Tennessee’s “Victims of Communism Day” part of campaign against socialism in US schools

Jane Wise
13 November 2026

On Monday, November 9, Tennessee public schools observed the so-called “Victims of Communism Day” for the first time under a new state law. The day marks the 1917 October Revolution in Russia—November 7 by the modern calendar, October 25 by the Julian calendar then used in Russia—which established the world’s first workers state. The “holiday” was observed on Monday because November 7 fell on a Saturday. High school students in world history and geography received 45 minutes of instruction about suffering attributed to communist regimes.

The preamble of the law, House Bill 2089, declares that “communism has given rise to infamous totalitarian dictators, including Joseph Stalin, Vladimir Lenin, Mao Zedong, and Pol Pot”—a list that equates Lenin, the leader of the October Revolution, with Stalin, who led the political counterrevolution against it.

The law, signed in April by Republican Governor Bill Lee, ties the lesson to one of five subjects—Stalin’s Soviet Union, Mao’s Cultural Revolution, Castro’s Cuba, Pol Pot’s Cambodia, Maduro’s Venezuela—that are themselves a falsification. The crimes of Stalinism, and of its Maoist and Khmer Rouge offshoots, were the product of the bureaucratic betrayal of the October Revolution, not of Marxism.

The law’s inclusion of “Nicolas Maduro and the Chavismo movement” means students will be taught to see communism in a government US special forces overthrew ten months ago, whose successors have since handed the country’s oil to foreign capital at gunpoint. The lesson doubles as war propaganda—with Cuba next in Washington’s sights.

Teachers were excluded from the decision, yet the state, which provides no curriculum, has dumped the burden on districts and teachers without additional resources, training or compensation; in September, Nashville’s district had no date for even sample lesson plans. Teachers were forced to disrupt carefully planned courses, locate propaganda that satisfies the state’s requirements and construct a 45-minute lesson on short notice. Brett Kmiec, in his 26th year teaching at Nashville’s Hume-Fogg Academic High School, told the *Nashville Scene* the law is “a solution that is looking for a problem.”

The same legislature that refused to adequately fund public schools and kept teacher salaries below the national average now mandates that teachers spend their own time constructing anti-communist propaganda. The state treats teachers not as educators but as instruments for transmitting ruling-class ideology—and expects them to do the ideological labor for free. A second law, Public Chapter 708, writes anti-communism into Tennessee’s future social studies standards. Tennessee joins Florida, Texas, Arkansas and Arizona, states where Republicans have led the assault on public education for years.

But the campaign is not only a Republican project, and its bipartisan origins go back decades. The Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, the far-right outfit now supplying anti-communist curricula to schools nationwide, was created under legislation signed by Democratic President Bill Clinton in 1993. Congress authorized the National Captive Nations Committee, once co-chaired by the Nazi collaborator Yaroslav Stetsko, to establish it.

In December 2024, the House passed the “Crucial Communism Teaching Act” by 327–62. One hundred fifty-six Democrats voted to indoctrinate schoolchildren with anti-communist propaganda, joined by 171 Republicans. Among them were Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries, former Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and Progressive Caucus members Ro Khanna and Jamie Raskin. In November 2025, Jeffries and 85 other Democrats voted for a resolution “denouncing the horrors of socialism.” Jeffries is now poised to become Speaker.

A year after the House vote, the White House declared November 2–8 “Anti-Communism Week,” timed to the anniversary of the October Revolution. This September, Education Secretary Linda McMahon urged schools nationwide to expand anti-communist instruction, citing Tennessee as a model, because young Americans are “expressing positive impressions of socialism in record numbers.” The administration's response is to equate socialism with mass murder and political repression while presenting America's constitutional institutions as the embodiment of freedom, a clear reaction to the growing rejection by youth of capitalism.

