

Educators Rank-and-File Committee holds meeting demanding release of Mahmoud Khalil

Our reporters
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On Saturday, March 15, the Educators Rank-and-File Committee in the US, which is affiliated with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), held a joint online meeting with the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE-US), which was titled, “Free Mahmoud Khalil! Mobilize the Working Class Against Trump’s Dictatorship! Defend the Right to Public Education!”

The meeting, which was well-attended by educators, students and workers from around the world, focused on the urgent threats to public education and democratic rights under the Trump administration. The proceedings were opened with a report by Renae Cassimeda, a member of the ERFC, writer for the *World Socialist Web Site* and a teacher in Southern California.

It also included contributions by Tom Carter, a California lawyer and WSWS writer; David Rye, IYSSE member and WSWS writer; and Will Lehman, a Pennsylvania Mack Trucks worker and IWA-RFC leader who ran as a socialist candidate for president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) in 2022.

There was wide-ranging discussion at the meeting with comments from teachers and young people in Michigan, Texas, Alabama, Ohio and other states, along with Brazil and Canada. The discussion concluded with a 97 percent vote to adopt the following resolution:

The Educators Rank-and-File Committee and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality demand the immediate release of Mahmoud Khalil and all university students and workers persecuted by the Trump administration for exercising their right to free speech against the U.S.-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Trump’s declaration that Khalil’s arrest is “the first of many” for alleged “anti-American activity” makes clear his administration’s intent to silence opposition. This crackdown extends to educators and workers fighting job cuts, the destruction of public services and attacks on education.

We call on educators, parents, students and workers across all industries to resist Trump’s dismantling of the Department of Education and privatization efforts. From the American Revolution and the Civil War to the early labor movement and the Civil Rights movement, a fundamental principle has guided every great struggle for equality: an educated populace is the only safeguard against the return of tyrants and despots. But oligarchy is incompatible with democracy. That is why the modern-day tyrants of the Trump administration are waging war on science, culture and historical knowledge—to suppress critical thought and maintain their power.

The Democratic Party does not oppose Trump; it serves the same

oligarchic interests and supports much of his agenda. On Friday, Senate Democrats backed the Republican spending bill that will give Trump and Musk a blank check to slash social programs, purge federal employees and lay the groundwork for a police state. While they posture as opponents, the Democrats represent the same corporate and financial oligarchy and have spent decades supporting war, austerity and the systematic destruction of public education.

The leadership of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) refuse to mobilize educators in any meaningful struggle. Instead of organizing strikes or workplace actions, they promote toothless measures such as petitions, social media campaigns and appeals to Congress—strategies designed to dissipate resistance rather than build it. While educators face mass layoffs, privatization and worsening conditions, the union leadership collaborates with both corporate-controlled parties, negotiating concessions rather than leading a fight. Their role is not to defend public education but to suppress workers’ opposition and maintain their privileged positions within the existing system.

The working class is the only force capable of stopping these attacks. Mass action must be organized through independent rank-and-file committees in schools, workplaces and communities to prepare for strikes and collective resistance. These committees, affiliated with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, will unite educators with workers across industries and national borders to defend social and democratic rights.

We demand:

- * The immediate release of Mahmoud Khalil.
- * An end to xenophobic attacks on immigrants.
- * Full restoration of Department of Education funding and staff and an end to privatization schemes.
- * The defense of democratic rights and constitutional protections for all.
- * Billions in funding for education and social programs, not war and corporate tax cuts.
- * The formation of rank-and-file committees in every workplace and community.

The struggle for these demands must be connected to the building of a political movement of the working class against both corporate-controlled parties, which will fight for workers to take political power, expropriate the oligarchs and use society’s wealth to greatly expand public education and social equality.

Cassimeda's report, which we publish below, detailed the administration's dismantling of public education and attack on essential social and democratic rights, as well as the fighting program of the Educators Rank-and-File Committee. Over the next few days, the WSWS will publish a fuller report on the meeting, including other reports and contributions.

We've called this meeting to address the urgent crisis facing public education and democratic rights under the Trump administration. As demonstrated by the actions of Trump over the past two months, the reality is that he and his administration of oligarchs are attempting to establish a dictatorship in this country, throwing out the Constitution, the Bill of Rights.

The administration is conducting a sweeping assault on the population through mass cuts to social spending, public education, public health, suppression of free speech and democratic rights, as seen in the abduction and detention of Columbia University graduate and Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil. Trump is building a framework for unfettered imperialist aims and World War III.

The situation demands a clear understanding of the stakes, the role of various political forces, the underlying causes and a strategy for genuine resistance.

What is at stake?

What is the current state of attack on public education?

- The Trump administration is moving rapidly to dismantle public education and core democratic rights. We have seen the layoff of 1,950 workers—or over half the staff—at the Department of Education (ED). This is part of a purge of tens of thousands of federal workers, disruption and delays to processing financial aid (FAFSA), the distribution of funds for Title 1, IDEA, Pell Grants and other state grants for college students.

- Transformation of the Office for Civil Rights into a tool for suppressing dissent.

- Elimination of seven out of 12 regional civil rights offices.

- Cuts to elementary and secondary education. This includes English language learning and education research. It also includes cancellation of over \$900 million in research contracts, including projects like the Nation's Report Card and other education research initiatives.

- The mass Reductions in Force (RIFs) are part of the Trump administration's efforts to close the department of education and redirect funds through block grants. Under such a framework the Trump administration stands in a position to dictate who gets access to these funds, namely those schools which support Trump administration policies.

The scale of cuts to public education will have catastrophic implications.

The USDA gutted over \$1 billion in funds for two federal programs that supported school meal initiatives and food banks. House Republicans recently proposed \$12 million in cuts to federally funded school meal programs. If passed, over 24,000 schools that serve more than 12 million children could lose access to the Community Eligibility Provision program (which allows high-poverty schools to offer meals to all students without requiring individual applications). California faces the highest risk, with 4,091 schools that could lose access to free school meals. Other highly impacted states include Texas (1,711 schools), Florida (1,175 schools) and New York (1,784 schools).

Schools are a lifeline for many students. Food insecurity and overall poverty a major factor in public schools. For many this is their only

meal of the day.

The attack on the ED is part of a broader strategy to privatize education through school voucher and school choice programs. This is exemplified by the plans laid out in Trump's January Executive Order (EO). Congressional Republicans, backed by the White House, are pushing for a new tax credit that would direct billions of dollars a year to school voucher programs and away from public schools and other social institutions.

The administration is simultaneously attacking democratic rights, shown by the brutal arrest and planned deportation of Mahmoud Khalil for exercising his right to free speech and protesting the genocide in Gaza. Another student at Columbia has since been arrested. While an immediate target on the campuses is students opposing the genocide, these are methods that will be used against the entire working class. Trump's executive order "Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling" aims to censor curricula and transform schools from centers of learning to centers of fascist and religious indoctrination.

Educators and the working class in general are up against unprecedented attacks on all of its social, political, and constitutional rights. Efforts are underway by multiple states to openly challenge the Supreme Court 1982 ruling in *Plyler v. Doe* and bar immigrant children from access to public education in this country. Across the United States, immigrant families are living in fear that they or their loved ones will be kidnapped and deported.

Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrests are being carried out with unprecedented force and frequency. This includes at schools. Just a few weeks ago, a father was detained as he was dropping off his children outside Jovita Idar elementary in Chicago. The terrorizing abduction was met with horror and outrage by parents, educators and students.

While the attacks on public education are being spearheaded with the attacks on immigrants, the rights of the working class as a whole to public education and other social rights are what is on the chopping block. This is what is behind the mass firings and gutting of public resources by DOGE. The level of these attacks are unprecedented but they are also a continuation of decades-long assault on public education by both the Republicans and Democrats.

In California, over 2,000 layoff notices have been issued to educators, and districts across the state are facing school closures. This is part of nationwide assault on public education. In Chicago, scores of schools could be on the chopping block. These cuts have taken place under the rule of the Democratic Party. The underfunding and gutting of education is bipartisan and—despite a chronic teacher shortage—budget cuts, layoffs and annual pink slips of educators have been normalized across both so-called red and blue states.

What is the role of the Democratic Party and the trade union apparatus?

The Democratic Party is complicit in these attacks. Like the Republicans, it is a capitalist party of the financial oligarchy. While engaging in superficial and spineless stunts, they fundamentally support Trump's aims. The Biden-Harris administration allowed \$190 billion in supplemental COVID-19 funding to lapse, creating fiscal crises in school districts and leading to school closures and layoffs.

The Democrats also collaborate with Republicans to suppress campus protests against the genocide in Gaza, slandering them as "antisemitic." The erosion of public education has occurred under

Democratic Party leadership in cities like Detroit and Chicago. Obama's "Race to the Top" program set the stage for the current crisis by cutting Title 1 funding and eliminating hundreds of thousands of teachers' jobs.

The Democrats' disagreements with Trump are primarily over geopolitical strategy—that is, which regions American imperialism should conquer first—not over the fundamental attack on the working class. Far from genuinely opposing these federal cuts, they have been and will be helping to carry them out.

The Democratic Party is not here to fight, they are here to collaborate. They had the opportunity to cut off funding for Trump's dictatorial measures on Friday but they instead ensured that the government remained fully operational with the support of top Democrats in the Senate. They also passed the Republican spending bill, which essentially removes all Congressional spending directives, giving Trump and Elon Musk a blank check to slash social programs, purge federal employees and lay the groundwork for a police state.

Congress's next priority is passing a budget that includes \$4.5 trillion in tax cuts for the rich and \$2 trillion in cuts to social programs, including gutting \$880 billion from Medicaid, which provides healthcare for 80 million people. Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) has made clear that Social Security and other so-called "entitlement" programs are next.

Furthermore, not only are the Democrats not an opposition party, they are assisting in efforts to normalize fascism and dictatorship! This was on full display on recent podcasts hosted by California Governor Gavin Newsom, who invited fascists Steve Bannon and Charlie Kirk to engage in chummy dialogue and praise.

