American Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten promotes slander of Gaza protests as “antisemitic,” covers for brutal government repression

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Educators , make your voices heard. Speak out against the bipartisan mobilization of police to suppress antiwar protests.

As mass arrests take place at universities across the US, from New York to Ohio to California to Minnesota and more, Randi Weingarten, the millionaire president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has closed ranks with the bipartisan slander of protesters as “antisemitic.”

As police were advancing on students at Columbia University in New York on Monday, Weingarten wrote on Twitter/X: “The antisemitic chants from protestors outside of Columbia University are horrific, unacceptable examples of antisemitism. This hatred and vitriol understandably puts Jewish students, professors and the community on edge. Hate speech that threatens violence is not protected speech under the law & must be condemned–-calling for divestment is protected free speech, calling for the killing of Jews is not. I've said it before and I'll say it again: hate does not belong on campus.”

Weingarten is repeating the “big lie” that the protests are dominated by antisemitism and even, according to her, “killing Jews.” In reality, there has not been a single antisemitic instance which she can point to, and a large number of people arrested at the protests are Jewish.

Weingarten’s statement is a serious attack, which puts the immense resources of the AFT and its 1.7 million members, most of whom are opposed to Israel’s genocide, behind the attack on the rights of students and teachers to protest. It underscores the need for educators to organize a rebellion against the corrupt pro-war bureaucracy Weingarten heads, which falsely claims to speak in their name.

She is contributing to an environment which could result in deaths. Right-wing senators Tom Cotton and Josh Hawley have already called for the deployment of the National Guard like at Kent State in 1970, where guardsmen killed four anti-Vietnam War protesters.

But her statement is hardly surprising. Weingarten, a member of the Democratic National Committee with close ties to the Clintons, “Genocide Joe” Biden and other war criminals, personifies the role of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy as a mouthpiece for US imperialism abroad and austerity at home.

A self-proclaimed Zionist, she has given political cover for the Democratic Party’s central role in Israel’s genocide in Gaza, which has officially killed over 30,000 Palestinians--mostly children and women--and left virtually all infrastructure in ruins.

The ongoing ethnic cleansing of Gaza includes the deliberate and systematic destruction of the education system, which the UN has referred to as “scholasticide.” In addition to destroying every university in the Gaza Strip, Israel has sought to obliterate K-12 education. A report published Tuesday by Education Cluster, using satellite footage to verify ground reports, found that over 85 percent of school buildings in Gaza have been damaged, and 72.5 percent require full or major reconstruction to be functional again. Israel has killed at least 5,479 students, 261 teachers and 95 university professors, according to the UN.

From the beginning, all of Weingarten’s efforts have been against the emergence of opposition to the genocide. Initially, she vociferously opposed a ceasefire resolution in a discussion of the AFL-CIO leadership, insisting on Israel’s “right to defend itself.” Her only opposition came

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from American Postal Workers Union president Mark Dimondstein, who is Jewish, exposing her slanders of antisemitism as a conscious lie.

Later, when this failed to stem the tide of mass protests, she flew to Israel to pose as a defender of "peace" and "human rights." Finally, in January, the AFT followed in the footsteps of other US unions by signing a ceasefire resolution that put primary blame for the massive loss of life on the Palestinians themselves and the "dictatorial rule of Hamas."

Meanwhile, Weingarten has cavorted with actual neo-Nazis who form the shock troops in the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. In 2022, on a tour of Ukraine, she shook hands with Andriy Sadovyi, the mayor of Lviv who is an outspoken admirer of Nazi collaborator and Holocaust perpetrator Stepan Bandera.

Weingarten also praised this week's bipartisan passage of an additional $95 billion military funding package that includes more billions for the murderous Netanyahu regime. The bill, which funds US military aggression in the Middle East, Ukraine and against China is an open expression of the relentless drive to World War III.

"Finally," she wrote on Tuesday, "this much needed aid is on the way - particularly Ukraine."

The endless sum of money being funneled into war is coming directly out of the pockets of the working class through mass layoffs, suppressed wages, and cuts to social programs. Meanwhile, school districts across the US face record budget cuts, with educators and students being told there is "no money" for essential school resources, personnel and programs.

Weingarten only expresses in one extreme form, the critical role of the entire union bureaucracy in promoting war. But other union bureaucrats seek to disorient and render harmless opposition to war by combining toothless support for a "ceasefire" with ironclad support for the Biden administration. The United Auto Workers passed a ceasefire resolution last December, only to endorse Biden weeks later. At last weekend's *Labor Notes* conference, UAW President Shawn Fain gave a warmongering speech calling autoworkers "the arsenal of democracy"--in plain language, cannon fodder for World War.

The chasm between the union bureaucracy and rank-and-file workers will only become more apparent as the ruling class expands its wars abroad. There is mass hostility within the American working class to war, built up over the course of decades of one bloody "intervention" after the other. The violent crackdown against campus protests reflects a keen awareness on the part of the ruling class that a far broader and more powerful antiwar movement is beginning to emerge throughout the working class.

While Weingarten, National Education Association (NEA) President Becky Pringle and the union bureaucracy close ranks to defend American capitalism, educators across the US are taking a courageous stand in defense of their students against state violence.

Hundreds of faculty at campuses across the country have begun to participate in and defend the student protests, including by forming physical barriers between students and police.

Professor of Journalism at Northwestern University in Illinois Steven Thrasher, where faculty have taken shifts to protect their students, expressed the sentiments animating educators when he wrote on X, "Never been arrested before, somehow always slipped out, but ready today. No one will touch our students without going through us at NU EJP. Hurting our students is my red line."

Elizabeth Dunn, Associate Dean for Graduate Education at Indiana University, spoke in tears at a faculty rally Friday to denounce the university for breaking "the fundamental link between us and our students. I would imagine there's a fairly high likelihood I will be fired today, but I can't sit here and watch this anymore."

But the critical question facing educators is a rebellion against the corrupt apparatus, combining the fight against war with the defense of public education in the US, Palestine and around the world. The way forward is the formation of rank-and-file committees, independent of and opposed to both the two pro-war parties and their lackeys in the union bureaucracy.

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