

Left Voice covers for Biden and the unions on school openings

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Left Voice (LV), the publication of an American pseudo-left group allied with the Morenoite “Trotskyist Fraction of the Fourth International (FT),” has issued a “Working Class Program for Safe School Reopenings.” The statement marks the group as the enemy of both the working class and safe schools.

The document was issued January 28, as American COVID-19 fatalities were soaring towards 900,000 and the worldwide death toll was estimated at between 6 and 20 million.

The catastrophe facing the world working class is, however, of no great import for these upper-middle class opportunists. Their statement reeks of complacency and indifference.

It amounts to a collegial debate with members of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and the pseudo-left more generally. The series of *Left Voice* pandemic policy statements published over the last two years has the character of friendly advice to the union bureaucracies on the most expedient tactical slogans for sabotaging opposition and forcing educators and students back into COVID-ridden schools.

LV makes a few rhetorical criticisms, but they are *not* directed against the reopening of schools. Rather, they are limited to concerns about *how* this reckless and murderous policy is being carried out.

In the January 28 statement, LV writes that “the decision to reopen schools shouldn’t be up to the capitalists—it should be decided by the people who live and work within their communities.”

The statement then immediately dispels the idea that workers should insist on fully remote education as part of a Zero COVID policy, stating, “Teachers, students, and parents are keenly aware that remote learning does not compare to the experience of learning in-person.”

It goes on to parrot the hypocritical justification of the Biden administration (and the teachers unions) for herding young innocents into COVID-infested schools, emphasizing virtual learning’s “long-term impacts on students’ social and emotional development.”

Thus, as the headline “Working Class Program for Safe School Reopenings” suggests, LV rejects the necessary scientific program of closing schools and nonessential businesses in temporary lockdowns and deploying the full arsenal of public health measures as part of a strategy to eliminate the virus. This is despite the clear scientific evidence that schools are primary vectors of community infection.

Left Voice’s insistence on reopenings marks a further capitulation to the government and the trade unions. Last September, LV had allowed for a “shutdown [of] some industries as necessary.” At that time, an estimated 660,000 Americans had died of COVID-19. But by January of this year, when a quarter-million more souls had been lost, LV dropped any mention of shutdowns.

This shift was a response to the mounting economic and political crisis of the Biden administration and the entire US political system, facing meltdown under conditions where the response of both big business parties to the coronavirus has exposed the bankruptcy of the capitalist system.

Biden’s promise to “follow the science” has proven no less a fraud than Trump’s lies. The Democratic administration seized on the Omicron surge as the pretense for dropping any and all mitigation measures and adopting Trump’s fascistic “herd immunity” policy.

The centerpiece of this policy of mass infection and death is the reopening of the schools, which has rapidly proved to be a death sentence for hundreds of school children and hundreds of thousands of parents, educators and other workers.

At the bidding of the corporate oligarchy, which from the start rejected any COVID-19 policies that threatened to depress the stock market and reduce profits, Biden insisted on a full-scale return to in-person instruction. American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten and the Chicago Teachers Union, led by DSA member Jesse Sharkey, shut down and sold out the January strike by Chicago teachers in opposition to this policy. Along with the National Education Association (NEA), the AFT continues to block efforts of teachers, parents and students to fight back.

In the course of its latest statement on school openings, *Left Voice* admits that the Chicago Teachers Union “ultimately betrayed” the teachers. This, however, does not prevent it from stating in point #7: “Every education worker needs a union,” followed by the absurd claim that “Unions are the largest organizations of the working class to stand up against capitalist interests and fight for safe conditions.”

Left Voice’s half-truths and outright lies have one purpose: to reinforce the unions in their suppression of the class struggle. The betrayal of the teachers in Chicago, part of Weingarten’s nationwide campaign to keep the schools open, has profoundly discredited the unions. Teachers are well aware there has not been a single nationally organized action taken during the pandemic by the AFT/NEA to shut the schools, despite the ever-increasing death toll among educators, children and families.