What these Democrats voted for is a curriculum built on

© World Socialist Web Site

falsification. The Tennessee law, like the White House proclamation, repeats the claim that communism killed more than 100 million people, popularized by the 1997 *Black Book of Communism*. The figure lumped civil wars, famines and Stalin's purges into a single toll charged to Marxism; two of the book's principal contributors repudiated it.

A "Black Book of Capitalism" would have to include the dead of the First World War (15–22 million) and Second World War (70–85 million, including the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust); the Korean War (2.5–3.5 million); the US war in Vietnam and the wider Indochina conflict (2.5–4 million); the wars in the Congo (3.3–5.4 million excess deaths); the US-led post-9/11 wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere (4.5–4.7 million direct and indirect deaths); the partition of British India (500,000–2 million); the Indonesian military's anti-communist massacres of 1965–66 (500,000–1 million); and France's colonial war in Algeria (approximately 300,000–500,000). These figures exclude countless other colonial atrocities, political executions, massacres of workers and peasants, and deaths from preventable deprivation.

Needless to say, there is no "Victims of Capitalism Day." Instead, the state mandates an account of history designed to identify socialism, rather than capitalism, as the source of humanity's suffering.

The law's equating of Lenin with Stalin is a continuation of the Big Lie of the 20th century. The October Revolution was led by Lenin and Leon Trotsky. The Stalinist bureaucracy consolidated its power by murdering the generation that made it: the Great Terror of 1936–38, which the Soviet historian Vadim Rogovin called a "political genocide," annihilated nearly the entire Bolshevik leadership of 1917 and thousands of Trotskyists, and a Stalinist agent murdered Trotsky in 1940. Naturally, no Tennessee lesson plan will mention the Left Opposition and the Fourth International, which fought against Stalinism.

This is not the first time the state has weaponized public schools against the working class. During periods of extreme crisis, the schools have been dragooned into inoculating students against socialism: the Lusk Laws' loyalty requirements for teachers after the first Red Scare, the McCarthy-era purges, and Florida's 30-hour "Americanism versus Communism" course, mandated in 1961, two years after the Cuban Revolution, and required of every Florida high school student for three decades.

The escalation of the anti-communist campaign in schools is inseparable from the escalation of the class struggle. The ruling class is terrified of a generation of the working class that has rejected capitalism. Since mid-September, high school students in France have blockaded their schools against overcrowded classrooms, unreplaced teachers and crumbling buildings, as the government cuts social spending to expand the military.

Teachers and workers have joined them, and the movement has spread from Belgium, Italy and Greece to Germany, where tens of thousands of students have struck against conscription. Everywhere, the state has answered with violence and repression.

The same radicalization is under way in the United States. After federal immigration agents killed Renée Good and Alex Pretti in Minneapolis in January, high school students walked out across the country, including in Nashville, where they marched to the State Capitol. On Tuesday, that anger found a distorted expression at the polls: voters threw out the Republicans, and a majority called the war on Iran the wrong decision.

The Democrats, the party of Wall Street and war, and the Democratic Socialists of America, their left cover, are its first beneficiaries. But what this generation wants will be settled in the class struggle, not in Congress. The 45 minutes on November 9 are meant to head off the conclusion, drawn by young people from Paris to Nashville, that their future is incompatible with capitalism.

These are the very young people the ruling class is now reprocessing as raw material for the labor market and the military. The Trump administration has handed most K-12 programs to the Labor Department, cut the Education Department's research staff and is stripping away the humanities that develop the capacity for critical thought. They are being denied the tools to understand the society in which they live at the same moment they are being indoctrinated against the alternative to it.

As the WSWS wrote a year ago in response to the White House's "Anti-Communism Week" proclamation, "For the ruling class, the real 'crimes of communism' are not the actions of the Stalinist regimes but the legacy of the 1917 Russian Revolution itself." The ruling class is not afraid of Stalinism. It is afraid of 1917—of the conquest of political power by the working class and the abolition of capitalism.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site