Jacobin endorses deadly school reopening plan reached by Los Angeles teachers union

Dan Conway
7 April 2021

Throughout February and March, the pseudo-left Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and its affiliated *Jacobin* magazine maintained radio silence on the drive to reopen Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), which rapidly escalated and was pushed through by the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) on March 21. Two weeks later, on April 4, *Jacobin* published an unqualified endorsement of the union's deadly deal to reopen the second largest district in the US, a week before elementary schools are set to begin reopening on April 12.

The article, "LA Teachers Won a Safe Schools Reopening by Organizing," states, "Despite the obstacles of opening school buildings in a pandemic, UTLA members are preparing to return to school sites in a far safer way than in any other major urban school district in America. This is a result of our social-justice-focused union leadership and school site organizing."

The *Jacobin* piece was published the same day that several public health officials and epidemiologists appeared on Sunday talk shows to warn of the accelerating nationwide spread of more infectious and lethal variants of COVID-19, identifying reopened schools as major sources of infections.

Speaking on CBS's "Face the Nation" program Sunday, former Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Dr. Scott Gottlieb stated, "What we're seeing is pockets of infection around the country, particularly in younger people who haven't been vaccinated, and also in school-aged children." Similar statements were made by Dr. Michael Osterholm and other noted epidemiologists.

With only 16.3 percent of US students still learning remotely, the latest increase is directly attributable to recent school reopenings under the Biden administration, which has distorted science in order to prematurely reopen schools and the broader economy.

Reports continue to emerge revealing that within weeks of a school district reopening, regional coronavirus infection rates begin to skyrocket. The starkest example is Michigan, which this week recorded 357 outbreaks in K-12 schools and another 131 outbreaks at child care facilities, accounting for more than a third of that state's total outbreaks. Illinois has also recorded a surge of infections, with Chicago Public Schools (CPS) the primary source of outbreaks statewide, after the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) carried out its miserable betrayal to reopen schools.

The latest *Jacobin* piece was written by DSA member Betsy Long, who identifies as a teacher and UTLA organizer. This is the first and only article listed under Long's byline, and is meant to give the impression of a rank-and-file teacher endorsing the UTLA in glowing terms. There is not one iota of honest journalism in the article, which reads like a transparent puff piece ghostwritten by the union itself.

The article falsifies the actual history of negotiations that led to the agreement to reopen LAUSD, in order to provide political cover for the UTLA when coronavirus cases inevitably increase as schools reopen. Even the basic chronology of the agreement is presented dishonestly. Long writes, "LAUSD's superintendent, Austin Beutner, announced an April 19 elementary campus phased reopening after the 'Sideletter Agreement' with United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA), the city teachers' union of which I am a member, was finalized."

In fact, the agreement was not finalized before Beutner announced the April 19 reopening date. The agreement shows a signature by UTLA president Cecily Myart-Cruz dated March 9, the same day the April 19 reopening date was announced. Beutner did not sign until the next day, March 10, however, while the agreement lists a further revision made on March 12.

Long omits the fact that once teachers voted in favor of the agreement, Beutner announced that more than 60 elementary schools would actually reopen a week earlier on April 12, a move that produced enormous anger among teachers but not a murmur of opposition from the UTLA leadership.

Long notes that 91 percent of LA teachers voted in favor of three safety measures which were then incorporated into the reopening plan, including "full vaccinations for schools staff, returning only when LA County is out of the purple tier, and enforceable safety conditions and protocols at every school." She fails to mention that there are no enforceable mechanisms in place for safety conditions and that the county manipulated infection categories to falsely claim it was out of the "purple tier" on March 9, the same day that the tentative agreement was announced.

While presenting the vote on the final agreement as widely popular, Long does not inform her readers that more than 12,000 UTLA members abstained from voting on the final plan. Factoring in these abstentions, only about half of all UTLA members actually agreed to return. The vote itself took place after the UTLA presented reopening as a fait accompli, explicitly telling teachers they either had to vote "yes" to return to schools under the unsafe conditions they negotiated or the district would reopen regardless. In the words of UTLA chief negotiator and secretary Arlene Inouye to angry teachers on the UTLA Facebook page, "the [only]

© World Socialist Web Site

option is to return to school."

According to the upside-down narrative presented in the article, the UTLA fought tooth-and-nail for the "safe" conditions outlined in the agreement, with teachers only having themselves to blame if schools become new hotbeds of coronavirus infections. Moreover, it is the teachers' responsibility to push the myth of a "safe reopening" in order to draw hesitant parents and students back into unsafe classrooms.

Long writes, "The next step for UTLA members like me is to prepare our schools and classrooms to be the safest environment possible. Less than half of students plan to return to campus this semester, which means we have a lot of trust to build in the months ahead. We aren't just advocating for ourselves, we're also advocating for our students and community."

She then states, "The safety of schools and the ongoing fight for schools our communities deserve is dependent on our ability to maintain and continue building a strong and militant membership. That membership now has to focus on enforcing the Sideletter Agreement."

One is compelled to ask, if this agreement is "very strong" and the "gold standard" of school reopening plans, as claimed by *Jacobin* and the UTLA, then why are teachers being asked to enforce the agreement provisions themselves? *Jacobin* is essentially telling teachers to ensure that there are adequate inventories of masks, hand sanitizer and air filters for their rooms. Educators must disinfect surfaces, ensure that students are regularly tested and contact-traced while maintaining six-foot distance between them at all times, all while providing complex mixtures of remote and in-person learning to students.

The *Jacobin* article speaks as if the pandemic is a thing of the past which should no longer play a role in political decision-making. The article mentions the reckless attitude of city and county governments last year in "keeping malls open, maintaining domestic and international travel, and allowing unsafe working conditions to persist at the virus' peak." It notes the more than 23,000 COVID deaths in Los Angeles County along with an alarming increase in the numbers of children with the deadly COVID-19-related multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C).

However, the article studiously ignores the growing numbers of restaurants, gyms, churches, salons and other indoor areas currently reopening for in-person business. On Tuesday, California Governor Gavin Newsom announced that the state would fully reopen the economy and do away with the tiers system altogether by June 15.

While both big business parties, the corporate media, the teachers unions and the pseudo-left proclaim a "light at the end of the tunnel" as more Americans receive vaccinations, the reality is that their reopening policies will lead to further needless suffering and death as the deepening surge of more dangerous variants threatens to render existing vaccines ineffective.

Jacobin and the DSA speak for privileged sections of the upper-middle class who seek to stifle working class opposition to the disastrous policies pursued by the ruling elites. They fully place themselves in the camp of Biden, Trump and the fascistic Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro who refuses to take any measures to contain the pandemic spread as Brazil's health care system collapses.

Last September, *Jacobin* interviewed Martin Kulldorff, a prominent advocate of reopening schools as part of the "Swedish model" based on infecting the majority of the population with COVID-19 in order to achieve so-called herd immunity. The article failed to challenge Kulldorff's arguments, with *Jacobin* publisher Bhaskar Sunkara later retweeting Kulldorff's claim that, "The lockdown is the worst assault on the working class in half a century." After the interview, Kuldorff gloated that, "In the United States, there is now a second front against lockdowns, from the left."

In January, *Jacobin* defended the betrayal of the Hunts Point strike by the Teamsters' union, aided by US representative and DSA member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez .

The mobilization in support of both the Teamsters and UTLA betrayals is motivated by concern over the growth of rank-and-file committees of workers spearheaded by the Socialist Equality Party, as well as the regular coverage of union betrayals on the *World Socialist Web Site*. In order to force through their betrayal, the UTLA and their affiliates censored articles by the WSWS and statements from the West Coast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees calling for a "No" vote from appearing on their Facebook pages. In Southern California, there is now a coordinated campaign of UTLA and DSA supporters using the April 4 *Jacobin* article to rebut the SEP and WSWS's call to keep schools closed and learning remote.

Jacobin, the DSA and the UTLA are now actively engaged in efforts to bring students and teachers back to classrooms at the most dangerous phase of the pandemic, which will lead to massive increases in infections and deaths. They are thus culpable in the ruling elites' policies of social murder, and must be viewed by educators and all workers as their class enemies.

Enormous opposition to these policies exists and must be mobilized through the expansion of the rank-and-file committees that exist in Los Angeles, San Diego and Northern California, which are part of an international network of such committees fighting to close all schools and nonessential workplaces until the pandemic is contained, while securing full income protection for all workers affected by lockdowns.

The California Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees will be holding a meeting this Saturday, April 10, at 2 p.m. Pacific Time, to discuss the state of the pandemic and outline a fighting strategy for educators, parents, students and all workers. We encourage all those who oppose the drive to reopen schools and wish to save lives over profits to register here and invite your coworkers, family and friends.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site