

The October 1 parents' strike: An important step forward in the international working-class struggle against the pandemic

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The call issued by Lisa Diaz for parents in Britain to keep their children home today in a one-day strike, as a protest against the irresponsible reopening of schools that has placed young peoples' lives at risk, has evoked deep-felt support from the working class.

Messages of solidarity are pouring in from working people in Britain and throughout the world. Videos posted by Lisa Diaz on her Twitter account have been viewed by hundreds of thousands of people.

The exact number of parents who will keep their children home today cannot be known. The call for action has not been reported in the national media. But what might be described as a global online picket line has been established and it is being honored by an international working-class audience.

This critical initiative to oppose the unsafe reopening of schools takes place as the pandemic is raging out of control, particularly among children. In the UK, 59,000 children were infected with COVID-19 in the first two weeks of school reopenings. In the United States, more than 200,000 new pediatric infections each week have been reported over the past five weeks, the vast majority the direct product of the full reopening of schools.

With nearly five million dead already, according to official figures, more than 500,000 new COVID-19 cases are now reported every day, along with more than 7,500 deaths. In the UK, new cases have risen from 2,000 a day in May to nearly 35,000 a day over the past month. In Canada, cases have increased ten-fold, from 400 a day in July to more than 4,000 a day in September. More than 1,600 people are dying every day in the United States, as hospitals, including pediatric facilities, overflow with the sick.

The October 1 action takes place as the class lines have emerged very clearly. On the one hand are the proponents

of mass infection, which is pushed in one form or another by governments and corporations throughout the world. On the other are workers, who are demanding emergency measures to stop the pandemic and save lives.

Whether it is the UK's Johnson government, which has promoted "herd immunity" from the start of the pandemic, or the Biden administration, which promotes the fiction that inadequate mitigation measures combined with vaccination can stop the pandemic, the end result is the same: Schools and factories are to remain open even as the pandemic rages out of control. The universal reopening of schools is driven by the imperative to keep workers on the job to sustain corporate profits and the enrichment of the financial elite.

Around the world, the ruling classes are demanding that whatever measures are still in place be removed. In New Zealand, one of the few countries that has pursued a policy of elimination of the virus, cases have jumped sharply in recent days, as the opposition National Party is demanding a shift to "vigorous suppression"—that is, the loosening of economic restrictions.

The *Financial Times* reported this week on an open letter from 79 major corporations in Australia denouncing the "big mistakes" of federal and state governments in attempting to mitigate the spread of the virus. The companies, according to the FT, "said the nation will have to learn to 'live with the virus,' as many other countries have done."

"It's time for corporate Australia to turn its disquiet and rumblings into a roar," Greg O'Neill, chief executive of Melbourne-based fund asset management company La Trobe Financial, told the FT. "It's time for courage and honesty."

The "courage and honesty" of the ruling class means the demand that the virus be allowed to spread, infecting

millions of more people and killing hundreds of thousands.

The October 1 UK school strike is significant in a number of respects.

First, it articulates the strivings of the working class for a policy based on saving lives, not profit. It is based on the demand for the implementation of the measures that leading scientists and epidemiologists insist are necessary to eliminate and eradicate the virus: the shutdown of schools and non-essential production, combined with mass vaccination, universal testing and contact tracing, and the provision of full income to all workers and real assistance to small businesses that are affected.

Second, the action has been organized independently of the unions, which have at every point worked to implement the homicidal policies of the ruling class. In the UK, the Trades Union Congress has opposed vaccine mandates while accepting the reopening of schools without even the most minimum mitigation measures.

In the US, the teachers unions have campaigned aggressively for the reopening of schools, threatening the lives of teachers, children and the broader community.

On September 30, the day before the October 1 strike, the American Federation of Teachers held a town hall meeting with the far-right parents group Open Schools USA. The panel included Jay Bhattacharya, one of the authors of the Great Barrington Declaration, the document drafted in consultation with the Trump White House aimed at promoting mass infection as a means to achieving “herd immunity.”

Third, the initiative is developing as an international movement. While the call for the parents strike began in the UK, it has attracted the support of workers throughout the world. In addition to the individual statements of solidarity, the action has been endorsed by teachers groups and rank-and-file committees in many countries.

In a Twitter post published on Thursday afternoon, Lisa Diaz called the response overwhelming, noting that her initial call had been retweeted in Canada, the US, Germany, France, Spain, Australia, and Japan. “It really has shown that we might be from different corners of the world, but our struggle is still the same. We just want our children to be safe at school.”

Lisa called on parents and workers throughout the world to post their videos and messages of support on social media using the hashtags #SchoolStrike2021, #SittingDucks, and #October1st. The *World Socialist Web Site* endorses this action and encourages its readers to join the online picket line by posting messages of support on

Twitter and other social media platforms.

The October 1 strike confirms certain critical elements of the perspective of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI): the revolutionary role of the working class, the international character of the class struggle, and the irreconcilable conflict between the interests of workers and the corporatist trade unions.

In May of this year, the ICFI established the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), based on the perspective that the fight against the pandemic requires a genuine rank-and-file rebellion from below, organized on an international scale.

The initiative of the October 1 strike must be carried forward through the building of independent committees in every section of the working class, uniting the fight against the pandemic with the growing struggles of workers throughout the world against inequality and capitalist exploitation.

As we encourage and promote this development, the ICFI and its national sections raise with workers engaged in this struggle the need to draw the more fundamental political conclusions. The fight against the pandemic, and against war, inequality, exploitation and dictatorship, is a fight against the entire capitalist social and economic order. It raises the necessity for workers of all countries to take power, expropriate the ruling elites, and establish a socialist society based on rational, scientific and democratic control of production.



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