

French parents support October 1 school strike call in the UK

Our reporters

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A growing number of workers and parents in France support the call for an October 1 school strike made by Lisa Diaz, a mother of two children in the UK, and supported by the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The demonstration on Friday is being held to oppose the policy by governments internationally of allowing the coronavirus to spread unhindered among children through the reopening of schools. It is raising the demand for the eradication of COVID-19, through a combination of temporary lockdowns and coordinated public health measures on an international scale.

The appeal for the strike has met with support from parents and workers in France. As in the UK, the Macron government is allowing the virus to spread unchecked among children in France. Yesterday, there were more than 40 children hospitalised with coronavirus in France, including nine of them in intensive care units. At least seven children under the age of ten have died in the country since the beginning of the pandemic, including one on August 20. Thousands of others are being left with the damaging and as-yet still unknown consequences of Long Covid.

The Macron government is responding to the spread of the virus through schools by further loosening protocols, abandoning even mask mandates in primary schools beginning in some districts on October 4, and trialling a new policy that would prevent closures of classes even after a case is detected.

A WSWs reporter spoke to Elisa Zeno, a member of the Forgotten Schools and Children Association, founded to protest state policy on the COVID-19 pandemic.

Asked about the call launched by Lisa in Britain, Elisa said: “We fully support it. We support it as individuals and also as a group of parents who are struggling to make our schools safe. We understand the

problems they are facing [in Britain] very well, because we have the same problems here. I would even say that we admire these parents in Great Britain who are reacting to defend the children. We fully support their initiative ... It is an unacceptable risk for children now, since it is possible to prevent infections at school.”

Elisa criticized the policies implemented by the Macron government and across the European Union: “It is the same problem as in Great Britain. It is unacceptable to let children get infected. Their last protection has just been withdrawn, because in France they were going to wear masks, but now this is to be changed. This is for children, who are aged between 5 and 12. How is it possible that children are supposedly the priority, which is what the president always says, but at the same time ... they are withdrawing this protection without even providing others, like air purifiers?”

Elisa welcomed the international support Lisa’s call for a strike was receiving, in the United States and beyond. She said, “We hope French parents will show solidarity for this initiative, like parents in other countries. Finally, defending the interests of children is a universal issue, it goes beyond national borders, and unfortunately our governments have all adopted unacceptable policies.”

Elisa pointed to the enormous difficulties facing working parents in each country due to state policies and official disinformation: “Here, we face a situation where the Pediatric Society is still going on comparing COVID-19 to the flu! ... Parents are not well informed about the risks of Long Covid or other long-term risks involved.”

Amande, a mother of two students in pre-school and primary school in Aix-en-Provence, told the WSWs, “I support this strike in the UK for many reasons. I do not

think that children are protected by the French state faced with the risk of coronavirus compared to other countries which have put in place protocols that are more serious...”

She added that “the concerns of parents like myself are not related by any opposition party or parents association. There is only the group @Ecole_Oubliee which has restated our demands. Like other parents I have the impression of preaching in the desert... The English strike could allow us to extend our voices, but perhaps for that it will be necessary that it be continued and perhaps repeated.”

Raphaëlle Lapôtre, a mother of two children aged one and three years old, from the Sens region of central France, explained why she supported the October 1 school strike call. “This virus has been presented to us as a severe flu, which while yes causing a lot of deaths among adults, is nonetheless harmless once the infection is over. But this is not true. Many scientific studies have shown that COVID affects all the organs, including the brain, pancreas, heart and lungs.”

“It affects those who are vulnerable and the healthy, adults and children, and even if it’s true that not everyone is affected the same way, the damage caused must be taken into account in every case. But in France, with regards to children, the government endlessly minimises the impact of the virus on their health, and these even though the Delta variant is more dangerous and more likely to affect them.” She noted that “it is claimed that children who have had COVID have only had psychological problems, caused only by the anguish of lockdowns.”

“When I refer to this situation with those around me ... I am often asked why the government would want to do harm to children,” she said. Even “investing in schools and public places to improve their aeration involves a cost, clearly minimal with regard the impact of coronavirus, but still too great for the French state, which has been pursuing austerity for more than a decade.”

“I think there is a vicious cycle,” she added. “The economic world (finance and big business) does not want a new strict lockdown, which would be inevitable if we want to suppress the virus; this layer therefore promotes scientists and personalities to introduce ambiguity or even argue against restrictions among public opinion.”



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