

Jacobin to teachers and kids: Back to death trap schools!

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Last week, thousands of students staged walkouts from more than 30 schools throughout the city of Chicago in opposition to the resumption of in-person schooling.

The walkouts placed students in opposition to not only Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot's demand that schools remain open during the worst stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also the decision of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) to repudiate the demand by teachers for remote learning and orchestrate the resumption of in-person instruction last week.

Following the January 4 vote by Chicago teachers to overwhelmingly reject a return to the classrooms, *Jacobin* magazine, associated with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), published an article by Liza Featherstone titled "Children belong in school. That's why we support the Chicago Teachers Union." The article calls for Lightfoot and the CTU to "open the schools" and effectively tells students and teachers to return to classrooms where they will face the risk of infection with a potentially deadly and debilitating disease.

"One thing we've learned from this pandemic is that children and communities need public school, and that remote learning, long-term, without an end in sight, is harmful for kids," the article begins. "That's why the mayor of Chicago should immediately meet the entirely reasonable safety demands of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), and then open the schools."

The call by *Jacobin* for the mayor to accept the "reasonable safety demands" of the CTU prior to reopening the schools was merely a cover for the effort of the CTU to override the will of teachers and force the reopening of schools. On the same day as *Jacobin's* article, the WSWS wrote, "The main demands of the Chicago Teachers Union—that the district agree to a positivity metric for taking schools remote, the availability of KN95 masks for teachers and staff, and increased testing—are utterly inadequate for stopping mass infection."

Two days later, on January 10, the CTU House of Delegates agreed to "suspend" the action by teachers on the

basis of an agreement with Chicago Public Schools (CPS) that did not even meet these inadequate demands. It then rammed through the deal with lies and threats, forcing the reopening of schools last week.

In justifying its demand for schools to be reopened, *Jacobin*, functioning as an arm of the Democratic Party, is promoting arguments originally developed by supporters of the fascistic Trump, including libertarian think tanks such as the American Institute for Economic Research and the Brownstone Institute.

The call to reopen schools, no matter the cost in lives, was embodied in the Great Barrington Declaration, sponsored by the American Institute for Economic Research and developed in collaboration with the Trump White House.

Notably, *Jacobin* played a significant role in promoting the "herd immunity" ideology embodied in the document, providing a favorable interview with Martin Kulldorff, who at that time was a vocal defender of the Trump administration's homicidal response to the pandemic.

Sharing the interview, *Jacobin's* Twitter account wrote, "The lockdown is the worst assault on the working class in half a century." Just three weeks later, Kulldorff and his Great Barrington Declaration coauthors would go on to meet with Trump Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar at the White House.

In his interview with *Jacobin*, the Trump apologist Kulldorff advocated the reopening of schools, writing, "Children and young adults have minimal risk, and there is no scientific or public health rationale to close day care centers, schools, or colleges. Good education is not only important for academic achievement and financial well-being; it is also critical for the mental and physical health of children and into their subsequent adulthood. Kids have minimal risk from this virus, and it is sad that we are sacrificing our children."

Over one year later, *Jacobin* has fully and unequivocally embraced Kulldorff's talking points. "Health experts also oppose school closures at this point in the pandemic," *Jacobin* writes, "with all major public health organizations

and most epidemiologists saying that the risks of in-person school are outweighed by its benefits.”

This is a lie. Epidemiologists and scientists have repeatedly warned that schools are central sites for the transmission of the virus, not only among children and teachers, but the community as a whole.

Since the virus that causes COVID-19 is airborne, crowded and poorly ventilated classrooms are Petri dishes for infection. States that track outbreaks have repeatedly listed schools as the leading centers of COVID-19 transmission. The latest figures from Michigan show that schools account for nearly half of outbreaks tracked by the state.

A study published November 19, 2020 in *Nature* stated that “school closures in the United States have been found to reduce COVID-19 incidence and mortality by about 60 percent.” In the United States, 1,084 children have died from COVID-19.

“Remote learning has had a demonstrably terrible effect on students’ mental health,” *Jacobin* continues, but it says nothing about the impact on the mental health of students from having their teachers, parents, grandparents and others die from an entirely preventable pandemic.

Jacobin concludes by emphasizing that its support for the CTU “should not in any way be taken as agreement with those who have insisted on an indefinite extension to remote school, consistently ignored the implications of widespread vaccination, exaggerated the dangers of COVID to children and the risks of community spread through school, trivialized the essential role of public school, the single most socialized aspect of American public life.”

In line with the arguments of the right-wing ideologues whose ideas they take without attribution, *Jacobin* argues that those who want to end the pandemic are seeking to promote an “indefinite extension to remote school.”

In reality, the scientists calling for the pandemic to be ended through a Zero COVID strategy argue that COVID-19 could be brought under control in a matter of months through the closure of all nonessential businesses and schools. Once community transmission is ended, schools and businesses could be reopened with aggressive testing and contact tracing.

Instead, the pandemic has been drawn out for two years, with every school day offering a chance for students and teachers to contract and spread the virus.

Who is it that, in *Jacobin*’s words, “exaggerated the dangers of COVID to children and the risks of community spread through school?” They are clearly referring to the scientists, doctors and public health experts who advocate ending the pandemic and the millions of workers who know through personal experience that schools are a leading

source of COVID-19 transmission.

Politically, the warnings of these scientists and the sentiments of workers are expressed in the policies advocated by the *World Socialist Web Site*.

In the view of *Jacobin*, the scientists “exaggerate” the dangers of COVID-19 in schools, while big-business politicians, whether fascists or Democrats, and right-wing economists are the ones who accurately portray the low risks of in-person instruction.

Jacobin is right, however, in insisting that its support for the CTU does not imply rejecting a policy of mass infection. The CTU and the unions as a whole have and are playing a key role in the efforts of corporations and municipalities to get workers back on the job during a raging pandemic, and to cover up and suppress knowledge of outbreaks.

Nationwide, the majority of the public favors keeping schools remote, according to a Harris Poll conducted earlier this month. Support for remote education is highest among those making less than \$50,000 per year.

Why is *Jacobin* promoting the arguments of right-wing ideologues in demanding the end of remote instruction during a pandemic?

The Democratic Socialists of America is a faction of the ruling Democratic Party, and *Jacobin* is carrying water for the Biden administration as it declares war on the population.

Jacobin and the DSA speak for an affluent upper middle class that is more or less indifferent to the mass death caused by the pandemic. Like the local politicians and corporate executives forcing workers back on the job and kids into classrooms, this social layer can by and large work remotely. Their stock portfolios have surged with the rise of the market in the past two years.

Like the “heroes of the rear” of the First World War, *Jacobin* is happy to send teachers and children “over the top” to ensure their parents continue to work and crank out profits to drive up stock values.

In their fight to save lives in the pandemic, teachers, students and other workers must be on their guard against *Jacobin* and the DSA, which serve as propagandists for mass infection!



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