

AFT President Weingarten exits the DNC amidst deepening crisis of Democratic Party

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26 June 2025

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), resigned from the Democratic National Committee (DNC) earlier this month, ending her 23-year tenure in the body. Her exit, alongside Lee Saunders, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), comes as the Democratic Party faces an unprecedented crisis of legitimacy among workers and youth.

In her letter to DNC chair Ken Martin, she wrote, “While I am proud to be a Democrat, I appear to be out of step with the leadership you are forging, and I do not want to be the one who keeps questioning why we are not enlarging our tent and actively trying to engage more and more of our communities.” Saunders echoed this call for broad coalition-building, stating, “We must evolve to meet the urgency of this moment... It is our responsibility to open the gates, welcome others in and build the future we all deserve together.”

Whatever the specific conflict that precipitated Weingarten’s resignation, it is certain that there are no issues of political principle involved. A member of the DNC since 2002, Weingarten is a creature of the state and intelligence agencies. She is a leading Zionist and supporter of the wars of US imperialism, crisscrossing the world in support of US-backed wars in Gaza and Ukraine. The latter has brought her in contact with Ukrainian neo-Nazis, and underscores the cynicism of her joining in the slander of opponents of Zionism as antisemitic.

Weingarten is also associated in particular with overtures to the extreme right, meeting with Trump advisor Steve Bannon and declaring her willingness to work with Trump’s Education Secretary Linda McMahon, whose mandate is to abolish the department McMahon heads. Weingarten also shared a platform with anti-vaxxers and “school choice” charter school campaigners during her campaign in 2021 at the height of the COVID pandemic to re-open schools against the opposition of teachers and parents. For this, she receives a salary of around \$500,000 per year, courtesy of workers’ dues money.

But Weingarten is a protege of former AFT President Albert Shanker, who was trained by ex-Trotskyist-turned Cold War anticommunist Max Shachtman. Like Shanker, Weingarten is well versed in the value of democratic phraseology to legitimize her reactionary politics and those of the Democratic Party. She is well aware of the deep crisis of credibility of the party in the working class, youth and even sections of the middle class, and recognizes the need to find some mechanism for restoring its public image.

In a recent interview with MSNBC over the mass protests against Trump, Weingarten urged “economic pluralism” and asked rhetorically, “how do we give people, right and left, agency and power?”

Given her ties to the extreme right, this reference to “right and left” is ominous and suggests an openness towards legitimizing the right-wing populism of the fascists. In fact, the union bureaucracy as a whole is already doing this, embracing Trump’s tariffs and attacks on Mexican and other foreign workers as a supposed boon to “American” jobs.

At any rate, the immediate issue behind her resignation appears to have been the forced removal of David Hogg as a vice-chair of the DNC. The 25 year-old Hogg is a supporter of fundraising efforts to run younger, up-and-coming figures in primaries against incumbent Democrats in safe districts, in what he describes as a wake-up call to party officials “asleep at the wheel.” At the same, Hogg has been careful to stress his loyalty to the party’s leadership, expressing support for the 85-year-old former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi as one of the older “fighters who are delivering.”

Nevertheless, his proposal has provoked significant pushback in the DNC, who accused him of setting up a “circular firing squad,” as one source told *Politico*. Significantly, Hogg was ousted in a maneuver using a gender quota requirement, underscoring the reactionary role of identity politics as a screen for the interests of the bourgeoisie and striving upper-middle class layers.

The obvious fear was that holding such primaries could serve as a venue upon which left-wing sentiment and social opposition could find a limited expression, which the

Democrats are determined to avoid at all costs.

This was the reason, for example, why Kamala Harris was installed as the party's nominee in last year's presidential election, once it became clear Biden could not continue, rather than holding an open convention.

The outcome of the New York City Democratic Party primary will no doubt be seen as vindicating these fears. The widespread frustration and hatred felt by workers and youth moving to the left was expressed in the shock win of Zohran Mamdani, a self-described "democratic socialist." Mamdani was opposed by wide layers of the party establishment and billionaires such as ex-mayor Michael Bloomberg, who poured millions into the campaign of rival Andrew Cuomo and attempted to smear Mamdani as an antisemite for his declared opposition to the Gaza genocide.

Mass opposition to the Trump administration were no doubt also a major factor, as was mass dissatisfaction with the refusal of the Democrats to mount any serious opposition to the would-be fuhrer. The day before the primary, most House Democrats joined with Republicans to block a bill supporting impeachment of Trump for his attack on Iran.

In another sign of the internal crisis, the city's teacher union, the United Federation of Teachers, which Weingarten headed before becoming AFT president, declined to endorse a candidate in the primary.

Weingarten and Saunders were supporters of Hogg's initiative. They had also backed Ben Wikler for DNC chair, who promoted a "permanent campaign" of "grassroots organizing" to win back support for the party.

In an interview last month with *City & State New York*, Weingarten declared that "the [Democratic] party has always had a value system of valuing the people of America and trying to be the working people's party, particularly in the modern age. You know, we are the party of FDR. We are the party of working folks. But when people don't believe it, then you have to do the work that you can do, and people don't believe it, because they're so angry about their own lives and they're right to be angry because of the inequality in America."

In fact, the Democratic Party is not a "party of working folks" but the oldest capitalist party in the world. Its role historically within the two-party system has been to use the promise of reforms to head off the danger of social revolution and to capture social movements before they pose a threat to capitalism. FDR's "New Deal" program was aimed explicitly at preventing a repeat of the Russian Revolution in the United States, with Roosevelt pledging to "save capitalism from itself."

At the same time, the Democrats ruthlessly pursued the interests of American imperialism, organizing intervention in both World Wars, the Korean and Vietnam wars and the

overthrow of countless nationalist governments in the colonial world. It also administered the system of Jim Crow apartheid in the South and did not hesitate, when deemed necessary, to use violence to crush strikes by workers in the US.

This double bookkeeping was only possible as long as the US was a rising power, with virtually limitless resources at its disposal. That period ended more than a half century ago. The Democratic Party long ago jettisoned any association with social reform, with the last major social legislation in the US dating back to the late 1960s.

For decades, it has jointly with Republicans carried out massive austerity and a transfer of wealth upward into the financial aristocracy. It has attempted to compensate for its loss of support in the working class by appealing to layers of the upper-middle class fixated on issues of personal identity.

Because of this, it is increasingly, and correctly, identified by wide layers as a party which supports the interests of Wall Street, genocide and war, is associated with violent repression of anti-war protests and which is continuously acting as enablers of Trump and the extreme right.

Meanwhile, masses of people are moving to the left and searching for an alternative to capitalism.

The source of the friction in the DNC is the fact that the Democratic Party's ability to play its historic function for the bourgeoisie is being seriously compromised.

This finds an initial, contradictory expression in growing support for "left" figures in the Democratic Party such as Bernie Sanders and Mamdani. But the inability of their supporters to achieve their demands within the Democratic Party will compel more workers, youth and the most progressive sections of the middle class to recognize the need for a massive political confrontation between the working class and the financial oligarchy.

They will conclude that this requires a final settling of accounts with the Democrats and the building of a party based on socialist internationalism. That party is the Socialist Equality Party.



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