

# Online meeting unites educators, students and workers to defend public education against Trump's attacks

Our reporters  
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*To join the fight for rank-and-file committees to fight Trump's destruction of public education, fill out the form at the end of this article.*

The Educators Rank-and-File Committee (ERFC-US) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) held a joint meeting on Saturday, March 15, entitled, "Free Mahmoud Khalil! Mobilize the Working Class Against Trump's Dictatorship! Defend the Right to Public Education!"

With a significant turnout of educators, students and workers from around the world, the discussion outlined a program for an independent industrial and political counteroffensive by the working class against Trump's attacks on education and democracy.

The meeting culminated in the adoption, by 97 percent of the participants, of a resolution, which included the demand for the immediate release of the constitutionally detained Columbia University graduate and Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil and all persecuted university students and workers. It also called to resist the Trump administration's dismantling of the Department of Education and privatization efforts through the formation and building of independent rank-and-file committees to organize collective resistance, connecting to broader class struggles through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

The resolution, as well as the meeting's opening report by California teacher and *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) writer Renae Cassimeda, have been published on the WSWS, and are available here.

Cassimeda's report outlined the urgent crisis facing public education and democratic rights under the Trump administration and detailing its attacks, highlighting the bipartisan nature of the assault. It explained the need for the organization of rank-and-file committees, independent of the trade union bureaucracies and both corporate-controlled parties, to mount a genuine resistance.

Tom Carter, a California attorney and a WSWS writer, gave a presentation following the opening report. He explained that the meeting was taking place at a historic moment amidst an ongoing operation to impose an authoritarian police state dictatorship in the US. Carter emphasized that the abduction of Khalil was not an isolated incident but part of a broader dismantling of democratic rights.

The Trump administration, Carter said, falsely claimed Khalil, a green card holder and permanent US resident, had no rights and was being deported for "illegal protests," despite admitting he broke no laws. Carter concluded by stating that this drive towards dictatorship stems from the interests of the capitalist oligarchy, and the defense of democratic rights depended on the political struggle of the working class to take power in its own hands and expropriate the wealth of the oligarchy.

During the discussion a high school student from Texas noted

Cassimeda's point that the assault on education was not unique to the Trump administration, specifically referencing George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind program.

Cassimeda and other speakers elaborated on these historical precedents and the bipartisan nature of these attacks on education, starting with Reagan's promotion of the anti-public education tract *A Nation at Risk*, Clinton's promotion of "school choice" and Obama's Race to the Top. Under the latter, Obama cut federal Title 1 funding to schools with low-income students and bribed school districts to expand charter schools, introduce merit pay and fire teachers at "failing schools" devastated by poverty and years of budget cutting.

An IYSSE member at Wayne State University in Detroit, denounced the kidnapping of Khalil and Leqaa Kordia, another Palestinian activist in the US from the West Bank, who was abducted by ICE in Newark, New Jersey last week. He stated that these actions are not only an attack on democratic rights but also a fear tactic intended to stop or limit protests against the genocide.

"I won't pretend that I'm unafraid," he said. "But I will continue to fight because while fear is a potent weapon, courage comes from the fact that the working class and young people hold the power to overcome it." He concluded, "Hitler required 53 days to dismantle German democracy. The question isn't what will happen next because we know from history what will happen. It's how we will fight against it."

David Rye, a California teacher, IYSSE member and writer for the WSWS, gave a report on the situation facing university campuses. He described the abduction of Khalil as a spearhead of the assault on democratic rights and the suppression of anti-genocide protests on campuses nationwide. Rye highlighted the politically motivated investigations into universities and the threat to free speech, noting that Trump's administration has already cut \$400 million in research grants and contracts to Columbia University as part of its coercion. He argued that Trump intends to transform universities into propaganda tools by exerting control over their funding and academic programs, as well as by attacking science.

Rye then stressed that the fight against these attacks could not be limited to students on the college campuses. The continuation of the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza, despite mass protests by young people for more than a year, demonstrated that no appeals to the conscience of the ruling class could stop war and dictatorship.

Instead, students has to turn to the working class and mobilize its great social strength against the capitalist system, the source of massive budget cuts, social inequality, war and dictatorship. This required a fight against the Democratic Socialists of America and other pseudo-left organizations, which reject the revolutionary role of the working class and tie young

people to the Democratic Party through the promotion of identity and other anti-Marxist politics. Serious times require serious politics, Rye said, urging young people to join the IYSSE.

Speaking in the discussion, Clare, a teacher from Alabama, emphasized the urgency of the situation and necessity for teachers and the working class to fight against Trump's fascistic attacks. "I just want to say, as a teacher, this is not a game. This is a war. This is a straight up attack against all children who are living in a state of need. Whatever that need may be, whether it be additional education, whether it be assistance with hunger, whether it be assistance with programs ... Our rights are under assault..."

"Now as educators, we have to realize that we have the power to fight back in all these ways, because they found out during the pandemic they can't do it without us. ... Yeah, with a bunch of children in under-supplied rooms and crappy, dilapidating buildings with not enough access to resources, and we do it every day ... We need to stand up. We need to make sure everybody stands up with us, and we need to make this stop."

Participants raised a series of critical questions, which were also addressed in the course of the discussion.

George, a retired University of Michigan professor, expressed his support for the meeting's focus on the working class. However, he said, there were historical experiences of workers being divided against each other, with some discriminated against others based on racial and ethnic prejudice. He asked how the socialist movement intends to address this "inhumane occurrence" and ensure unity and respect for all, regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds in future movements.

Jesse Thomas, a New York City teacher, writer for the WSWS and moderator of the meeting, emphasized that the great struggles of history have required the unification of workers across racial and ethnic lines. This was not an automatic process but had been actively fought for by socialists against all forms of racial and nationalist poison promoted by the political establishment and trade union bureaucracies.

He called on Will Lehman, a socialist autoworker who ran for United Auto Workers (UAW) president in 2022, to further elaborate. While such prejudices exist, Lehman said, it is possible to overcome them and unite the working class with the correct leadership and perspective.

## An international strategy for the working class

Drawing on his experience campaigning among thousands of autoworkers, Lehman said autoworkers overwhelmingly support his program of uniting workers across national boundaries and conducting a common struggle against the transnational corporations, which were attacking the jobs and conditions of workers in every country.

Lehman emphasized that the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) aims to provide the clear political perspective for workers to unite and overcome these divisions. He denounced trade union leaders, such as UAW President Shawn Fain, for cozying up to Trump and promoting tariffs and economic nationalism, which undermine the unity of US workers with their brothers in Canada, Mexico, China and the EU. Lehman concluded that rank-and-file committees would transfer power from the union apparatus to workers on the shop floor and create the best conditions for a unified struggle by all workers to defend their jobs, living standards and basic democratic rights.

The international character of the struggle to defend education and democratic rights was underscored in the comments of Brazilian teacher and Socialist Equality Group (SEG) member Tomas Castanheira. He warned US educators that Trump was following the fascist model of Argentina's President Javier Milei and former Brazilian President Jair

Bolsonaro to destroy public education and militarize the schools.

Eric, a former college student from Northeast Ohio, asked how someone outside the formal educational system could connect with current students and teachers. He expressed interest in creating coalitions to broadly unite "the left," seeking advice on the most effective way to achieve this.

Nancy Hanover, a WSWS writer, warned how "coalitions of the left" have repeatedly been used to subordinate working class struggles to the trade union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party. She detailed how the DSA and other pseudo-left organizations embedded in the teacher unions had worked diligently to derail the powerful rank-and-file rebellion of teachers in 2018-19, which began with the wildcat strikes in West Virginia.

They lined up completely behind the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Educators Association (NEA) unions. They falsely painted these rotten deals as wins. They lent their websites to the invaluable assistance of shutting down the strikes. They gave a left spin to the role of the unions while AFT President Randy Weingarten was flying from state to state shutting down these strikes. ... They required the use of groups like Bad Ass Teachers and the Maoists, and all of these other phony, phony socialists to do their dirty work for them.

Although the strike wave, which spread to Oklahoma, Arizona and other states, began in defiance of the AFT and NEA bureaucracies, the union apparatus was able to reassert its authority over the teachers and crush the strike movement. This coincided with the cynical lie that the election of Democrats in 2020 would end the nightmare of the Trump administration. Instead, four years of the Biden-Harris administration, with its endless warmongering and austerity for the working class, paved the way for the return of the would-be dictator to the White House.

Before reading the resolution, WSWS Labor Editor Jerry White pointed to the decades-long transfer of wealth from the bottom 90 percent of the population to the top, which had been overseen by both parties. The share of national income for the bottom 90 percent had fallen from 67 percent in 1975 to 47 percent in 2023, with some \$79 trillion taken from the working class during this period to enrich the corporate and financial oligarchy that rules America.

The meeting ended with overwhelming adoption of the resolution, which concluded:

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.



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