

”We are being sacrificed for the profits of big business”

Teachers strike across France against Macron administration’s “herd immunity” policy for schools

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Yesterday, tens of thousands of teachers across France took part in a one-day strike action to oppose the Macron administration’s criminal and reckless policy of allowing the coronavirus pandemic to spread through schools.

According to the trade unions, the strike participation was between 20 percent among primary school teachers and 45 percent in middle schools. The government’s own figures, which generally underestimate the actual participation in strikes, recorded participation of 8.8 percent and 10.4 percent, respectively.

The one-day strike followed a week of walkouts organized by rank-and-file teachers since the resumption of classes following the holiday break last Monday. Teachers at dozens of schools convened meetings before school and voted not to enter classrooms, under conditions of a massive resurgence of the virus and where not even the most minimal social distancing measures are in place to prevent its spread among students, teachers and their families.

Students also protested at about 10 high schools in the Paris area yesterday. They blockaded entrances to schools and demanded that schools be closed. As with last week’s protests, riot police were swiftly called out to violently repress the protests using tear gas and charges with riot shields. Police set up cordons outside several high schools and demanded papers from every student before allowing them to enter.

The Macron government’s policy has allowed the pandemic to spread beyond control. Another 472 people died on Tuesday. The day before, 551 had died, the highest daily death toll in the autumn, and only

slightly below the record of 613 people who died on April 6. In the last 24 hours, the number of occupied emergency care beds increased by 472, bringing the total to 4,736. A total of 3,168 people were admitted to hospitals. The rolling seven-day average of new coronavirus cases is now well over 40,000, equivalent on a per-capita basis to more than 200,000 cases daily in the United States.

Teachers who participated in the strike spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* and described the disastrous conditions inside schools. Teachers are not informed when a child is absent because of coronavirus, meaning that it is impossible to determine if a cluster is developing and react. Classrooms remain full with between 25 and 35 students. Canteens are full with hundreds of students at a time. Corridors, public transportation, and courtyards are packed, with no social distancing maintained.

Kelly, who teaches cooking in the Bouches-du-Rhône region, at a middle-school where more than 80 percent of teachers participated in the strike, told the WSWS: “Last week we had a student who came on Monday saying she had been in contact with someone who was positive, but she was awaiting the result. Tuesday she was absent because she was positive. But the school administration told us nothing. We are not told about students or possibly colleagues who get the virus. We only find out by communicating with the teachers and the parents.”

Typically, classes at her school had 30 students, she said. “My son is in middle-school, he takes the bus that is so full that he can’t even sit. Personally I’m very

angry at the lies of our minister. Since the first lockdown he has declared that everything is ready, organized, under control. In fact, we are being left to ourselves.” She added that she believed the government’s aim was to consciously allow the virus to spread among young people through the population. “No matter that there can be serious cases among children and especially no matter for us and our families.”

She noted that in her family, which included restaurant workers, “they do not understand why they cannot have 20 customers but 400 students can be in a canteen.” The opening of schools was aimed at keeping parents at work. “In fact, we are being sacrificed to protect the profits of the large companies.”

Laure, a middle-school teacher of 14 years in the Rhône Alpes region, told the WSWS that in her school, “there is no disinfectant in the teachers’ rooms, the class sizes have not been reduced even though the rooms are extremely small (very old building with small rooms). We don’t know officially the names of the students who are positive in order not to ‘worry us.’ We only find out from students. I know that my school is doing its maximum. But the maximum is nothing when you don’t have the means.”

Reports by teachers that they have no way of knowing the number of cases also coincide with growing evidence of a deliberate cover-up of the COVID-19–infection numbers of students. The government’s figures claim that 3,528 students tested positive last week, but the statistics from the ministry of public health show that in the first three days of the week, more than 25,000 people aged 0–19 tested positive. The government has not made any attempt to reconcile the obvious contradiction between these figures.

The strike and protests by teachers and students show that mass opposition is building against the Macron government’s policy. Schools are being kept open not out of any concern for students’ well-being, but in order that their parents can be sent to workplaces and corporate profits can continue to mount. As a result, tens of thousands of people are being threatened with death in the coming months in France alone.

The urgent task is the development of a unified industrial and political movement of the working class to demand the closure of all schools and non-essential

workplaces, to allow workers to confine in their homes and to stop the spread of the virus and save lives.

The trade unions did not call yesterday’s strike action in order to wage such a struggle. In fact, the strike was aimed at demobilizing the movement of teachers, who had already begun to take action over the course of the past week.

The unions labeled the one-day action a “warning strike” to the government. They insisted in their statement for the strike that the “priority must be to keep schools open,” and included vague demands for an “emergency plan” for a large recruitment of teachers. If a majority of teachers decided not to participate in the strike, it is because they saw it as yet another in a long series of single days of action organized by the unions whose purpose is only to let off steam among workers, without any aim of organizing a genuine struggle.

As the Socialist Equality Party outlined in its statement published for the strike, we urge teachers, students and parents to form their own independent rank-and-file safety committees in every school, independent of the trade unions, which are the allies of the corporations and the government. These committees would provide the means for mobilizing the independent strength of teachers and students, including for a strike for the immediate closure of all schools.



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