

Teachers union president preaches calm as educators back call for mass strike against Trump dictatorship

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American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten spoke at a “Public Education Town Hall” in the Detroit suburb of Eastpointe, Michigan, Monday night. Weingarten, who recently authored a book titled, *Why Fascists Fear Teachers*, made no proposal to mobilize the AFT’s 1.8 million members against Trump’s ever more apparent attempt to establish a fascist dictatorship.

Instead, she reassured attendees that “it never gets to the point where fascism gets here.” Her remark came a day before Trump told top generals that US troops should use American cities as “training grounds” for war against the “enemy within.” Targets of this repression will include hundreds of thousands of teachers and students. Just last week, Trump adviser Stephen Bannon declared at the Charlie Kirk rally that “a third of the teachers are terrorists.”

Although opposition to Trump is immense, Weingarten addressed fewer than 100 people, mainly union and Democratic Party officials. Far from warning of dictatorship or calling for action, her remarks dripped with complacency.

She claimed “the courts, Congress and the Court of Public Opinion” were the battleground against Trump, praising Democrats for their budget wrangling with Republicans—even though they have raised no demand to end the military occupation of cities or resist Trump’s moves. On the mass firings at the Department of Education and other agencies that accelerated with the government shutdown just two days later, she said only, “We’ll help our members who are laid off.”

As in her book (which the WSWWS will review soon), Weingarten spoke in vague generalities, never naming Trump, Bannon, or Stephen Miller as fascists. Public schools once suffered from “neglect,” she said, but now there was “intentionality” to destroy them. The aim was to “create so much chaos, fear and cruelty so that people will just give up.” Her advice: attend school board meetings.

So, going to a school board meeting is really important to start saying, ‘Oh, I have a voice... Let’s try to figure things out together... it creates trust, and trust is actually essential right now to get through all this.’

Above all, she insisted teachers belonged in their classrooms, not out on strike. “By making schools a safe and welcoming place,” she said, teachers were “showing politicians that it was their job to protect our schools.”

The absurdity of this was highlighted by the decay of the 100-year-old Eastpointe High School where the event was held. At schools in Eastpointe Community Schools, 59.7 percent of students are eligible to participate in the federal free and reduced price meal because of poverty.

After decades of bipartisan defunding and privatization schemes, the American public school system is on the brink of complete collapse. The Trump administration, aided and abetted by the Democrats, is trying to drive the final nail in the coffin, and convert the schools into centers of religious, nationalist and fascist indoctrination.

What the AFT president did not and could not say is that defending public education and democracy requires a fight of the working class against the corporate and financial oligarchy. Weingarten is a political hack, and not a workers’ leader. A multimillionaire and longtime leader of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) until her recent resignation, Weingarten fears above all an independent mass movement of the working class.

During the first Trump administration, she crisscrossed the country to shut down the 2018 wave of wildcat teacher strikes. Over the last year, she blocked strikes in Chicago, Los Angeles and other cities against austerity demands due to Biden’s ending of pandemic relief funding and Trump’s cuts. During the Obama years, Weingarten colluded with billionaire Bill Gates and other school privatizers. The AFT’s slogan was “School reform with us, not against us.”

Fascists may fear teachers, as the title of her book suggests, but they have nothing to fear from Randi Weingarten. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, she allied herself with right-wing anti-vaxxers against teachers opposed to reopening COVID-infested schools.

Functioning as a State Department asset, she helped provide a “democratic” veneer to Ukrainian neo-Nazis which spearheaded a Western-backed coup in 2014. Today, these forces have their own units in the Ukrainian Army and their outsized political influence is bound up with the official rehabilitation of World War II-era Nazi collaborators. She is also an avid Zionist who supports

Israel's genocide in Gaza, notwithstanding occasional statements for public consumption.

Weingarten herself is not a Nazi, and her Jewish background no doubt makes her a target of the extreme right. But her adaptation to such forces flows from the class logic of her position and the union bureaucracy as a whole. They were long ago integrated with the state and corporate boardrooms, and these connections and their six-figure incomes depend on their ability to prevent significant organized resistance in the working class.