The Democratic Party has shown time and again that it would rather accommodate fascists than mobilize a genuine fight against them.

What will be the social force to fight against the fascists and their legitimizers in the Democratic Party? It will not be the trade union bureaucracy, which is equally culpable.

Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), has postured as an opponent of these cuts to education while at the same time declaring her willingness to "work with" Education Secretary Linda McMahon—whose sole purpose is to abolish the department she leads.

The National Education Association (NEA) and AFT are arms of the Democratic Party and hand over tens of millions of dollars of educators' dues money to this capitalist party. The AFT and NEA bureaucrats have responded to the unprecedented attacks of the Trump administration by telling educators and parents to email and text Donald Trump and congressional Republicans.

In reality, the union bureaucrats are actively working to prevent any genuine resistance to the scapegoating of immigrants, the terrorizing of students and families, and the attacks on public education.

The unions prioritize "labor peace" and the enrichment of their officials over the interests of their members. It was the union bureaucrats who came in to isolate and smother the powerful teacher rebellions during the first Trump administration in 2018-2019, and have continued to limit and smother educator opposition.

Facing mass closures, layoffs and budget cuts the California Teachers Association (CTA) has launched its toothless "We Can't Wait" campaign, telling 80,000 teachers to appeal to the Democrats who run the school districts, the same party that just rubber-stamped Trump's budget.

What the trade union bureaucracies will never call for and are in fact actively working to prevent and contain are nationwide strikes by millions of educators. Instead, they want to ensure the deepening

opposition to the Trump administration is straitjacketed. Such opposition would find immediate international support as educators around the globe are facing the gutting of public education, including in Argentina, Brazil, the Netherlands and Germany, just to name a few.

Why is this happening?

In discussions with teachers everywhere, a major question they are all asking is: why is this happening? Teachers are expressing that it is hard to believe that such illegality is possible.

There is a definite reason for this crisis, and it does not come solely from the mind of Trump or Musk. Trump's social counter-revolution and dictatorial measures are rooted in the crisis of the world capitalist system. Trillions of dollars are being redirected from the working class to Wall Street, to fund war preparations and tax cuts for the financial oligarchy. The underlying cause is the capitalist system itself, which is incompatible with the basic interests of the vast majority of the population.

The Trump administration represents a government of, for, and by the oligarchy. Such extreme levels of inequality are completely incompatible with democracy, which is why attacks on speech and constitutional rights are being eroded. With the complicity of the Democrats, Trump is establishing a framework for a dictatorship to suppress resistance from below.

As Thomas Jefferson famously argued, an educated populace is the most effective defense against tyranny. Universal public education, a core ideal of the Enlightenment, has long been seen as essential to democracy and a safeguard against authoritarianism. That is precisely why this administration seeks to dismantle public education. It wants nothing to do with an educated population. The historic rights that the working class has fought for are being eroded. The future of the youth and the very social right to a public education are at stake.

It is only our movement, the genuine socialist movement, that is upholding the fight for social and democratic rights and the ideals of the Enlightenment. This is not a task which can be left to the hands of the complicit Democratic Party or the trade union bureaucracies. Above all, the Democrats fear a movement of the working class far more than they fear dictatorship and fascism spearheaded by the Republican Party.

The international working class is the revolutionary social force in society that can halt this attacks on education. An explosive movement of the working class is emerging and the conditions exist to unite educators with federal workers, healthcare workers, manufacturing workers and students. This requires the formation of rank-and-file committees, independent of the trade union apparatus.

These committees must unite teachers, students, parents with every other section of the working class in a coordinated struggle against Trump's mass layoffs, the destruction of social programs and the privatization of public education. They will serve as a means by which workers can exchange information, organize across workplaces and regions, and prepare for powerful, collective action, including nationwide strikes. That is among the principal aims of today's meeting. We have hundreds of educators on the call today and rank-and-file committees must be built in every school and campus.

The fight to defend public education must be united with the struggles of immigrant workers facing deportation, industrial workers fighting layoffs and unsafe conditions, and healthcare workers opposing attacks on Medicaid and Medicare.

This is a task not just for us educators here in the US. We are

fighting what is a global assault on public education. All the social gains won by the working class in an earlier period are under assault as the ruling classes of each country are preparing for imperialist war, lurching to the right and gutting what remains of any social rights.

The struggle is against Trump and the entire capitalist profit system which has produced him, and which is incompatible with the most basic interests of the vast majority of the population. We call for the expropriation of the wealth of the oligarchy which must be directed to meet the social needs of the population under a socialist program.

The protests and opposition to ICE raids, mass firings, the destruction of public education—all of this is building, but it must have unity and political direction and coordination. This is the purpose of the rank-and-file committees, which are united globally under the International Workers Alliance of Rank and File Committees (IWA-RFC). This requires the fight for socialism and the mobilization of the only social force that has the capacity to defeat fascism and reorganize society to meet social needs—the international working class.



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