

Teachers strike across France against first day of deadly school reopenings

Will Morrow
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As schools reopened across France yesterday after the holidays, mass opposition among students and teachers at the Macron administration's deadly school reopening policy is growing. Assemblies of teachers met at schools yesterday morning and resolved to strike against the lack of safe conditions to prevent the spread of the virus. Images are being widely shared online showing students crammed like sardines into hallways, classes and cafeterias.

The government is reopening schools despite a second wave of the pandemic that its own scientific council has warned will likely be larger than the first, which killed more than 30,000 people in France and 200,000 across Europe. More than 37,000 people have now died from the virus in France, with another 416 deaths reported on Monday.

Despite the government's cynical claims that it is determined to protect students' psychological well-being, the school reopening is driven by entirely different concerns: to ensure that parents can continue to work, and that the corporations can continue to obtain profits throughout the pandemic, regardless of how many lives are lost as a result.

A Twitter account reporting on opposition among teachers to the Macron government reported dozens of local strikes by teachers organised in assemblies at schools across France on Monday morning.

At the Balzac de Mitry-Mory school, 24 teachers organised to strike at 8 a.m. yesterday. At the Romain Rolland school in Clichy-sous-Bois near Paris, another 22 teachers voted to strike. In the Feyder school in Epinay-sur-Seine near Paris, 47 teachers voted by 100 percent to strike at 8 a.m. Classes were held for 60 students out of 1,600 enrolled. At the Berthelot school in Pantin, north of Paris, 28 teachers resolved to strike against the demand that they return to classes "as

though nothing was happening."

At Bachelard school in Chelles, 20 staff lodged their "right to strike" with the direction due to unsafe conditions caused by the pandemic and "non-respect of the health protocol."

At the Jean Jaurès school in Clichy, teachers walked out, and the administration told families that the school may be forced to close. At Von Donghen school in Lagny, classes were cancelled after teachers threatened to strike. At the Flora Tristan school north of Paris, half of teachers supported a strike at 8:30 a.m. At the Joliot-Curie school in Nanterre, teachers voted 53-3 for a strike at midday. At the Olympe de Gouges school in Noisy-le-Sec, over 30 teachers voted to strike in the morning. At the Eugène Hénaff school in Bagnolet, 18 teachers voted to strike.

At the Alice Guy school in Lyon, the student body reportedly refused to enter classes, and there were reports of further strike action by teachers in Montpellier and Marseille, as well.

Safety protocols inside schools are essentially non-existent. One teacher writing into *Le Monde* stated: "I feel humiliated. While in the media there are grandiloquent statements to support our teachers, in reality there is nothing. ... The health protocol is the same as before the holidays! The students continue to change between classes, with 30 crammed into a class. We have not received disposable masks since the beginning of the confinement! We have the right to only two masks on Sundays!"

Existing protocols state that social distancing must be respected "to the extent that it is possible." Given the overcrowding of schools, this simply means they do not apply anywhere. Parents are advised to "take the temperature of their children before they go to school" and to "keep them home" if they have a temperature of

over 38 degrees. Since it is well known that many cases are asymptomatic or exhibit symptoms after they have already been contagious, this will do nothing to prevent the spread of the virus in schools.

The protocols state that “social distancing is not required for students in the same group (class or year level) either in closed spaces or the exterior.”

Students aged over six are being made to wear masks, contradicting the government’s earlier lies that young students were neither contagious nor in danger from the virus.

“It will be very difficult for them to stay six hours a day with a mask, while on the street, they don’t have to wear one,” Haydée Leblanc, a primary teacher in Abbeville, told France3. “Then they will spend their time touching the mask! Before, we were told that wearing the mask for young children was counter-productive, because they could actually spread the virus faster with their hands. Apparently the doctrine has changed.” Noting that it was a public relations stunt, she stated, “it’s above all to add something to the health protocol to reassure families.”

The Macron administration is pursuing a policy that it knows will cause thousands of additional cases and deaths. Schools will act as vectors for the transmission of the virus, countless children will become infected, and will infect their family members and friends.

The school reopening takes place as reports by the government’s own scientific advisory bodies make clear that the partial confinement of the population, while keeping non-essential business and schools open, will not significantly cut the spread of the virus. The Pasteur Institute estimated that the partial confinement would bring the rate of reproduction of the virus to 0.9, with the “pessimistic scenario” that it would be brought down to only 1.2 by the government’s measures, meaning a continuing exponential spread of the virus.

Children will also fall sick and die. Official claims that youth are not in danger from the virus are lies. French health authorities report that 170 people aged under 19 are currently hospitalised with COVID-19, of which 23 are in urgent reanimation care. The long-term health impacts of the virus on youth are still unknown.

France’s corrupt union bureaucracies are hostile to a struggle against school reopenings. They have been in continuous discussions with the Macron administration on its reopening policy, and have done nothing to

mobilize the mass opposition among teachers and students. On October 30, the unions cynically published a notice authorising strike action between November 2 and 7. But its aim was only to provide some means of maintaining control over the growing opposition among teachers.

The growing strike movement among teachers and students must be unified and organized. For that, teachers need their own organizations, rank-and-file school safety committees, independent from the trade unions.

The struggle to close non-essential industries and let workers and youth safely confine at home requires the mobilization of teachers and broader layers of workers in mass strike action. The best allies of teachers and students in France are their counterparts in Germany, Britain, and across Europe and beyond. These forces can fight to prepare and mobilize workers for a European general strike and a struggle for the working class to take state power and impose a scientific policy against the COVID-19 pandemic.



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