

Parents and teachers denounce Parents United group for opposing October 1 school strike

Our reporters
30 September 2021

Campaign group Parents United posted a statement Wednesday opposing today's school strike as a "radical action" with "potential legal implications", insisting the campaign for safe schools remain "apolitical" and accusing parents of being co-opted by "fringe groups". The statement has been met with widespread opposition.

Lisa Diaz, who made the call for the strike, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "Martin Luther King would be spinning in his grave," referring to King's comment that "One has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws." She continued, "Whatever happened to 'Boycott the Return to Unsafe Schools' aka BRTUS [the former name of Parents United]? An average of 3 children a day are dying of COVID in the USA. 9 kids have died in the UK so far in September only.

"We have been writing strongly worded letters and petitions since March 2020. What has changed? Things have gotten worse not better. If now is not the time for action when is?"

The post of the statement made in the Parents United Facebook group has had its comments section disabled, preventing discussion. However, several people responded to the post on Twitter.

One user wrote, "Kids are collateral damage in the UK infection strategy. Have you seen the child infection rates? And we know 14% will get long Covid and many will lose a parent, carer or significant adult to Covid. How far has lobbying got us with gov? We have fewer mitigations now than before... We need to stand up together."

Leah explained, "I joined PU very early in the pandemic, when they were BOYCOTT RETURN TO UNSAFE SCHOOLS. If I'm honest after 19 months, schools are the most dangerous they've ever been. I'm seeing CV/CEV families infected at an alarming rate. After strict shielding and sacrifice.

"When school attendance makes infection a foregone conclusion. Action must be taken. I don't fear punitive measures half as much as reinfection. As much as loss of life and quality of life for families."

She challenged Parents United's claims that the strike involved the "use of children for political point scoring" and "places children and families at risk of radicalisation",

questioning, "One day? Or a letter of solidarity, for action globally with media engagement? You condemn this?? You call this radicalisation?"

Lizzy wrote, "Whilst I accept your position I don't understand what you mean by vulnerable families could be radicalised and it could be a safeguarding issue? A one day strike? Are you serious?"

Michelle asked, "Please look at this from a historical perspective. How many more lives will be lost, students harmed waiting for policy changes? To me, the extreme action here, is the assumption this will move through those means. This needs a pressure cooker. Not a simmer.

"I think it's unfair to suggest any parent would Use their child here. You are assuming students themselves aren't looking for a way for their voices to be heard. I am being threatened with prosecution. I can't just wait around anymore."

On the threat of fines and Parents United's claim to be "unsure we will have sufficient resources" to support parents who take strike action, **Amrit** wrote, "You seem to have concerns about 'legal implications' and 'attendance policies' but you fail to address the views of @GoodLawProject that the law is on parents' (and not schools/LAs') side in these circumstances."

Cal said of the statement touting Parents United's work "empowering our members to make informed choices and pushing for policy reform" through legitimate channels, "Whatever all that means, it ain't working!"

Speaking with the WSWs, teacher **Ruth** said, "This strike has come from ordinary parents and very quickly gathered momentum and support internationally.

"Three children died from Covid every week this month in the UK. A whole class of children is admitted to hospital every day with Covid in the UK. That's before we consider the onward transmission to siblings, parents and grandparents. A thousand people a week are dying from Covid in the UK. Who do we think all these people are and how do we think they caught the virus? We know that schools are vectors for transmission..."

"Parents United seem to imagine that speaking with

government or political parties or being seen by them as reasonable, will give them some kind of power to change things. Look at the teaching unions and learn. It will not.

“Many of us who are not able to withdraw our children from school completely need advocacy, support and solidarity just as much as those who are educating their children at home during the pandemic. The new attendance crackdown in the UK is going to make it harder for us too to keep our children away from school when there are outbreaks in the school or class which would previously have resulted in closure or isolation, or even when our children themselves are sick or need to be isolating.

“We know that there are a significant number of children and young people missing from UK schools... But tomorrow’s School Strike will make a huge impact if it also includes students who are normally in school. We have the right to be safe, a right to life, health and education. We have the right to safe schools. Why are we accepting this illegal policy that is a clear breach of our human rights? Enough is enough.”

Claire, a former teacher and a parent and founder of SafeEdForAll (Safe Education for All), told us, “I would say that it is hardly 'radical', whatever that is supposed to mean, with its connotations of danger. As a parent, to wish to remove your child from the path of danger, it is an innate human response. It is self-evident that schools are not safe places for our children during the pandemic, and not a penny, nor a thought, have been used to try and make them so...”

“I think also, many families, hitherto apolitical, have become aware of politics around this issue, suddenly becoming aware that their government are not taking their and their family’s health and safety seriously, and have begun to wonder what else this government are failing to do?”

“Many of them have already become frustrated with 'official channels', they have written hundreds of letters to those in charge, MPs, Councillors, Heads and Academy Trusts, to no avail. Same for the organisations designed to monitor these, the Health and Safety Executive, the Department for Education, the Children’s Commissioner and politicians from all parties.

“This symbolic, one day strike is borne of the frustration that they have done absolutely the right thing, calling out their concerns about guidance, policy, and the safety of their families, and eighteen months later, NOTHING has happened. It’s like living in a nightmare version of Groundhog Day.

“Our children are sitting ducks. There are no mitigations in place, no reduced class sizes, no masks, no bubbles. Nothing has been done about ventilation or vaccination.”

Brian, also a former teacher and a parent, said, “The government have implemented a policy of the mandatory mass infection of children by forcing them into schools, absent of any measures to protect them.

“In their statement, Parents United talk about how we have moved into a ‘very different phase of the pandemic’. They are right, we have entered a different phase of the pandemic, a

phase where we should be taking action and standing up for the health of our children...”

“The Parents United group state the need for them to remain ‘apolitical’ and a concern for children being radicalised as a reason for them not supporting the recent call for a school strike. What a lie! What about protecting children from the worst consequences resulting from exposure to Covid-19?”

“I fear this statement may expose a link between Parents United and the apparatus of the state (the unions and/or the main political parties), who are absolutely complicit in their support of the criminal and murderous actions of the government. It seems like groups like this exist to dilute the growing resentment against the actions of the government and funnel the anger through the political apparatus.

“Rather than stating a concern against the radicalisation of children, the group should focus their efforts on protecting children starting with supporting the actions of Lisa Diaz and the *World Socialist Web Site*.”

...

After this article was published, Lucia, a teacher, sent the following remarks:

“The statement from Parents United is pathetic. You can’t change government policy by being apolitical. The SEP is one of the very few political groups to take a principled stand against the government’s murderous pandemic policy. I am not a member of the SEP but I stand united with them and all those parents who object to our children and teaching staff being used as Covid fodder in a mass infection experiment, which is in the words of Mike Ryan of the WHO ‘epidemiologically stupid and morally bankrupt.’”



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact