



# Speak Out Now

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## NFL Owners Won't Dictate Our Lives!

The NFL issued a new policy in its latest attempt to stop players from engaging in protests against racial inequality and police brutality. According to the new rule, the League will fine teams if players on the field "do not stand and show respect for the flag and the anthem." As if it is somehow disrespectful to a flag to stand up against racism and violence. The new policy also encourages team owners to come up with their own punishments for players who protest.

The new policy came out of a meeting of the 32 owners of NFL teams, most of whom are millionaires and billionaires. There were only a few owners who expressed any opposition to the policy, like New York Jets owner, Christopher Johnson, who voted for the new rules, saying that he would pay the fine of any of his players who continue to protest. Jed York, owner of the San Francisco 49ers, abstained saying he wanted to hear more from the players. The NFL Players Association, the union of NFL players, was not allowed to participate in the meeting, and came out against the new policy.

This policy is in response to the wave of protests sparked by San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick in 2016. At the time, Kaepernick explained his protest, saying, "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses Black people and people of color... There are bodies in the street and people getting away with murder... I have to stand up for people that are oppressed."

Since becoming a free agent, Kaepernick has not been signed by any team because of his stance against racism and police brutality. His teammate, Eric Reid, who was the first to join the protest, also remains unsigned. But other players have continued to protest off the field. One player, Philadelphia Eagles safety, Malcolm Jenkins, helped create the Players Coalition, a group of NFL players working together in neighborhoods suffering from poverty and police violence. Jenkins spoke out against the new policy, saying that the League is trying to silence the players, to block their "rights to express themselves and use our platform to draw attention to social injustices like racial inequality."

Another player, Chris Long, Philadelphia Eagles defensive end, also criticized the policy, saying the NFL owners were only concerned about profits. He said, "this is a fear of a diminished bottom line...It's also fear of a president turning his base against a corporation. This is not patriotism. Don't get it confused. These owners don't love America more than the players demonstrating and taking real action to improve it."

This confrontation goes beyond the football field. It isn't about their claims of losing money. Last year the NFL made \$14 billion and is expected to make more next season. This is about power and who makes the rules, and not just about football. This ruling by the NFL owners reflects the power and attitudes of those who control the large corporations and think they own this society, and think they can tell us what we can and can't do.

The owners think they can tell the players to shut up and stay in their place. The fact that the owners are rich white men and the majority of players are Black reflects the relations in this society. And when Black players, sometimes joined by their white teammates, speak out against the injustices of this society, it doesn't just threaten the NFL. It threatens the relations of the whole society – the racism and the relationship between bosses and workers.

Kaepernick and those who have continued to speak out have shown another option. We don't have to be silent and just accept this society and all its problems. We can stand up for the kind of world we want to live in, one without racist killer cops, one free from poverty, and one with opportunities for everyone, not just the super rich.

Athletes can use their high profile positions to speak out for what is right – and the rest of us can too.

### **Lessons From the Recent Teachers' Strikes!**

Come teachers who participated in the education strikes in West Virginia, Arizona and Kentucky.

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**Oakland Technical High School**  
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