

As teachers union President Randi Weingarten redoubles support for Biden

US-backed Israeli war machine destroys last standing university in Gaza

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Earlier this month, *Al Jazeera* posted an extraordinary video showing the January 17 controlled demolition of Israa University in Gaza City. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) detonated 315 mines in order to destroy the complex—the last standing university in the Gaza Strip. This criminal assault followed the bombing of the Islamic and Al-Azhar universities.

The Palestinian news agency Wafa reports that to date 12 higher education institutions in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed by Israeli forces.

The IDF is also targeting primary and secondary schools. Since the beginning of the war last October, K12 schools have been repeatedly bombed, forcing closures and leading to the decision of the Ministry of Education to officially terminate the school year across Gaza on November 6.

Israel is obliterating the entire educational infrastructure in Gaza, with the aim of making the destruction permanent.

This includes the eradication of the human bearers of culture. A January 20 report by Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor denounced Israel for the targeted assassination of academic, scientific and intellectual figures across a variety of research disciplines, including 17 individuals with professorial degrees, 59 with doctoral degrees, and 18 with master's degrees.

According to the South African complaint argued before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on January 11, leading Palestinian academics who have been assassinated include:

- Professor Sufian Tayeh, the president of the Islamic University. An award-winning physicist and UNESCO chair of astronomy, astrophysics and space sciences in Palestine, Professor Tayeh died alongside his family in an airstrike.
- Dr. Ahmed Hamdi Abo Absa, the dean of the Software Engineering Department at the University of Palestine. Dr. Abo Absa was reportedly shot dead by Israeli soldiers as he walked away from them after being released from a three-day forced “disappearance.”
- Professor Muhammad Eid Shabir, professor of immunology and virology and former president of the Islamic University of Gaza.
- Professor Refaat Al-Ar'eer, poet and professor of comparative literature and creative writing at the Islamic University of Gaza.

Before the genocidal assault on Gaza, there were 625,000 students and 22,500 teachers in the enclave. Since then, as many as 350 schools have been destroyed or damaged. In what is undoubtedly an undercount, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of

Humanitarian Affairs reports that at least 4,327 students have been killed and 7,819 students have been injured. The same agency reports that as of January 24, 231 teachers or administrators had been killed and 756 had been wounded.

These acts, as the South African ICJ document establishes, are violations of the Geneva Convention, which outlaws “intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population, civilian objects and buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science, historic monuments, hospitals, and places where the sick and wounded are collected.”

The South African ICJ complaint quotes UN Security Council Resolution 2712, which expresses “deep concern that the disruption of access to education has a dramatic impact on children, and that conflict has lifelong effects on their physical and mental health.” It cites an interview with an emergency coordinator for Médecins sans Frontières who spent five weeks in Gaza:

[I]t's even worse in reality than it looks. It's—the amount of suffering is just something ... incomparable. It's really unbearable. I'm speechless when I try and think of the future of [these] children. It's generations of children who will be handicapped, who will be traumatized. The very children in our mental health program are telling us that they would rather die than continue living in Gaza now.

Women and children have suffered 70 percent of the deaths and injuries in Gaza. In an exhibit posted by *Al Jazeera*, the names of about half of the child victims are listed, together with their ages. The thousands of individual names give a sense of the unspeakable horror experienced by the population.

The silence of AFT President Randi Weingarten and the teachers union apparatus on Israel's systematic and calculated destruction of education infrastructure and targeted murder of educators in Gaza speaks volumes.

Their deeds speak even louder. Both the AFT and the National Education Association (NEA) are actively campaigning for Biden in the 2024 presidential race. With this endorsement, the union apparatus has provided its seal of approval to the American government's full financial, logistical, military and political support to the Zionist

genocide.

At the same time, the AFT and NEA are seeking to suppress anti-war protests among their members, just as they suppressed the fight for COVID protections and for decades undercut and betrayed the struggles of teachers and the working class as a whole over wages, working conditions, jobs and inequality.

But opposition among educators is mounting. A petition circulating widely within the NEA is demanding that the union revoke its endorsement of Biden in the 2024 presidential race until he secures a “permanent ceasefire,” stops “sending military funding, equipment, and intelligence to Israel,” and commits “to a fair due process for asylum seekers and refugees.”

Reporting on this petition, a recent article refers to the “splintering” of the NEA, the largest union in the US. According to the *Nation*, “19 local, state, and regional bodies of the NEA [have called] for a ceasefire in Gaza, including the National Council of Urban Education Associations.”

In response to these developments, AFT President Weingarten reposted on Twitter/X a January 22 column authored by J Street, a pro-Israeli lobby and political action committee, of which she is a prominent board member. The statement, “Time for Diplomacy,” calls for a “negotiated stop to the fighting” in order “to bring freedom to the hostages” and “relief” to the people of Gaza.

The reference to a “stop in the fighting” and “relief” does not signify opposition either to the war or its genocidal character. Rather, it echoes the statements of top US officials, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken and White House national security spokesman John Kirby, that the US is pushing for a negotiated month-long “humanitarian pause” in the fighting and a “hostage exchange.”

It remains to be seen whether such a pause takes place, but even if it does, it will not alter the strategy of ethnic cleansing and annexation of Gaza and the West Bank that underlies the current genocidal campaign. In fact, release of the remaining US and Israeli hostages being held by Hamas will arguably give the fascist regime in Tel Aviv and its enablers in Washington a freer hand to complete their “Final Solution” of the “Palestinian Problem.”

In the statement, Weingarten and J Street insist, “Israel had the unquestioned right to respond militarily to the horrific terror attack of October 7.” It goes on to give a green light to new crimes by Israel against the Palestinians, saying Tel Aviv will “have an ongoing responsibility to continue to protect and defend its citizens and hold to account those who perpetrated the October 7 attack.”

This is a justification of war crimes, not a demand to halt them.

Nor should anyone be misled by the addition of the word “ceasefire” to some of Weingarten’s recent social media posts. Her talk of a ceasefire expresses not a change in position, but a rhetorical adaptation to the concerns of the AFT membership—overwhelmingly in favor of a ceasefire—carried out with an eye to corralling teachers behind Biden in the November presidential election.

On January 29, the AFT Executive Council adopted a resolution calling for an “end to the Israel-Hamas War by negotiated bilateral cease-fire” and “steps towards a two-state solution.” Amid hand-wringing over “cycles of violence and retribution,” the resolution restates the standard justification of the war: “We have long recognized the right of Israel to protect its citizens against crimes of war and aggression. The horrific slaughter of Israeli civilians perpetrated by Hamas, Islamic Jihad and others on Oct. 7 was the largest mass murder of Jews since the Holocaust.”

Ludicrously, the AFT resolution seeks to assign the basic blame for

the bloodbath in Gaza (the word “genocide” does not appear) not on Israel, but on “the dictatorial rule of Hamas.”

The “process” of a “two-state solution” has supposedly been on the agenda since the 1993 Oslo Accords, which created the Palestinian National Authority. Since that time, the Zionist regime has proceeded with repeated mass killings of Gazans, intensifying repression, expanding war, and now openly carrying out genocide. Throughout, it has enjoyed the full and indispensable support of US imperialism, without which it could not pursue its expansionist policy.

The so-called “two-state” process was and remains a cover for Israeli aggression. Even in the unlikely event that a two-state system arose out of the ashes and above the corpses of the present slaughter, it would in no way represent an advance for the oppressed Palestinian masses.

As explained in “Bernie Sanders, the left face of genocide,” a Palestinian state would be tasked by US imperialism and Israel with maintaining a police-state grip upon the population. Elements of the hated and corrupt Palestinian Authority, voted out of office in Gaza in 2006 due to its subservience to Israel and notorious corruption, would be installed to serve as the puppet administrators of continued imperialist domination of the region and its peoples.

There is no progressive national solution to the genocidal onslaught on the Palestinian masses. The genocide in Gaza is itself part of the descent of world capitalism, in the throes of its greatest ever crisis, into barbarism: world war, genocide, authoritarian and fascist rule, and the further impoverishment of the working class. But this crisis also produces revolutionary struggles of the working class internationally.

Weingarten and the entire trade union apparatus serve as the labor police of the ruling class, suppressing the class struggle and seeking to uphold the political subordination of the working class to the capitalist parties. This pro-imperialist, pro-war bureaucracy must be overthrown and replaced by organizations of the rank and file, fighting to unite the struggles of all workers in an international offensive to put an end to imperialism and capitalism and establish world socialism. An essential component of this program is the fight for the United Socialist States of the Middle East.

We urge educators in the US to join the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, to fight for this perspective.



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