kidnapped posters.

“It makes me sick,” he said, “because I pay a lot of taxes every month ... and those taxes go to kill my own people. I don’t want this money to go to Israel. I love Israeli people, but I don’t like the government. It makes me sick.”

A Jewish college student and IYSSE member, Amanda, denounced the genocide and stated that the safety of Jewish and Palestinian people were intertwined. The cynical charges of antisemitism being used against protesters actually “trivialized and distracted” from real antisemitism coming from the far right, including politicians like House Representative (Republican-Georgia) Marjorie Taylor Greene.

“It just shows me that they do not care about Jews at all,” she said. “They only care about protecting their imperialist interests. I don’t feel that Israel keeps Jews safe at all. When Joe Biden said that if there wasn’t an Israel, Jews wouldn’t be safe, I just thought that was insane, because he doesn’t want to keep us safe in America. He doesn’t care about that; he just cares about imperialism and capitalism.”

Morgan, an IYSSE member in Australia, drew the parallel between the state repression against students and educators in the US and that taking place in Australia. The Labor government has spearheaded the campaign against student school strikes, slandering them as “antisemitic” and for “supporting terrorism,” while also threatening teachers who speak in defense of the Palestinians. He reported that despite political censorship from the state and the universities, the IYSSE Australia has successfully held public meetings on campuses and is working alongside the Committee for Public Education to campaign for a unified movement of youth and workers against the genocide in Gaza.

Repeatedly, the question of how to stop the genocide was raised.

Adham, a student at Wayne State University in Detroit and IYSSE member, stressed that the fight against genocide has to be based on the working class. “The working class is the only class whose social interests are opposed to war and capitalist exploitation. We’re the most powerful class. We produce all the wealth through our labor, and we are the ones who die in war and we’re the ones that make the guns and bullets which the capitalists use against our brothers and sisters across the world.”

Building upon this, Emma Arceneaux, a member of the IYSSE in the US, gave a final report on the way forward. She explained that the strategy of pressuring the imperialist powers, all of whom are actively participating in Israel’s war crimes, is a dead end.

Instead, the movement against war must turn to the growing movement of the working class, which is being driven into global struggle by escalating attacks against it. “Every imperialist war abroad,” she stated, “depends upon a war at home against the democratic rights and living standards of the working class. The US government cannot get away with its policies without suppressing the rights to protest and free speech. Nor can it funnel endless billions to pay for war without laying waste to the living standards of workers and youth at home.”

However, the working class must overcome the obstacle of the trade union bureaucracy, whose material interests are hostile to those of the rank and file, evident in the AFL-CIO’s resolution in support of Israel and its refusal to take up the call by the Palestinian trade union federation for workers around the world to block arms shipments.

In particular, she drew attention to American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, who has openly colluded with the Biden administration in its support for Israel. She was also recently appointed to a new Homeland Security Academic Partnership Council, which has been formed to repress freedom of speech on university campuses.

The way forward in the fight against the genocide in Gaza requires a

movement for the political independence and international unity of the working class. This means “a political offensive against both the union bureaucracies and all factions of the capitalist political establishment, above all, the Democratic Party and the many forces, including the Democratic Socialists of America, that sow illusions that this imperialist party can be ‘reformed’ or ‘pushed to the left.’”

“The working class needs its own organizations and its own political party that unites it internationally in a struggle against imperialist war and capitalist exploitation, and that includes a fight to unite the Israeli and Palestinian working class in a common struggle against Zionism.”

On this basis, she called for attendees to join and build the IYSSE, the ERFSC and the Socialist Equality Party.

The meeting concluded with the following resolution and call to action, which was put forward for a vote and adopted by a wide margin.

This meeting of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality and the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee condemns the genocide being perpetrated against the Palestinian people in Gaza by the Zionist state of Israel and its imperialist backers. In the United States, the Democratic Party and the Biden administration are direct partners in these monumental war crimes.

We denounce the state-organized witch-hunt and the attacks on democratic rights being carried out by both capitalist parties against students, educators and all those who oppose this genocide. The aim of this campaign is the abolition of free speech on campuses and in high schools and the criminalization of dissent more broadly. In particular, we condemn AFT President Randi Weingarten’s active collusion in the war policies of Biden and the suppression of dissent among educators and students.

We reject the lies that are being used to justify this witch-hunt, including that there is a broad-based antisemitic movement on US campuses or that anti-Zionism is antisemitic. The threat of fascism and antisemitism is real, but it is emanating from the ruling class, not antiwar students and the working class. Jewish people, especially Jewish youth, have played a courageous and leading role in the protests against this genocide.

But demonstrations and protests to the ruling elites cannot halt the attacks on Palestinians or the working class in any part of the globe. We must mobilize the social force that can objectively halt weapons production and shipments—the international working class.

? Stop the genocide! Endorse the call of the Palestinian trade unions to refuse to handle any military-related goods headed for the Zionist state. For a political general strike against the genocide!

? Oppose the state-backed witch-hunt against students! For the unconditional defense of the democratic rights of all opponents of genocide!

? For the right to free, high quality education for all! The money being used to fund imperialist war must go to our public schools and universities! Corporate billionaires, the military and CIA should be thrown off campuses.

? For a unified movement of workers and students in the US, Europe, Israel and Palestine against imperialist war and capitalism!

? Build the IYSSE! Build the ERFSC!



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact