

For a general strike against the reopening of schools!

By the Political Committee of the Parti de l'égalité socialiste (France)
4 September 2020

The Parti de l'égalité socialiste (Socialist Equality Party, PES) calls on teachers, young people and workers to oppose the reopening of schools. Despite the resurgence of the coronavirus, the Macron administration is overseeing the resumption of in-person teaching. Only the independent mobilisation of all workers and youth in a general strike will stop this murderous policy.

Millions of youth and teachers will be exposed to the risk of infection in overcrowded classrooms, rundown toilet facilities and public transportation. At least 5,000 new cases are now recorded every day, and the reproduction rate of the virus is growing daily. The Health Ministry has called the “exponential” spread of the virus “very worrying.” The decision to resume classes under these conditions testifies to the government’s flagrant irresponsibility.

The health regulations announced by the Education Ministry are derisory and dangerous. They state that physical distancing is not necessary if it “does not permit all students to attend school.” Students aged under eleven are not required to wear masks. The local educational body in Brittany, in western France, has announced that the detection of one case of coronavirus in a class is not enough to trigger the quarantining of the other students, and that instead three cases are necessary.

Yet scientific studies have established that children transmit the virus and can hold up to one hundred times the viral load in their airway tracts than do adults. The school reopenings in the United States and Brazil have already caused thousands of new infections and school closures in many regions. More than 70 French schools had to be closed when their partial opening in May triggered a wave of infections.

In April, two-thirds of parents opposed the restarting of classes after the lockdown. Sixty percent stated that the return to classes was dictated by economic considerations. Indeed, the European Union and its member states have

collectively granted 2 trillion euros in credit to the banks and corporations, and the profits to be obtained from this capital are to be extracted from the labor of the working class. But for parents to return to work, their children must be in school, whatever the cost in lives.

Macron, the president of the rich, is driving this policy of the EU. “We can’t bring the country to a halt,” he declared. Responding to the fears of the population in the face of the pandemic, Macron added: “We must address this anxiety without falling into the doctrine of zero risk.”

To stifle the fear of the French population without combatting the danger, the state is resorting to lies and misinformation. With thousands of new cases each day, President of the Scientific Council Jean-François Delfraissy brazenly declared: “It is certainly not a question of a second wave.” Other commentators are speculating without evidence that if the number of hospital admissions are rising less quickly than the number infections, the virus must have mutated and become less dangerous.

The trade union apparatuses and their political allies serve as the transmission belt for this propaganda campaign by declaring that the policies to treat the pandemic require only minor modifications. The teacher’s union SNUipp-FSU proposed postponing the school reopening by one week, while the General Federation of Labor (CGT) has called a protest for September 17, two weeks after the restarting of classes. As for Jean-Luc Mélenchon, he is demanding “social cohesion.” His party Unsubmissive France has declared that it is seeking inspiration for obtaining “social cohesion” by studying the First World War, when the Social Democratic parties used patriotic demagoguery and the “Sacred union” with the extreme-right to suppress workers’ opposition to the war.

Indeed, scientific data refute these irresponsible claims that the virus has become less dangerous. The number of

hospital admissions, which always lags behind infections, is already rising fast enough to saturate hospitals in October. Virologists have denied that mutations have made the virus less virulent, or that the danger of a life-threatening immune response has become less likely. Professor Bruno Lina told *Le Figaro*: “All viruses are ‘antigenically’ identical,” and so too therefore is the “human immune response they cause in the [human] organism.”

The government’s argument that a physical return to classes is essential to preserve social equality must be rejected. In fact, Macron’s contempt for the lives of the working class is an expression of his deeply unequal social policies: the slashing of pensions, the privatization of the national railway network and the destruction of the labor statutes for rail and public sector workers. The school reopenings are aimed at further enriching the financial aristocracy.

International resistance to the reopening of schools is already emerging. Hundreds of thousands of teachers, pupils and parents have joined groups hostile to school reopenings on social media in the US, Brazil, UK and elsewhere. Health and safety committees are being formed in the factories, schools and universities in the US, Britain and Germany, independently of the trade unions, which are the bribed allies of the corporations and state. In France, Red Pen Facebook groups have attracted thousands of teachers opposed to the reopening.

The PES solidarizes with their struggle and actions. It emphasizes that, to be successful, their struggle must be expanded throughout the entire working class. It is necessary to unify workers and prepare a general strike against the criminal policy of the ruling class. We urge teachers, workers and youth to discuss the following demands:

- **No physical return to classrooms until the pandemic is under control!** Learning must be carried out online or in small groups, physically partitioned in safe conditions.

- **Billions for teachers, schools and online learning!** To ensure safe conditions, facilities must be requisitioned or rented and teachers must be hired. Countless students, young adults and professional workers could teach under the direction of qualified teachers if properly paid. Schools and students’ homes must be provided with broadband internet connection and parents provided with necessary financial support.

- **For a massive increase in testing and contact tracing!** While the Trump administration openly dismisses testing in order to conceal the number of cases, the Macron government is still unable to test one million people per day as pledged. A massive increase in testing of the virus is necessary.

- **Halt all non-essential production!** As long as the pandemic is not under control, only key industries—food production, health, logistics—should continue. Workers in these sectors have the right to the most advanced health protection from the virus.

- **No layoffs and no bankruptcies of small business!** Macron has declared that millions of workers will be laid off and bankruptcies of small businesses will intensify. This is unacceptable. The billions that fill the pockets of the rich and bloat the CAC-40 stock index must be used instead to preserve jobs, provide a decent wage to all, and protect restaurants, tradespersons and other small businesses from the pandemic.

The PES calls for the formation of action committees, independent of the unions, to prepare for a general strike and ensure the safety of workplaces in every sector. As in May–June 1968, a general strike will pose the question of political power and the necessity of transferring state power to the workers’ own organizations of struggle. It would be an important link in the mobilisation of workers now emerging in the United States, Latin America, across Europe and the world.

The only way to stop the resurgence of the pandemic and the social attacks being prepared is to combat their cause: the capitalist system. This is the perspective of the PES, the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International. We urge teachers, youth and workers to contact us in order to organize this opposition, and sign up for the *WSWS Educators Newsletter*.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact