

For a general strike against the reopening of German schools!

**Statement of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei
15 August 2020**

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) calls on teachers, students and workers in Germany to stand up against the dangerous reopening of schools. By demanding a return to face-to-face teaching amid rising coronavirus infection rates, state governments of all stripes are putting the health and lives of countless teachers, students and parents at risk. This murderous policy can only be stopped by the independent mobilization of all workers in a nationwide general strike.

When the number of daily infections exceeded the 1,000 mark on March 15 and the coronavirus pandemic spread rapidly in Germany, schools were closed due to pressure from teachers, parents and students. Now, despite similarly high numbers, they are being reopened during a new wave of infections without any serious safety precautions being taken.

Hundreds of thousands of German teachers and millions of children face a deadly risk in overcrowded classrooms and dilapidated sanitary facilities and on crowded public transport on their way to school. All safety measures that were developed in the last school year in weeks of work by educators, parents and students are being thrown overboard. Even the regulations regarding minimum distances and wearing protective masks do not apply in classrooms.

However, it has now been scientifically established that children and adolescents are at least as infectious as adults and that the virus is spread strongly via schools and day-care centres. “We warn against the idea that children play no role in the pandemic and its transmission,” ten leading virologists declared last week in a joint statement on school openings and warned of “a lack of prevention and control measures.”

The mass deaths of teachers, parents and even students are being accepted as part of forcing workers back to work and securing the profits of the rich. The hundreds of billions of euros that have been thrown at the corporations and banks since the beginning of the pandemic are now to be recouped from the population—at any cost.

Four Berlin business groups have expressed this with remarkable openness in a joint declaration. “It is high time that regular operations in Berlin schools start again,” they say. “It is in the interest of employers and their employees that their children are reliably taught and looked after again.”

This ruthless policy in the interest of the banks and

corporations is supported by all parties in the Bundestag (federal parliament). The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), neo-Nazis and coronavirus deniers demonstrate against the protective measures—and the federal and state governments put their demands into action. Regardless of whether the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU-CSU), Social Democratic Party (SPD), Greens or Left Party head the government, each proceeds with breathtaking brutality.

In Germany’s most populous state, North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), scientific studies have classified half of all classrooms as hygienically unacceptable and breeding grounds for the coronavirus, according to current workplace guidelines. When state Education Minister Yvonne Gebauer (Free Democratic Party, FDP) was asked about this by broadcaster Deutschlandfunk, she insisted on full attendance at classes. She categorically ruled out renting additional space, as demanded by virologists. “We cannot protect people from becoming ill with COVID-19,” she declared tersely.

Resistance is growing against this policy, which puts profit above the lives of people. Teachers are organizing themselves via social media to exchange ideas and protest against the reopening policy. At many schools, pupils are discussing school strikes. Similarly, resistance is forming throughout Europe and the world.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei supports all these protests and actions. For them to succeed, they must be extended to the entire working class. Teachers and educators must unite with other workers and jointly prepare a general strike against the criminal policies of the ruling elites.

The reopening of schools is part of the general policy of opening up the economy, which is forcing slaughterhouse workers, farm workers, factory workers and many others into hazardous jobs to increase the profits of the corporations and drive up stock prices. For parents to be able to return to the labour market without restriction, children must go to school, whatever the price.

We, therefore, call on teachers and workers to discuss the following demands in schools, factories and residential areas in preparation for a nationwide general strike:

No return to regular attendance classes until the virus is

under control! During the pandemic, teaching should only take place online or in small, fixed study groups, physically separated and safely housed.

Billions for more teachers, new premises and online teaching! To guarantee safe supervision and teaching, extended premises must be rented or requisitioned, and many more teachers must be employed. There are enough trainee teachers, students and other professionals who would be willing to lead small groups under the guidance of experienced educators if they were paid properly. Also, all teachers and students must be provided with good computers and fast internet access to ensure quality online teaching. Families need comprehensive financial and social support during the pandemic.

Stop all non-essential production! Until the pandemic is contained, only key industries—such as food production, medical care and logistics—should remain open. Workers in these industries must be equipped with the most advanced protective measures to prevent infection. All others must receive full pay!

For a massive expansion of testing and contact tracing! To bring the pandemic under control, tests must be made available to everyone and contact tracing must be increased by the hundreds of thousands to quickly track coronavirus cases and test and isolate those potentially infected.

A particularly deceitful argument is that schools must be opened because otherwise the children of poor families would be left behind, and their parents would face social hardship. The same parties that are now shedding crocodile tears have been destroying the public education system for decades and are responsible for the spread of poverty. Now, this poverty is to be used as an argument for putting the very survival of those affected at risk.

The reopening of schools has nothing to do with the problems of poor families. On the contrary, it is accompanied by the most serious attacks on the working class since the Second World War. First, workers are being forced to work under dangerous conditions, then hundreds of thousands of them are being thrown on the streets. In the German car industry alone, at least 300,000 jobs are to be destroyed. On top of this, there are mass redundancies in retail trade, aviation and many other industries.

As in the reopening of schools, workers confront not only the corporations and the government but also with the trade unions. Just as the IG Metall is organising the return to work and the mass dismissals in the auto industry, the Education and Science (GEW) trade union is supporting the reopening of schools. The GEW has even spoken out against the compulsory wearing of masks in the classroom, urgently demanded by virologists.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei calls on workers in all sectors to set up a network of action committees, independent of the trade unions, to prepare a general strike against the reopening of schools and all the policies of the ruling class. The sacrificing of human lives for profit must be opposed by workers with a policy putting their lives and the needs of

society above the profit interests of capitalists. The hundreds of billions of euros which have gone to the banks and corporations and which are being channeled into armaments and war must be used for education, health care and the continued payment of wages.

The action committees must contact workers in other countries facing the same attacks. In the US, action committees have already been formed in major car factories fighting for safe working conditions. Teachers in the US, Brazil and Britain are also fighting against the reopening of schools. The international sister parties of the SGP support the establishment of action committees everywhere and will help workers to network with each other. The US SEP has already published a call August 5 for a nationwide general strike.

The development of a general strike in Germany would be an important contribution to encourage workers around the world. It would bring the working class into direct conflict with the grand coalition of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats and all the parties that are implementing brutal policies at federal and state level, while resorting more and more openly to authoritarian methods and relying on networks of neo-Nazis in the police, armed forces and the state.

The reopening of schools, the further spread of the pandemic and millions more infections and deaths can only be prevented by a mass mobilisation of the working class directed against the cause of the misery brought about by the pandemic—against the capitalist system.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei and its youth organization, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), are fighting for this goal. We call on teachers to contact us to help organize the opposition. We appeal to students and youth to support the resistance and join the IYSSE. Sign up for the WSWs Newsletter to stay informed about the ongoing struggle against the reopening of schools.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact