

COVID-19: French NPA's *Révolution Permanente* web site lines up with Macron's school re-opening

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Amid growing international opposition among teachers and workers to the reopening of schools in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the New Anticapitalist Party's (NPA) *Révolution Permanente* (RP) web site is making itself an accomplice of state policy. While making tactical criticisms of state health guidelines, it tacitly supports a deadly reopening of schools. Its demands are entirely compatible with the activities of the French union bureaucracy.

The unions are leading efforts to push workers back into the factories and pupils back to school. The Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) explicitly supports President Emmanuel Macron's and German chancellor Merkel's European Union bailout. It signed a May 20 statement with the German Union Federation (DGB) that "especially applauds the Franco-German initiative to relaunch the European economy presented by the French president and German chancellor on May 18, 2020 after the coronavirus crisis."

The reopening of schools and the massive bank bailouts are at the center of this plan. The back-to-school policy is accelerating the pandemic, which has already cost nearly a million lives worldwide. Everywhere this policy arouses enormous opposition. Hundreds of protests have denounced it; more than a hundred Facebook groups have been formed internationally, attracting hundreds of thousands of supporters.

In this context, RP has published a series of articles discussing how to reopen French schools. The article, titled "Reopening with Covid: 'schools are not ready' say an association of doctors," admits school reopenings "constituted a serious stimulus to the

epidemic as in Israel or Chile." In fact, German intelligence expects a million lives could be lost, just in Germany, without drastic social distancing measures.

However, RP claims that the danger comes not from recklessly reopening schools, but from "confusion" and "inconsistently applied" state health protocols: "The 2020 back-to-school took place on September 1, and already, classes have been closed in five establishments in mainland France and one in Réunion island. But even more worrying than the closure of classes are inconsistent health protocols reflecting the great confusion which dominates this new school year in these special circumstances."

RP worries that COVID-19 infections in schools and the absence of health measures are driving growing opposition among teachers and parents. In an article titled "A chaotic school restart: we want free masks, massive testing and recruitment," it writes: "With insufficient health procedures and a lack of human resources and means to safely receive pupils, reasons for anger among teachers are not lacking."

A class gulf separates the demands of teachers and workers want to stay safe and those of RP, which refuses to call workers and teachers to mobilize against the reopening of schools. The danger for teachers, students and their families stems not from one or other school reopening protocols, but from any attempt to reopen schools amid a deadly pandemic.

The WSWS and the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES) have called upon teachers to mobilize with other workers to prepare an international general strike against the reopening of schools and the return to work, which expose millions of people worldwide to mortal dangers.

In the United States, since the reopening of high schools and universities, more than 51,000 positive cases have been recorded on 1,000 campuses across the US, of which 35,000 occurred over the last three weeks. In France, the rapid growth of the pandemic is extremely dangerous. As the country records about 10,000 new infections per day, 32 establishments and 524 classes have closed after two weeks of the return to school.

RP provides a “left” cover for the carrying out of school reopenings by the unions and ruling elites. RP is not opposed to school re-openings and the back to work drive, quite the opposite. It tries to present its reactionary demands in a “militant” light—such as free masks and tests for students and teachers carrying out dangerous, in-person teaching in crowded classrooms—but RP has only minor differences with the State, compatible with trade union policy.

RP aims to channel mass opposition to school reopenings behind impotent calls to modify back-to-school health protocols, whereas teachers and workers have to oppose the back-to-school campaign itself.

Teachers and workers are facing deadly conditions. RP covers for this policy, insisting it is not a conspiracy: “There is no conspiracy to be found in the health and economic measures taken by the ruling elite. This would be to imagine spiritual darkness (a state of mind that it would then be possible to change?), where in fact it is only a question of class interests. One must not let a crisis go to waste, as the airline companies so often remind us.”

In fact, history has shown there is no worse “darkness” than accepting to sacrifice millions of lives to the material interests of the capitalist class. The pandemic has shown the ruling elite’s contempt for workers’ lives. For months, governments internationally were informed of the deadly nature of the virus by intelligence agencies and Chinese authorities. But they long refused to take efficient measures like social distancing and lock-downs, and the middle class parties like the NPA acquiesced to this reactionary policy.

The only viable strategy for workers in these dangerous conditions is to mobilize to impose a lock-down in decent conditions for all, spending massive resources on supporting workers and small businesses and increasing health care spending, in an international

struggle by the working class to take power. This requires a political break with parties like the NPA, which are tied to the union apparatus and the ruling establishment.

Conscious that workers’ radicalisation is developing outside the unions, RP proposes “committees of teachers, parents of pupils, students and school staff, independent of school management and the State, emerge in the situation in order to propose an alternative to the capitalist handling of the return to school and its consequences.”

RP proposes to create workers and teachers committees. However, unlike the PES, it does not make clear that organisations created by workers need to be rigorously independent from the trade unions. This is because, like the NPA as a whole, it is closely tied to the CGT union and wants to subordinate these committees to the unions and thus to the European Union’s policies.

The NPA as a whole speaks for affluent elements of the upper middle class tied to the unions and the universities. Its support for EU policy is rooted in material class interests. Through EU bailouts, the financial aristocracy injects billions into the banks and financial markets. On the one hand, the state then forces workers and pupils back to work and school in order to extract profits on these vast numbers of capital; on the other hand, these finances flow into the coffers of the unions and the stock portfolios of the affluent middle class.

Teachers and workers should expect nothing of benefit from RP. Workers and teachers face the task of creating their own independent committees of action, breaking with the unions and their allies like RP and the NPA, and to mobilize these committees in a struggle for socialism against the pandemic and the capitalist system.



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