

For a nationwide general strike to halt the drive to reopen schools!

Statement of the Socialist Equality Party
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A growing movement is now underway of teachers, students and parents against the effort to reopen schools amidst the expanding coronavirus pandemic.

Over the past month, more than 300,000 educators and parents in the US have joined Facebook groups opposed to the back-to-school campaign. There have been protests and demonstrations in Mississippi, Arizona, Florida, Iowa, Alabama and many other states. On Monday, protests were held in dozens of cities throughout the country.

For this movement to succeed, it must be developed into a nationwide struggle, uniting educators with all sections of the working class in a general strike movement against the homicidal policy of the ruling elites.

The drive to reopen schools, supported by both the Republicans and the Democrats, is a linchpin in the broader back-to-work campaign. The demand that workers return to work, put into effect in May, is already responsible for 50,000 deaths in June and July. But the ruling class cannot get workers back to work if their children are not in school.

This is the same logic that is driving the effort to curtail or eliminate federal unemployment benefits, forcing workers to return to work or face hunger, homelessness and destitution.

The science is clear: Children are equally susceptible to catching COVID-19, have viral loads equal to or greater than adults, are more likely to be asymptomatic carriers, and transmit the virus at the highest rates of any age group. At least four schools that reopened last week have already had students test positive for COVID-19. Any school that reopens will quickly become a major vector for the spread of the virus throughout that community.

The effort to reopen schools, in other words, means that students will get sick and die, teachers will get sick and die, and parents will get sick and die.

In making the call for a nationwide general strike, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) urges educators and all workers to raise and discuss the following demands in their schools, workplaces and neighborhoods:

*** Keep all schools closed until the virus is eradicated!** With the virus spiraling out of control across the US, in-person instruction cannot be done safely.

*** Full funding for public education and online instruction!**

High-speed internet access, food distribution, mental health care, special education support and all other resources needed to provide the best quality remote learning must be guaranteed to every student and educator.

*** Halt all nonessential production!** Until the pandemic is contained, only key industries such as food production, medical care and logistics should remain open. Workers in those industries must be provided with the most advanced safety measures to prevent infection. All nonessential workers and laid-off workers must be provided with full unemployment benefits and access to free health care.

*** For a massive expansion of testing and contact tracing!** In order to contain the virus, universal testing must be provided and hundreds of thousands of contact tracers hired to track any cases that emerge and test and isolate those potentially infected.

The past seven months have demonstrated that the fight against the pandemic depends upon the independent intervention of the working class. The death toll keeps rising and the pandemic is spiraling out of control because the ruling class will not tolerate any measures that cut across its profit interests.

If that means the pandemic must rage on, so be it. The indifference of the ruling class to the massive loss of life was expressed most nakedly by Trump in an interview with Axios over the weekend. Asked to respond to the fact that 1,000 people in the US are dying every day, Trump replied, "They are dying, that's true. And it is what it is."

One could not have a clearer statement of class policy. On Monday evening, Trump declared his determination to press forward with the campaign to prematurely reopen schools, demanding on Twitter, "OPEN THE SCHOOLS!!!"

Trump does not speak just for himself. In an editorial Monday, "School-Opening Extortion," the *Wall Street Journal* gives vent to the social interests driving this policy.

The *Journal* denounces protesting teachers for engaging in "political extortion" by resisting the effort to reopen schools. "Children, who would have to endure more lost instruction, are their hostages," the mouthpiece of Wall Street writes. Teachers, it declares, are attempting "to coerce parents and taxpayers to dance to their agenda if they want their children to learn."

What contemptible hypocrisy! The ruling class has

systematically degraded public education for decades through the gutting of state funding and the promotion of charter schools, standardized testing and “school choice” schemes to divert funding to private and parochial schools.

The *Journal* has the gall to accuse teachers of using the pandemic to extract concessions. In reality, it is the financial oligarchy that used the pandemic to demand trillions of dollars in bailout money, sanctioned by the CARES Act passed in late March with near-unanimous bipartisan support. Having looted the state treasury, the ruling class now demands that workers get back to the job of producing profits to pay for it.

The editorial concludes by stating, “No political force should have veto power over the education of America’s children.” In class terms, the *Journal* is demanding that educators, parents, students and the working class as a whole have no say over whether schools reopen or remain closed.

While the Trump administration is spearheading the campaign to reopen schools, it has bipartisan support. In New York City yesterday, teachers, parents and students staged a protest against plans by Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio to reopen schools.

Both Republican and Democratic governors removed restrictions on nonessential production as the pandemic spread, sending workers back on the job to risk their health and lives to produce profits for the corporations.

Teachers are not fighting alone. There is growing anger and opposition in the entire working class. Their allies are students and parents in K-12 schools, as well as students in colleges and universities that are also moving to reopen.

Meatpackers, health care workers, farm laborers, logistics workers at Amazon, UPS and USPS, transit workers, service workers and the entire working class confront the same enemy. Autoworkers in Michigan and Ohio have already begun forming independent rank-and-file safety committees to organize opposition.

The ending of federal unemployment benefits this week threatens millions of jobless with poverty and eviction. Behind closed doors, the Democrats and Republicans are negotiating over how much these benefits will be cut and how quickly in order to create the best conditions to blackmail workers and get them back to work.

The opposition of teachers in the United States, moreover, is part of an international movement. Facebook groups opposed to reopening schools have formed in the UK, South Africa and other countries where the ruling class is enforcing the same policy.

To fight back, teachers must form independent rank-and-file organizations. The protests organized by the teachers unions are entirely inadequate. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA), subservient to the Democrats and the ruling class, are highly conscious of the radicalization taking place among educators and seek to preempt and control this movement. In 2018 and 2019, the

unions orchestrated the shutdown and betrayal of a series of teachers’ strikes, beginning in West Virginia.

The Socialist Equality Party urges workers in every industry and sector to develop an interconnected network of rank-and-file committees to prepare for a general strike against the opening of schools and the entire policy of the ruling class.

The measures demanded by teachers correspond to what scientists and epidemiologists insist is necessary to stop the spread of the pandemic. Two absolutely opposed social interests are involved. Teachers are fighting for life. The ruling class is fighting for profits and death.

The trillions that have been handed over to Wall Street and the financial oligarchy must be redirected to provide full unemployment benefits to all workers and universal access to health care and public education.

The development of a nationwide general strike would create a powerful impulse and would galvanize support internationally among workers who face the same life-and-death issues. The logic of such a struggle would place the American working class in a direct confrontation with the Trump administration, which seeks to maintain its rule through increasingly authoritarian measures, and the entire ruling class.

All the rights of the working class, even the right to life, depend upon the expropriation of the ruling class and the reorganization of economic life on the basis of social need, not private profit.

The only way to halt the reopening of schools, stop the spread of the pandemic and prevent millions more infections and deaths is through the mass mobilization of the working class in a revolutionary struggle against the source of all suffering wrought by the pandemic, the capitalist system.

The Socialist Equality Party and its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, are spearheading this fight. We urge teachers to contact us for assistance in organizing your struggle. We call on students and youth to support this struggle and join the IYSSE. Sign up for the World Socialist Web Site Educators Newsletter for updates on this fight.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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