

# French police assault students demanding school shutdowns to stop coronavirus spread

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3 November 2020

Yesterday, French riot police tear gassed and broke up protests by high school students calling for the closure of their schools to prevent the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

Protests and blockades of school entrances were reported in over a dozen schools. They were organized the day after a wave of teacher strikes that began Monday with the resumption of classes after the holiday break. Teachers at dozens of schools held local meetings shortly before 9 a.m. and voted not to enter classrooms under conditions where there were no protocols to realistically prevent the spread of the virus.

In Paris, students held protests outside the Hélène-Boucher, Maurice Ravel, Sophie Germain and Colbert schools, blockading the entrances with bins. A large protest of 300 students blocked the entrance to the Aristide-Briand school in Saint-Nazaire. Thirty students protested outside Pasteur school in Besançon, and students picketed outside the gates of the Delaune school in Bobigny, northeast of Paris.

“We are still just as crammed together in the corridors and stairways at 8 a.m. It’s the same,” a student told *France Info*. “We are still 36 in a class with all the windows closed,” said another.

A student at Hélène-Boucher told *Actu Paris* that they were blocking the school entrance “to denounce the absence of measures against the coronavirus. We should not be here. We are at risk of getting the virus and passing it on to our parents.” He denounced what he called a “farcical confinement.”

Jean, a Parisian student, told *RT* journalist Charles Baudry: “We still have the same classes, filled with students side-by-side. We are demanding the reduction of student numbers by half, and the putting in place of appropriate social distancing measures, to be safe at school because this is putting everyone in danger.”

~~Another~~ *Inf* student “We toldare physical education without a mask, although all our sports teachers have had coronavirus. The canteens are not closed. We are at least 500 people inside the canteen, and we eat right next to each other.”

Teams of dozens of heavily armed riot police with shields were sent in to break up the protests. At Colbert, police used tear gas against 15- and 16-year-olds. Up to 60 students are reportedly now facing fines for having refused police orders to break up.

The police also tear-gassed journalists who were filming the assault. Clément Lanot, a freelance journalist, tweeted: “I’ve just been tear-gassed by a policeman (with other journalists) although I am identifiable (press badge + camera). Elbowed and threatened with being run over by a car. We were outside the perimeter of the police intervention; not all the police were wearing masks.”

The Macron administration’s police assault demonstrates the diametrically opposed class interests involved in the response to the coronavirus pandemic. Students and teachers are demanding a scientific policy involving the closure of schools and health protocols to stop the spread of the deadly virus and save lives.

The Macron administration, acting on behalf of the corporate elite, is determined to keep schools open to force parents to remain on the job so that corporate profits can continue to flow. In all but name, the Macron administration and its counterparts across Europe are pursuing a policy of “herd immunity,” allowing the schools to spread the virus. It is determined to suppress opposition to this criminal policy, including through police repression.

Teacher strikes continued yesterday. As on Monday, the strikes are being organized by teachers themselves from below. The national union federations published a

formal in-advance notice last Friday in order to sanction the growing opposition among teachers and prevent it from developing outside their control.

Strikes were particularly concentrated in the outer northern suburbs of Paris, which have higher levels of poverty, lack of resources and understaffing. Sixty percent of teachers are on strike at the Triolet Middle School in Saint-Denis. At the nearby Pablo Neruda Middle School in Stains, 38 teachers were on strike on Tuesday, up from 20 on Monday.

In Hérault, in the south of France, strikes are taking place at the Jean Moulin, Poussan, Gignac, Villeneuve-lès-Maguelone and Pierre Mendès France schools.

Hundreds of teachers have posted, liked or shared comments and photos on the Red Pens Facebook group protesting against the conditions in their classroom. One teacher posted a photo of her class, with students side-by-side with no social distancing, with the comment, “Here is a class in a room that was provided for the official health protocols.”

Morgane, another teacher, commented: “So no more than 30 are allowed at a funeral, six for a marriage, but 32 in a classroom??? Making small children wear a mask while visits to aged care homes are allowed? It’s nonsense and even institutional abuse of our children.”

Bérenice added: “In my school we aren’t allowed to mix red chairs and blue chairs. Otherwise everything is the same [as before the confinement].” Olivier said, “This minister bears a significant responsibility for the propagation of the virus.” Another teacher, Anissa, said, “I wanted to do the same [take a photo of her class] but I didn’t dare.”

Geneviève said: “Same in our class of CM2 [second year of primary school] where there are 31... soon 32! Yet the health care minister says that the majority of classes have a maximum of 25 students... The exceptions surpass the rule.”

Grégoire noted that the cover of the recently updated health care protocols released by the Macron government included a picture of just four students in a classroom, with more than a meter separation between them. “A nice provocation and judicious choice of illustration for the page of the ‘strengthened’ protocol,” he wrote.

To organize their struggle for a scientific policy against the coronavirus pandemic, students and teachers should form committees of action inside schools to

monitor health and safety conditions and prepare a counteroffensive against herd immunity policies. These committees must be independent of the trade union bureaucracies, which have collaborated with the Macron administration in the systematic de-funding of education and the reopening of the economy, which have created the conditions for the second wave of the pandemic.

An appeal must be made to students, parents and teachers in France and across Europe for joint strike action to demand the closure of schools and the enforcement of health care protocols by school committees themselves. The fight against the pandemic is a fight against capitalism and the ruling class’s herd immunity strategy of sacrificing the lives of millions upon the altar of its own profit interests.



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