

The Political issues in the Fight to Defend Public Education in the US: A new pamphlet from Mehring Books

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In the lead-up to the 2024 presidential elections in the US, Mehring Books has published a pamphlet entitled The Political Issues in the Fight to Defend Public Education in the US. We present the introduction below. We encourage our readers to order the pamphlet here, together with critical theoretical works including Sounding the Alarm: Socialism Against War,” essential to mobilizing the working class against capitalism.

The three articles collected here were originally posted on the *World Socialist Web Site* (wsws.org), the most widely read socialist online publication in the world. They form part of the ongoing struggle to unify teachers, school workers, parents, and students worldwide against the destruction of one of the most fundamental social rights: the right to a free, high-quality education.

No matter which capitalist candidate occupies the White House in 2025, the onslaught against social rights and public education will escalate in tandem with the headlong plunge of the US into global war. Democrats and Republicans alike speak for Wall Street’s agenda of prioritizing wars for US hegemony and paying for it by scrapping what few social rights remain.

The first article, a statement of the Educators Rank-and-File Committee (US), addresses the savage cuts to public education funding. The decision of the Biden/Harris administration to allow the termination of federal support to schools under the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) program represents a body blow to every district. This fiscal cliff is predicted to cost as many as 380,000

educators’ jobs over the next year or two.

Since the statement appeared, the onslaught has escalated:

1. Chicago Public Schools have announced a nearly \$1 billion deficit. The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), in alliance with Democratic Mayor Brandon Johnson, is forcing teachers to work without a contract as the union and city collude in determining the number of jobs, programs and schools to be closed. Already, over 600 paraprofessionals have been laid off. The district has deemed 293 out of 497 schools as “underutilized” and potentially subject to consolidation or closure.

2. Seattle Public Schools has announced its intention to close between 17 and 21 elementary schools next year. Pittsburgh intends to close 16 schools, Denver is beginning a second round of closures, and Philadelphia has called school closures “likely.” This is only a very partial list, which grows weekly. Those districts that have not yet announced school closures are laying off staff, ending programs, and terminating services.

These cuts are not the product of a lack of resources. Rather, they arise due to the diversion of the social wealth created by the working class to ever-escalating US wars of aggression. The Biden-Harris administration has allocated approximately \$1 trillion to military spending, with the support of both big business parties in Congress. As of September 2024, the United States had spent \$175 billion on the war in Ukraine. At the same time, another \$8.7 billion military package was approved to support the Israeli genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza, which is now metastasizing into a horrific war in Lebanon and across the Middle

East. The provocative expansion of US aggression against nuclear-armed Russia threatens the future of mankind itself.

The statement addresses the suppression of democratic rights among teachers and students and the government's ongoing refusal to address the spread of COVID-19 and other airborne pathogens in America's severely antiquated school buildings. It advances a program to organize the working class independently of the pro-capitalist unions, including the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

The second article marks 70 years since the US Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954). It assesses the historical and enduring significance of the landmark decision, which mandated the end of legal segregation in schools and the entire Jim Crow legal edifice. *Brown*, however, said nothing about mandating high-quality, sufficiently funded education for every child. The article seeks to explain why this basic social right has not, and cannot, be achieved under capitalism. It points the way forward against both capitalist politicians and racist identity politics.

The final article is a review of the book *Bankers in the Ivory Tower* by Charlie Eaton. The volume traces the financialization of higher education from the 1980s through the 2010s, showing the transformation of universities—ostensibly institutions of higher learning—into massive financial entities. Among the conclusions WSWS writer Emma Arceneaux draws from Eaton's book is the role of these financial interests in explaining the failure of student protests to secure divestment from military contractors profiting from the genocide in Gaza.

The state of public education today ensures a new eruption of struggle among educators.

None of us have forgotten the mass strike movement of educators from West Virginia to Washington State in 2018-2019. Thousands of teachers defied their unions to walk out and fight budget cuts. Educators stood firm against anti-strike laws and rallied tens of thousands against the brutal austerity being imposed on education in both "Red" and "Blue" states. However, the union bureaucracies systematically isolated and wore down these "Red for Ed" strikes, forcing through contracts that met none of the teachers' demands.

AFT President Randi Weingarten and then-NEA President Lily Eskelsen Garcia crisscrossed the country to suppress what was a genuine mass movement. In turn, these terrible betrayals paved the way for these same union bureaucrats to force educators back into unsafe, COVID-infested school buildings in 2020-21, costing the lives of thousands of educators, family members and students. Facing annual reinfections with COVID-19, millions of educators, school workers and students are now likely suffering from the negative health impacts of COVID-19, including Long COVID, which can affect cognition, learning ability and virtually every organ of the body.

The key lesson of these recent struggles is the urgent need for a political program to unify educators independently of the sellout union bureaucracies and the lying capitalist politicians, both Democrat and Republican. A political fight that insists on the right of all children to equal and high-quality education, full access to mankind's culture, and safe schools can only be realized through the mobilization of the working class by forming independent rank-and-file committees. These committees must join the fight against austerity to the fight against war.

Educators will find allies among the millions of workers battling for their rights, from longshoremen to railroaders to autoworkers. Anger is seething as social inequality, attacks on democratic rights, climate change and poverty confront workers in every country. The task ahead is forging a socialist leadership in this common struggle against capitalism.

We urge teachers to prepare for these coming class battles by studying these articles, reading the *World Socialist Web Site*, and joining the Educators Rank-and-File Committee (US), affiliated with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). Contact us at wsws.org/edsafety to get involved and discuss next steps today.



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