

Quebec educator speaks out against being forced back to work while infected with COVID-19

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On Tuesday, April 19, my youngest son tested positive for COVID-19. The next day, the rest of the family also tested positive for the debilitating and potentially fatal disease.

The following Tuesday, day 7 of my infection, I had to return to work, despite still testing positive and having obvious symptoms. Because school authorities have failed to provide us with N95 masks, I had to wear the blue Level-1 surgical mask issued to school workers.

These masks are insufficient to filter out aerosols, the main mode of transmission of the virus.

When my students, some as young as eight-years old, learned that I still had COVID, all of them without exception looked at me dumbfounded. “Why are you at school?” they asked. I didn’t know what to tell them other than, “You’ll have to ask [Quebec] Premier Legault.” It was an unsettling day for me and the children.

Quebec schools’ COVID-19 rules have changed a lot. It is little-known among the general public that school workers are forced back to work on day 5 of their being infected. That is, while they are still contagious. They are thus made—perhaps unbeknownst to themselves—into potential mass spreaders of COVID-19.

As elsewhere in Canada and around the world, the CAQ (Coalition Avenir Québec) provincial government, led by Premier François Legault, took advantage of the emergence of the highly-infectious

Omicron variant last December to eliminate the remaining limited measures to curb the pandemic, under the pretext that we must “learn to live with the virus.” This led to mass infection, including a sharp increase in childhood hospitalizations during the Omicron wave.

In my own case, this was the second time that COVID made its way into the family home. The first was at the very beginning of the second wave, in October 2020, shortly after all schools in Quebec were reopened. Significantly, I was not officially stricken with the virus at that time, although I had not and could not isolate myself from my infected spouse and children. At least, my test results were all “negative,” although I did find it strange that I was experiencing unusual headaches. This time, however, it was clear: I had Omicron. And I was the most severely impacted in the family.

In October 2020, I was removed from my position as a special-needs teacher for 24 days due to my potentially being a COVID carrier. Public Health officials then considered that it could take up to 10 days for the virus to be transmitted to a person living in the same household, and up to 14 more days after transmission for the infection to occur. At that time, in response to public concern, the Legault government had to follow, at least partially, expert recommendations on curbing community transmission. But it quickly set these aside, forcing a premature reopening of schools and non-essential workplaces.

A year and a half later, governments across Canada, with the encouragement of the trade union-backed federal Liberal government, and around the world have completely abandoned all efforts to combat the

pandemic.

Responding to the demands of the banks, big business and the wealthy to get workers back to work at any cost so that profits can continue to flow, governments have imposed a criminal “live with the virus” policy on the population.

In many countries, governments have abandoned all anti-COVID public health regulations. In Canada, in most provinces, even masking in the most packed indoor settings has been dropped. In Quebec, where public concern over another spike in COVID cases compelled the health authorities to postpone until May 15 their plan to abolish the mask mandate, what prevails is the government’s pursuit of “herd immunity”—the pseudo-scientific pretext for rejecting any serious effort to stop the virus’ spread.

It is intolerable that because of this homicidal government policy that puts profits before lives, people, both old and young, are dying prematurely, tens of thousands of innocent people are getting sick and children are developing long-term health problems.

In unionized workplaces, workers have been completely abandoned by the unions during the pandemic, and in fact for years prior. As a result, workers rightly view it a waste of their time and energy to contact and try to pressure these bureaucratic apparatuses to act on their behalf.

In order to protect ourselves, our families and the children we teach, and to fight for a science-based strategy to eliminate the pandemic, Canadian school workers, including myself, have built our own committee, the Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Committee (CERSC), that is completely independent of the corporatist trade unions. I call on all teachers and educators in Canada to contact and join our committee.

For information on setting up a rank-and-file safety committee in your school, contact the CERSC at cersc.csppb@gmail.com.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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