

Teachers union bureaucrat falsely claims to support a “general strike,” while insisting school workers “Obey Now, Grieve Later”

Nancy Hanover, Jane Wise, Tom Hall
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The recent WSWs exposure of the National Education Association’s (NEA) injunction to teachers, “Obey now, Grieve Later,” directed at preventing educators from walking out against ICE with their students has angered educators nationally and triggered a defense of the bureaucracy by a “teacher union rep” on social media.

The WSWs article, which received over 3,000 upvotes on Reddit, revealed the thoroughly reactionary policy of the NEA. It stated:

As students walked out in opposition to fascistic attacks that threatened their communities, friends and families, teachers were ordered to do the opposite: remain in their classrooms, obey administrative directives and suppress any collective response, under the guise of “student safety.”

Union locals issued directives to teachers warning against participation in protests, reminding them of school districts’ policies on staff conduct, and instructing educators to enforce attendance and disciplinary rules against student protesters. These interventions were intended to block the participation of educators in actions framed as part of a national general strike, which threatened to draw teachers into a mass movement independent from the union apparatus.

It concluded:

The power of the working class must be brought to bear against oligarchy and inequality. But this requires new organizations which are accountable to workers, not the political establishment, and a strategy based on the mobilization of the working class, not its suppression. Democratic rank-and-file committees are required to organize real protections for student and educator safety, based on collective action and solidarity with broader sections of the working class.

Many comments objected angrily to the revelations of the NEA’s openly reactionary position. But the article clearly touched a nerve in the apparatus, prompting an angry response on Reddit from someone who identified themselves as a union rep. They wrote:

The NEA General Assembly has already voted for a provision to lay the groundwork for a general strike in 2028 in conjunction with

UAW. These things take time, and you have to develop things for members in states that have anti-strike legislation.

In other words, “Don’t take a stand now. Wait for two years, when it might be ‘legal’.”

This, in response to Trump’s open flouting of the law, including the use of paramilitary ICE forces occupying cities, the murder of protesters, the seizure of men, women and children to incarcerate or deport them and the imposition of massive austerity on workers by slashing jobs and destroying public education.

This is not a plan for resistance but a political cover for support of the Democrats. The proposal for a May 1, 2028, “general strike” was first promoted by UAW President Shawn Fain in October 2023. The idea was invoked to provide a “militant” smokescreen for the betrayal of the national “stand-up strike” (dubbed by workers the “bend over” strike), which has led to the layoffs of thousands of autoworkers with the UAW’s acquiescence.

This phony “general strike” call—in reality, a vague call to align multiple contract expirations around May 1, 2028—is promoted by the Democratic Socialists of America and its operatives in the unions, including Sara Nelson, President of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA (AFA-CWA).

The timing of this call for a strike makes clear that it is a campaign stunt designed to drum up support for Democrats in the 2028 general elections. Indeed, the NEA or UAW have no intention of calling a real strike even in the future, or, if they do, it would be a token action that does not challenge the status quo. Instead, they are using the promise of a strike in 2028 to oppose action now, giving Trump the critical time and space he needs to consolidate dictatorial power.

The experience in Minneapolis is illustrative. As spontaneous forms of resistance grew to ICE’s murderous operations and demands emerged from workers and young people for a general strike, various union locals expressed their support for a city-wide day of action on January 23. But the unions specifically blocked their members from participating in a mass walkout, citing no-strike clauses in the collective bargaining agreements they signed.

While more than 50,000 people marched through the streets in a powerful display of opposition on January 23, there were no organized delegations of teachers, healthcare, public sector, industrial and logistics workers because the unions, allied with the Democratic Party establishment, prevented a real general strike.

The union bureaucracy enforces no-strike clauses and demands that workers accept existing legal restrictions on strikes to preserve their role as a labor police force and ensure the continued flow of dues money and

investment returns into the unions' coffers. The labor bureaucrats are creatures of the state and corporate America, not workers' leaders.

To this end, the union rep presents a general strike as possible only through the sanction of the bureaucracy, through lengthy bureaucratic procedure.

The person writes:

"And while I support a General Strike, and was one of the delegates at the NEA GA last year who helped pull the general strike planning over the finish line (which at a meeting of 9,000 delegates from all 50 states IS NOT F...KING EASY)"

In addition to their arrogance and crudeness, the bureaucracy is painfully aware that workers are increasingly supportive of a general strike. They counter with the injunction that workers must "play the game." They go so far as to lecture readers on the "need" for a bureaucracy.

