

Spanish pseudo-left covers for union complicity in back-to-school drive

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25 September 2020

With opposition mounting to the Spanish government's back-to-school drive, the pseudo-left Morenoite group Workers Revolutionary Current (CRT), the sister party of the Argentine Socialist Workers Party (PTS), is seeking to cover for the unions' complicity in the homicidal reopening of schools. The CRT, and its daily publication *Izquierda Diario*, is refusing to oppose the return to classrooms, aiming instead to divert opposition to it into impotent channels.

There is an enormous resistance in the working class to the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government's reopening of schools, as coronavirus cases continue to soar. Within barely two weeks of children returning to classrooms, already over 700 COVID-19 incidents have been reported in Spain's schools, with numerous education centres having to partially or completely close their doors. Tens of thousands of new infections are being reported every day, with daily death tolls averaging around 100—and rising.

According to the latest report from the National Epidemiological Surveillance Network of Instituto Carlos III, the number of children below age 15 infected rose to nearly 8,000 (14 percent of the registered positive cases) in the week from September 7 to 14, coinciding with the back to school campaign.

Numerous educators' strikes have already broken out in Spain in opposition to a return to classrooms under these manifestly unsafe conditions. But these strikes have been isolated by the trade unions, which have limited industrial action to one-day or short-duration protests and limiting them to only some of Spain's 17 autonomous regions.

In this context, the CRT has issued a number of statements on the return to school, including, most prominently, one titled "Starting the academic year

with strikes: Prepare a plan of action among workers, families and students." Despite its radical-sounding rhetoric, the statement provides everything but a program of struggle for the working class, combining "left" demagoguery with tacit support for reopening schools and attempts to tie workers to the reactionary union bureaucracy.

While the statement makes certain tactical criticisms about the lack of safety measures in education centres, describing conditions in schools as "precarious and unacceptable," these amount to no more than window dressing for the CRT's support for the reopening. The danger to teachers and students cannot be alleviated by arguing over the details of the reopening protocols, but by opposing the Spanish government's back-to-school campaign itself. The CRT is hostile to this perspective.

"In-person [teaching] in hygienic and sanitary conditions," the CRT statement declares, "and with appropriate working practices which respect student ratios and safe distances, cannot be guaranteed in the current conditions of precariousness and lack of investment."

While acknowledging that the safety of teachers and students "cannot be guaranteed," with large numbers of infections already being reported in education centres, the CRT does not call for schools to be closed as a matter of urgency.

Instead, the statement makes vaguely worded references to teachers' strikes being the "starting point" of a "new series of mobilisations" which would, at some unspecified point in the future, provide "urgent educational measures in the face of the pandemic" and "question 40 years of neo-liberal policies." This will do nothing to prevent the infections and deaths taking place in the present day, as the virus rampages through Spanish schools and neighbourhoods.

In fact, the unions are doing everything possible to prevent the outbreak of further “mobilisations” and to contain and dissipate workers’ opposition. While the CRT refers to some of the strike calls made by unions such as the General Confederation of Labour (CGT), General Union of Labour (UGT) and Workers Commissions (CC.OO), it makes little criticism of the token character of this industrial action. In fact, the strike called in Madrid by the CGT, CCOO, UGT and the Madrid Union of Education Workers (STEM) for September 22–23 is already a climb-down from an earlier call for four days of industrial action at the start of the month.

Fearful that working-class resistance could develop outside the unions, with the treachery of these organisations plain to see, the CRT proposes the formation of “assemblies of teachers, non-teaching staff, students and precarious and unemployed parents, in order to consider and pursue a whole series of educational, but also (and especially), social concessions, which go much further than the immediate educational and health measures.”

“If we commit to developing the mobilisation and the widest self-organisation,” the CRT statement declares, “we will succeed in breaking and overcoming the short-haul union logic of these bureaucracies. ... We must think about revolutionising the methods of organisation and break with the divisions which the union bureaucracies have imposed.”

But while the Morenoites variously refer to the main unions as “bureaucratic” or as imposing “divisions,” they issue no call for a break from these organisations themselves. In fact, they make ludicrous appeals for support not just from the unions, but from parties across the political spectrum: “it is critical that all the political, social and union organisations support them [the mobilisations].”

This is veiled reference to their repeated attempts to form a front with parties with ties to the capitalist state and the current PSOE-Podemos government, like the pseudo-left Anticapitalistas and Catalan and Basque nationalist organizations.

“Self-organisation” or “assemblies” which do not base themselves on a complete and unequivocal break with the unions, Podemos and their satellites, like the CRT itself, would be no more than adjuncts of the trade unions, organically hostile to the working class.

Concluding their statement, the CRT tries to promote the supposedly more radical unions like the CGT. *Izquierda Diario* advises the CGT to “position themselves as an alternative to the adaptation of the large union apparatuses.” To do so, the statement counsels, the CGT must “put forward a bold policy that unites social discontent and leads to questioning not only the insufficient measures taken during the pandemic, but to a break with neo-liberal and capitalist politics in their full extent.”

The Morenoites’ only concern is to ensure that the deep-seated opposition in the working class does not escape the confines of the union bureaucracies, hoping to tie workers to the CGT union, which is an integral part of the unions’ campaign to defuse mounting working-class opposition.

The CGT has long worked to strangle opposition from workers disenchanted with larger unions. When they are the majority union, as among bus and metro workers in Barcelona, they are however just as quick to sell out strikes as the pro-PSOE UGT and pro-Podemos CCOO.

The CGT has done everything in its power to prevent a broader outbreak of opposition to the homicidal back-to-work and back-to-school plans. It has joined with the UGT, CCOO and other unions in calling for token one- or two-day strikes.

The way forward for education workers in Spain lies not in appeals to the CGT bureaucracy or to any other faction of the political establishment. The WSWs and the International Committee of the Fourth International have called upon teachers, parents and other workers to form rank-and-file committees, independent of the trade unions, and prepare an international general strike against the homicidal policy of in-person school reopening carried out to boost capitalist profits.



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