The global campaign to reopen schools drives COVID-19 deaths past one million

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The world is closing in on a grim milestone of one million deaths from COVID-19 since the onset of the pandemic. The United States, with only 4.25 percent of the world's population, accounts for nearly one-fifth of the deaths worldwide, or 200,000 people.

The reopening of schools is now a focal point of both the efforts by the ruling elites to abandon the most basic precautions against the spread of the virus and the growing resistance of workers and youth throughout the world.

In the **United States**, public health experts are warning of an "apocalyptic fall," in large measure because of the opening of schools and colleges. In a deliberate effort to conceal this danger, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Monday retracted passages from guidelines it had released just a few days prior that acknowledged COVID-19 is mainly transmitted through airborne particles. The retracted information included the following warning: "In general, indoor environments without good ventilation increase this risk."

On Monday, 90,000 pre-K and special education students returned to classrooms in New York City, the nation's largest school district. After a series of protests by teachers and parents last week, including at poorly ventilated schools, Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio delayed full resumption of in-person learning for hundreds of thousands of students until September 29, one week from today.

The reopening of the schools across the country has already led to tragedy, including the deaths of at least three teachers reported last week alone. Colleges and universities have also been hotspots, with at least 90,000 infections over the last few weeks. While this policy has been spearheaded by the Trump administration, it has been backed and implemented by Democrats who run state governments and the largest urban school districts.

In **Brazil**, which has the world's second highest number of COVID-19 deaths, with over 137,000 dead, the fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro has denounced educators who struck and protested against unsafe conditions as an "an extreme left" minority who do not want to work. His ostensible political opponents in the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) plan to resume face-to-face instruction in Sao Paulo, the largest school district in the Americas, with two million students, by October 7.

Across Europe, schools are reopening despite a resurgence of infections and death. A poll released in **Britain** Monday revealed that 82 percent of schools have been forced to send students home to self-isolate because they cannot get a test for the virus. Prime Minister Boris Johnson remains emphatic about keeping schools open no matter what the cost, even as new cases are expected to rise to more than 50,000 a day within the next several weeks.

In **France**, the education ministry announced Sunday that classes in preschool and primary schools will "continue to be held as usual" even if a classmate tests positive for COVID-19. In **Germany**, teachers and childcare workers are charging that government officials are deliberately concealing the outbreak of infections.

In **South Africa**, which ranks ninth on the list of total confirmed cases, the African National Congress is moving ahead with school openings this week after a delay due to a spike in infections.

What is motivating this global war against students, teachers and other educators?

Whether they admit it or not, capitalist governments around the world have adopted the policy of "herd

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immunity," that is, allowing the virus to spread without restraint. Even conservative estimates say this policy will lead to more than 23 million deaths globally in the coming years.

The US and many other leading capitalist countries took their lead from Sweden, whose government officials knew that schools would become superspreaders, but deliberately kept them open. As Sweden's chief epidemiologist Anders Tegnell wrote last March, they did so "in order to reach herd immunity more quickly."

Governments in the US, France, the UK and other countries pointed to Swedish officials' claims that keeping the schools open had not appreciably impacted the spread of the virus. But authorities in Sweden, which has one of the highest COVID death rates, have since admitted that they did not track infections among school children. And even larger outbreaks, which caused schools to close, were not counted in the official case totals.

The back-to-school campaign is driven not by public health concerns, let alone the needs of children, but by the interests of the ruling class. After handing over trillions of dollars to prop up the banks and major corporations, governments are sending children back to school so their parents can resume producing the profits needed to finance this mountain of debt.

The growing realization that governments around the world are deliberately infecting children and teachers with the deadly virus is provoking immense anger and opposition among educators, with hundreds of protests around the world against the reopening of schools and colleges.

On August 5, the Socialist Equality Party (US) issued a statement calling for the formation of rank-and-file committees to prepare for a nationwide strike to stop this homicidal policy. "The measures demanded by teachers," the SEP wrote, "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."

Since this call to action, a global network of Educator Rank-and-File Safety Committees has begun to emerge. Committees have already been formed throughout the US, including in the two largest school districts in the country, New York City and Los Angeles. Committees have been formed in Michigan, Texas, and Florida. Similar committees have been launched in Germany, the UK, and Australia.

These committees are independent of the corporate-controlled trade unions, which have worked to suppress opposition to the opening of the schools. The demands of the safety committees are based not on the interests of the capitalist class, which has enriched itself while a million people around the world have died, but what is necessary to protect the lives and well-being of children, educators and the entire working class.

In waging this struggle, the rank-and-file committees have adopted the demand for the immediate closure of all public, private and charter schools; full income protection to all parents and caregivers who stay home with their children; and for the trillions of dollars handed over to the rich to be redistributed to provide full funding for public education, online instruction, high-speed internet, food security, mental health care, special education support and all other resources needed to provide the best quality remote learning.

The rights of the working class, including the right to health, safety and life, depend upon the international coordination of its struggles and the development of a powerful socialist movement, whose aim is the expropriation of the ruling class and the reorganization of economic life on the basis of social need, not private profit.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and its youth and student wing, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), are at the forefront of the fight to mobilize the working class in a revolutionary struggle against the source of all suffering wrought by the pandemic: the capitalist system.

We urge youth, educators and all other workers to join the fight for life and the working class, which is the fight for socialism.

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