Tens of thousands of teachers know otherwise. The "rules and processes" instituted by the bureaucracy are not tools for struggle but for the suppression of struggle.

After these words were written, San Francisco teachers mounted a powerful four-day strike coinciding with 31,000 nurses at Kaiser Permanente. But the teachers' strike was promptly ended by the United Educators of San Francisco (affiliated with the NEA and American Federation of Teachers, or AFT), which settled for paltry 2 percent annual raises. The sellout followed an extraordinary intervention by the city's Democratic mayor and former House speaker Nancy Pelosi. The California Teachers Association (also affiliated with the NEA and AFT) has kept tens of thousands of teachers across California on the job without contracts since last summer, blocking strike action despite multiple strike votes.

This is only the most recent example of the collusion of the bureaucracy with the Democratic and Republican parties in stifling the independent mobilization of teachers. Last year, Trump eviscerated the Department of Education, vowed to close it down and turn Title I into block grants, withheld over \$12 billion in funding to schools and passed measures, including national vouchers, to destroy public education. The unions wrung their hands and filed lawsuits which changed nothing.

The bureaucracy is not a tool to be "weaponized." It is the weapon used against teachers.

The betrayals of the bureaucracy arise directly from their class interests. The NEA bureaucracy, holding roughly \$375 million in assets, inhabits a world entirely apart from teachers. It is an upper-middle-class social stratum which provides labor peace in exchange for their legal right to collect dues. For these services, NEA President Becky Pringle receives over \$514,000 a year, while top executives bring home between \$270,000 and \$380,000. At least 482 staffers collect six figures, with hundreds of additional officials—"organizational specialists," policy staff, managers, lobbyists and other full-time functionaries—collecting between roughly \$140,000 and \$190,000 a year.

The AFT has \$138 million in assets and disburses \$52.9 million in salaries and other perks to its top officials, including AFT President Randi Weingarten who pocketed \$514,000 in 2024.

Integrated into management structures, regulatory bodies and the Democratic Party apparatus, the material interests of this bureaucracy lie in maintaining capitalist stability, not mobilizing workers.

Will Lehman, a leader of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), is running for UAW president to spearhead this rebellion and demand the abolition of the apparatus and the return of power to the rank and file.

In his campaign announcement, he explains:

The truth is, this bureaucracy can't be reformed. It must be

abolished. The union parasites who collaborate with management and the state must be removed, and the resources of the union must be taken out of their hands and placed under the democratic control of the rank and file.

Social progress has never come through maneuvering within capitalist institutions but through independent mass action by the working class. A general strike is the product of the objective growth of class struggle. Every such struggle has involved the organic and direct participation of the masses in the build up for a mass strike.

Writing in 1906, Rosa Luxemburg ridiculed those trade union functionaries who believed that a "prohibition of 'propaganda' eliminate the problem of the mass strike from the face of the earth," or those who saw it as "means of struggle which can be 'decided' at their pleasure and strictly according to conscience, or 'forbidden'—a kind of pocket-knife which can be kept in the pocket clasped 'ready for any emergency,' and according to the decision, can be unclasped and used." The Russian experience in 1905 proved the mass strike to be "a historical phenomenon which, at a given moment, results from social conditions with historical inevitability," she concluded.

This "inevitability" is what the bureaucracy is fighting against. It is trying to disrupt this growing objective movement by sowing confusion, pessimism and complacency. The working class must respond by developing new channels where this opposition can be fully organized, maintaining independence and initiative free from the interference of union bureaucrats or corporate parties.

This means the formation of rank-and-file committees in every workplace, school and neighborhood, which are capable of resisting and defeating bureaucratic sabotage, build momentum by connecting the fight against fascism and dictatorship with the fight against job cuts and austerity and draw in ever wider sections of the working class for collective, mass action.

As Will Lehman says, "We as workers have enormous power. Without us, nothing moves, machines don't run. The trucks don't ship. The profits don't flow. But we have to use that power consciously. And that means getting organized."

If you are ready to fight for a general strike, form or join a rank-and-file committee, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) urges you to contact us immediately and participate in building a democratic, independent workers' movement. Read the program of Will Lehman and sign up today.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact