Parents United group attacks October 1 school strike

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UK campaign group Parents United has issued a statement opposing today's school strike and seeking to intimidate its supporters.

Published Wednesday, the statement cites "the potential legal implications embedded in any proposal to withdraw a child from school" as the reason for opposing such "radical action, as protecting vulnerable families must remain the heart of our work."

This last-minute intervention is an indication of the broad support which parent Lisa Diaz's call for a strike has received. Lisa's videos calling for the action have been viewed 124,000 times. The hashtags #schoolstrike2021 and #parentstrike2021 have had a reach of over 2 million in the last week.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has posted messages of support from parents, students, school teachers and other workers in the UK, United States, Germany, Canada and Sri Lanka. Resolutions and statements of support have been published by the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (UK), the Network of Safe Education Action Committees in Germany, the Teachers-Students-Parents Safety Committee in Sri Lanka, the Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, the Tennessee Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee and West Coast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees in the US.

Doubtless, there are many followers of the Parents United group who feel the same way. But the response of its leaders exposes them as political policemen, seeking to contain opposition to unsafe schools rather than mobilise it.

The words "COVID", "Long COVID", "infections", "hospitalisations" and "deaths" do not feature once in their statement, despite tens of thousands of children catching COVID-19 every week, scores being hospitalised with the virus every day and close to 90 dead.

Instead, their statement warns of the need to protect "vulnerable families" from "the formation of political allegiances", "proposed initiatives that are attached to fringe political parties or groups", "fringe groups who hold political beliefs and motives that inhabit the far ends of the political spectrum", "political point scoring" and "overtly political parties that we believe have the potential to co-opt the direction and intentions of the movement."

Despite the references to "parties", this broadside is levelled solely against the Socialist Equality Party (SEP). Parents United's claim that the SEP is seeking to "co-opt" the movement for safe schools is a McCarthyite slander. The SEP, its international sister parties and the *World Socialist Web Site* have waged a fight against the policy of mass infection since the start of the pandemic. We have argued that such a struggle must necessarily be taken up by the working class.

Our attitude to the school strike was detailed in a perspective this Monday, "British parents plan October 1 school strike—An important step forward in the fight against the pandemic", noting that the proposal reflected "the growing opposition in the international working class to the homicidal pandemic policies of the ruling elites" and was "part of a growing wave of resistance by the working class, which is entering a new stage of the class struggle."

Its central significance, we argued, "is that it has been organized independently of the unions and capitalist political parties and has evoked a powerful response among parents and workers worldwide."

The independence of the school strike initiative and the global response it has received is why Parents United is so fiercely opposed to it. The organisation was formerly known as Boycott the Return to Unsafe

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Schools (BRTUS). Last year they called their own school strike for November 5 and asked the education unions to stand "shoulder to shoulder" with parents.

The unions instead continued to work with the Conservative government and the Labour Party to demobilise opposition to the opening of unsafe schools. When the SEP criticised the trade unions for refusing to support the parents' action, the leadership of BRTUS banned anyone who posted WSWS material from its Facebook page.

To cultivate ever closer relations with the trade unions, local authorities and others, their next action was to reject any repeated protest by their members, which their latest statement says, "diminished our standing to advocate for our group with respected stakeholders."

When they write that their programme is to "apply pressure on various political and legal institutions… through established and legitimate channels" and based on "a wider understanding of the socio-legal systems in place", what they are advocating is the complete subordination of parents and workers to organisations that have spent more than a year suppressing opposition to unsafe schools and enabling Prime Minister Boris Johnson to pursue his murderous agenda.

The Tories have no qualms about working with the real "fringe groups" on the far right of the "political spectrum." Last September, Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Chancellor Rishi Sunak held a private meeting with Sunetra Gupta, a leading signatory of the Great Barrington Declaration calling for a policy of mass infections. Last week, leading Tory right-winger Sir Graham Brady met with supporters of the anti-vaccine, mask and lockdown HART (Health Advisory and Recovery Team) group in Westminster.

With no way forward to offer their followers, Parents United resorts to outright intimidation to oppose today's strike. Their statement warns that "we are unsure that we will have sufficient resources to support all those parents who will need help as a consequence" of taking strike action—by which its supporters are put on notice that anyone victimised by the state can expect no help from Parents United.

More ominous still, the statement declares, "We cannot ethically, or in good conscience, advocate for *the use of children* in political point scoring. This places families and children at risk of *radicalisation*, and *safeguarding* is essential [emphasis added]."

"Radicalisation" and "safeguarding" are terms closely associated with the government's "anti-terror" Prevent scheme, established by Tony Blair's Labour government in 2007 as a means of giving the state the tools to police political thought in education. Invoking this threat and accusing parents of "using" their children is despicable.

The efforts of Parents United to undermine today's school strike only underscore the event's significance. There is an unbridgeable political gulf between the Labour and trade union bureaucracy, and those organisations oriented towards it, and the broad mass of the working class now coming forward to defend health and lives.

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