Of course, Biden and the Democrats agree with Point #7. Last week, Biden announced a “Task Force on Worker Organizing and Empowerment” aimed at strengthening the pro-corporate trade unions as critical instruments to keep workers on the job and suppress wages.

Why the desperate drive to force children back into disease-ridden schools? Because, as Biden and his COVID-19 advisers acknowledge, this is key to forcing parents back into factories and workplaces. What they omit to say is that the inevitable explosion of infections and deaths is critical to continuing the flow of profits to the corporate elite.

Despite *Left Voice*’s occasional recourse to verbal rabble-rousing—“seizing schools,” “abolishing capitalism”—it puts forward the most limited demands. To reassure the capitalists and the union bureaucrats that its program is safely reformist, it states: “This is not a blueprint for a new society” but merely for “basic measures.”

LV’s initial pandemic program, published in March 2020, was written as the CARES Act was being adopted by Congress on a near-unanimous vote of both big business parties. Little wonder the capitalist politicians, including Bernie Sanders, backed it since it funneled trillions of dollars to

the rich even as the pandemic was beginning to rip through the population.

In addition to hundreds of billions in direct handouts to corporations, it enabled the Federal Reserve to pump some \$4 trillion into the stock market so that multi-billionaires like Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk could double their wealth during the pandemic.

LV ignored these class and political issues. Instead, it put forward a list of reforms, such as free health care, universal paid sick leave, and a freeze on layoffs, admitting that they were “minimal” in nature. It peddled the illusion that such basic social measures could be achieved by putting pressure on the unions and the Democratic Party.

The subsequent evolution of the Biden administration and the Democratic-controlled Congress has demonstrated that no social reforms can be achieved outside of a struggle for socialism. The Democrats have joined with the Republicans to scrap all earlier pandemic relief measures and dropped any fight for even the timid reforms included in the “Build Back Better” plan.

By contrast, a month before the passage of the CARES Act, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) issued an urgent call for the mobilization of the international working class in a globally coordinated emergency response to the spreading coronavirus pandemic.

The ICFI warned that “The danger cannot be overstated” and called for “scientists from all over the world... to share their research and technology, unencumbered by ‘national interests’ and geopolitical conflicts.”

It concluded:

In demanding that capitalist governments implement these emergency measures, the international working class does not abandon its fundamental aim: the ending of the capitalist system. Rather, the fight for emergency action will raise the consciousness of the working class, develop its understanding of the need for international class solidarity, and increase its political self-confidence.

By the time of its September 2021 COVID-19 statement, *Left Voice* finally admitted that the pandemic “could significantly worsen.” But it pointed encouragingly to President Biden’s six-pronged “Path Out of the Pandemic.”

This plan, devised by Wall Street financiers such as the head of Biden’s COVID task force Jeffrey Zients (estimated wealth, \$89.3 million), can be summed up as vaccines only, keep schools open, protect profits.

While holding out hope in Biden’s plan, LV cautioned that it might “fall short.”

For our part, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the ICFI were assisting workers in forming rank-and-file safety committees, independent of the unions and the capitalist political parties, among autoworkers, health care workers, teachers, parents and others in the US and around the world to fight for a Zero COVID policy. The ICFI launched a Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic, partnering with leading scientists to counter the official lies and provide critical information to the working class.

In the midst of the public health catastrophe, as medical professionals were straining every nerve to save lives and workers of all nationalities, races and ethnicities were being sacrificed to the manic greed of the ruling class, the *Left Voice*’s program made a criminally light-minded and divisive call for “dismantling a system of medicine built on racism and white supremacy.” Such is the reactionary, anti-worker outlook of the pseudo-left’s identity politics.

As part of the need to “start addressing the long history of medical coercion,” LV strenuously objected to vaccine mandates, which, it

claimed, “open the doors for increased state surveillance, coercion, repression, and domination.”

Here LV aligned itself with the anti-vax current, promoting a poisonous form of middle-class individualism that plays into the hands of the pandemic profiteers and the far right.

There is a long history in public health of mandatory vaccinations, accompanied by mass education, which have saved countless lives.

As the WSWS has made clear, the task of socialists in the pandemic is to help the working class enforce a scientific policy that protects the lives, health, livelihoods and liberties of the population against the policy of social murder implemented and ferociously defended by the ruling class.

Left Voice talks out of both sides of its mouth. It claims to be for “science” but disputes the clear public health necessity for protecting the population with vaccine mandates. The working class as a class has the social right and responsibility to protect the broad masses of society from a deadly pandemic that is killing millions due to the criminal priorities of the profit system.

Above all, schools and nonessential businesses must be closed until viral transmission is ended, with full compensation to workers and assistance for small businesses.

The authors of the LV program should explain how they propose to make reopened schools “safe” while allowing the airborne virus to circulate freely in poorly ventilated school buildings.

Left Voice has sought to counter the widespread support among educators and other workers for the building of rank-and-file safety committees independent of the pro-corporate unions, campaigned for by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality parties in the US and around the world. It does so by calling for “self-organized assemblies of education staff, students and communities.”

This is just another means of subordinating workers to the pro-corporate union structure and the capitalist state. As LV explains, “The unity of the class through democratic committees and assemblies is the only way to properly fight against these measures. To build towards that, we have to push *our current organized bodies, such as labor unions*, to throw their full support behind organizations like the ones organizing student walkouts for safe schools [emphasis added].”

The only “support” the unions will give to student walkouts is the support of a noose around the neck of the hangman’s victim. Randi Weingarten has notoriously bragged about her “15-hour” days pushing for “kids in seats.” Demonstrating last week that there is no line she will not cross in the service of big business, she stated that it was time to end mask mandates in schools.

The alignment of LV with Biden and world imperialism and against the preservation of life is expressed most starkly by LV’s co-thinkers in their attack on China and its successful Zero COVID policy .

“China has remained ruthless in their ‘zero-tolerance’ policy against COVID,” writes the Revolutionary Workers’ Current (CRT) in Spain. This organization denounces the safety measures that have saved millions of lives in the largest nation on earth. In terms that could have been lifted from the US State Department or CIA mouthpieces such as the *New York Times*, the CRT condemns the use of temporary lockdowns combined with systematic contact tracing and quarantining as “authoritarian.”

The result of these measures, which enjoy broad popular support in China, is four COVID deaths in a country of 1.4 billion people since April 2020. This compares to the supposedly “humanitarian” and “democratic” policies of most capitalist governments, which have led to some 950,000 deaths in the US and 80,000 in Spain over the same period.

The Morenoite attack on China’s COVID-19 policy dovetails with the American unions’ anti-lockdown policies and the US government’s escalating war buildup against China.

The fact that *Left Voice* aims to provide a “left” veneer to the herd immunity policies of the ruling class is in keeping with the reactionary,

anti-Trotskyist history of the Morenoite tendency. In Argentina, where the political tendency originated, the Morenoites' popular front policies disarmed the working class and paved the way for the junta's 1976 military coup, engineered in conjunction with the US. Nahuel Moreno's adaptation to the Peronist Argentine state was responsible for the deaths of thousands.

Today, this opportunist tendency responds to the resurgence of class struggle on an international scale by joining forces openly with neo-Stalinists and bourgeois politicians. The movement of growing layers of the working class into struggle against the capitalist system and its national states is undermining the discredited nationalist trade unions and driving the Morenoites and other pseudo-left parties of the upper middle class into the arms of imperialism.

There is nothing remotely socialist or Trotskyist about *Left Voice*, which has lined up with the global capitalist policy of mass infection and a "forever pandemic."



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