But the massive growth of opposition has forced some tactical adaptations on Weingarten's part. While a longtime supporter of "establishment" Democrats, she is now working alongside the Democratic Socialists of America, which is a faction of the Democratic Party, and has endorsed DSA member Zohran Mamdani for mayor of New York City. Since winning the party primary, Mamdani has walked back his populist campaign rhetoric to reassure Wall Street and the party leadership that they have nothing to fear from him.

Her decision to resign from the Democratic National Committee was over factional disagreements related to the party's increasing inability to channel and sideline mass opposition with left demagoguery, one of the party's core traditional functions for American capitalism.

Her support for the October 18 "No Kings" demonstrations is aimed at corraling opposition behind Democrats like JB Pritzker and Gavin Newsom, and limiting it to endless protests which do not change anything. "If there's five to 10 million people... it's going to send a message to Donald Trump that people don't like the loss of freedom," she said.

Before the meeting ended, this reporter asked:

Ms. Weingarten, you raised the danger of fascism. It is a very real danger. Tomorrow, Pete Hegseth and Trump are meeting with generals as they plan to deploy troops to Portland and other cities. Why aren't the NEA and AFT preparing a strike of their 3 million members to drive the Trump administration out? Six months ago, you said, 'go to the courts, go to Congress,' but that has only emboldened Trump. Teachers in Los Angeles and other cities have been working without a contract for months. Why have you opposed calling a strike of every teacher in this country?

"I'm not opposed to a strike," Weingarten claimed. "A strike is one of the vehicles that one does. They are normally an economic vehicle against a boss." Her evasive statement that she is "not opposed to a strike" against Trump is undermined by her refusal to raise it on her own.

What she is saying is that workers should limit themselves to purely "economic" struggles over wages and benefits—which the AFT has also worked to sabotage. To the extent that they concern themselves with politics, it should be limited to support for the Democrats and various Democratic Party campaigns.

Knowing full well that a national walkout against Trump would

be a political strike, she had to admit that recent mass strikes and protests drove from power the South Korean president who declared martial law in December 2024.

Such a movement in the United States would have explosive and revolutionary implications, and that is why union bureaucrats like Weingarten live in constant fear of such a development. For the working class, however, the defense of democratic rights is, as history shows, a matter of life and death.

The comments of Weingarten only underscore again that the most critical prerequisite of such a struggle is breaking the grip of the union bureaucracies and the Democratic Party and unleashing and organizing the immense economic, social and political power of the working class against the fascist threat.

This can only be done through the formation of rank-and-file committees in every factory, workplace, school and neighborhood where the strategy and tactics of the fight to drive Trump from power can be discussed and organized. Uniting all sections of the working class and youth, these committees will become the centers of resistance to Trump's fascist government, the complicity of the Democrats, and the broader assault on democratic rights and living standards.

Serious educators in attendance at the Detroit area event backed the Socialist Equality Party's call for mass action by the working class. One handed out an open letter addressed to Weingarten recalling the 1942 Norwegian teachers' resistance to the Nazification of their schools in German-occupied Norway. Despite arrests and deportations, 10,000 educators refused to join the fascist-controlled union, forcing the collaborationist Quisling regime to drop its plans to incorporate the schools into the fascist state.

Pointing to this heroic action, this educator told the WWSWS, "Hopefully, we shut down the schools, so people can't go to work. If we don't band together and do something, there is going to be nothing left." Supporting the call for a general strike, she said, "The only thing we can do is impact this country financially. But we don't just strike, we go with our list of demands: 1) Nobody is retaliated against; 2) Donald Trump, you leave and all your money leaves politics too. We need to say: we want what we want, not what you want."

Another retired history teacher added: "People need to go back and study their history. First of all, read what is a dictator, what is authoritarianism, what is an oligarchy. Compare it to what is going on today, and they will see it's a playbook and it's being played. People have to stand up and get involved, they can't sit by. I wish we could do what they do in Europe, like in France when they went after social security, everyone went on strike."



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