

“Only awakening the working class can put a stop to this”

## French parent calls for rank-and-file committee to fight state COVID-19 policy

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This weekend, Raphaëlle, a mother of two living in Sens, France, spoke to the WSWS on her call to build a rank-and-file committee against the official handling of the pandemic. She called to support Lisa Diaz’s struggle in the UK who is defying threats by the state over her refusal to send her kids to school amid a wave of COVID-19. Lisa has received wide support on social media.

Raphaëlle explained that the bankruptcy of official health policies at each step of the pandemic had convinced her of the need to build an independent organization and movement. From the beginning of the pandemic, when then-French Health Minister Agnès Buzyn admitted that she downplayed the scope of the pandemic after telling the presidency, the state acted against workers’ interests.

“We knew from the end of the first lockdown [in May 2020] that the lockdown had come too late,” Raphaëlle said. “What was going on was unacceptable. There was dereliction of duty at the highest levels of the state. But in the current political system, opposition to government actions is in my view not sufficiently reliable. I felt that very clearly at the end of the first lockdown. What I did not entirely realize was how little opposition there would be from the main established parties. I thought more of them would take up this issue.”

Her anger grew as the French state suspended aid to locked-down workers in order to force them back to workplaces to make profits for the banks, even as the virus continued to circulate. A few months earlier, in January-February 2020, mass rail and public service strikes had opposed pension cuts. But no established party or trade union led any opposition to the

irresponsible and deadly policy carried out by the state and President Emmanuel Macron.

Raphaëlle added, “At the end of the lockdown, they blackmailed us on unemployment insurance. The line was, send your kids to school or you will get no more assistance. I thought, if they resort to such blackmail, something is going on. ... I really thought at a certain point there would be a general strike, it was [being treated as] a purely economic issue. So, of course, at a certain point there should have been a general mobilization of the working class. And since we had been in struggle just before the lockdown ... I was extremely surprised when nothing happened.”

The government, she said, “encouraged working from home and waited for the vaccine, but nothing was done in the schools to halt circulation of the virus. That was when I discovered the personality of our Education minister [Jean-Michel Blanquer], I realized what kind of people we are dealing with. He was constantly denying what was happening and the fact that children can transmit the disease.”

At that point, Raphaëlle sought out an alternative and to try to bring together opposition to the official policy via social media. “There came a point when, between us parents, we were telling ourselves, this is impossible, we can’t open the schools as long as the pandemic continues.”

As months went by, scientific data on the ability of the virus to infect many organs and to cause Long COVID, including among children, vindicated Raphaëlle’s refusal to send her children into unsafe schools. “It is as if I were sending my child into a radioactive area. It is completely irrational, when I see all the complications that can flow from this, the virus

can get into the brain, into many organs.”

Raphaëlle also stressed her opposition to appeals this summer from pseudo-left organizations like Unsubmissive France of Jean-Luc Mélenchon and François Ruffin to join anti-vaccine protests initially called by the far right. Raphaëlle said, “The left took a very wrong path there, absolutely. It is one of the great betrayals of our century.”

She explained, “I understand totally that there is anger against mandatory vaccination, because nothing was done to inform the public about the fact that the vaccine is safe. A population that is uninformed is a population that is angry. On the other hand, not every popular movement is necessarily a rational, revolutionary movement. ... So one can be courageous and go against its positions when that becomes necessary.”

It was at this time that Raphaëlle became aware of Lisa’s struggle in Great Britain against official threats aiming to force her to send her kids to school, despite co-morbidities making members of her family vulnerable to developing serious cases of COVID-19.

Raphaëlle applauded Lisa’s struggle and the support it has received internationally. “I think it is wonderful, it is really good for them, she is not alone in what is happening. ... We must think in terms of strategy and coordinate as much as possible with what is going on outside our borders, with what Lisa is doing. What Lisa is doing is very courageous, and I think that we can bring help to her, as well.”

Raphaëlle stressed the need for an international struggle, “for the good and simple reason that progress on public health has always been made in an international way.” This requires, she added, the unification of diverse layers of workers in different countries in a common struggle.

She said, “We are a bit walled off from each other. On the one hand, there are parents who don’t want to endanger their children. There are teachers who do not want to endanger children and who are in struggle against the Education ministry’s policies; they are in a situation that is really catastrophic. There are the struggles of health care workers themselves ... and attacks on public hospitals are part of the broader onslaught against social rights. Each on one side denounces what is happening. If we acted together, our voices would be heard much better.”

From this standpoint, Raphaëlle stressed the need to build a rank-and-file committee in France to support Lisa’s struggle and oppose the official policies on the pandemic, in line with similar committees being built in America, Germany and beyond.

Pointing to growing working-class anger and the European ruling elites’ turn toward neo-fascists, notably in the French presidential election campaign, she said, “I am pessimistic about the ability of the currently existing systems of power to turn onto a correct path. I fear actually that there would be something somehow similar to World War II, where the individuals who profited from that destruction, who for a time were forced to hide and bury themselves, will profit from this using underhanded means.”

She explained that, against a ruling elite carrying out an irrational policy leading to unnecessary mass deaths, the way forward is a direct assault on the privileges of the financial aristocracy. “We must enter into struggle because they will do nothing against the pandemic. They do not intend to act, they have no financial interest in acting. ... We must get beyond a perspective of negotiating with them,” she said. “We are watching the situation go by, impotently, because we have not created conditions for a real struggle. And to do this, we must be clear they will make no profits.”

Raphaëlle added that this requires an international political awakening of the workers: “We are in an unprecedented crisis. Only awakening the working class to the power that it can have if it is united, and to what it can do, will get us out of it.”



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