

Stop the dangerous “routine operation” of schools in Germany! Prepare a nationwide general strike!

Set up independent action committees for the safety of teachers, pupils and parents!

The Action Committees for Safe Education
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The completely unsafe routine operation of schools threatens the health and lives of millions of educators, parents, children, young people and their families.

Teachers and pupils are exposed to a deadly risk in overcrowded classrooms, dilapidated sanitary facilities and crowded public transport on their way to school. All the safety measures that were developed in the last school year in weeks of work by teachers, parents and pupils are being thrown overboard. Even the rules on minimum distances and the use of protective masks do not apply in classrooms.

These conditions alone make it clear that the welfare of children and young people is not the authorities' concern. The same politicians who are now shedding crocodile tears over the fact that poor pupils are being left behind have been ruining the public education system for decades and are responsible for growing educational inequality and the present social disaster. They have not done the slightest thing to support working class families while schools were closed. Now, this poverty is being used as a warped argument to put the very survival of those affected at risk.

The opening up of schools is really about the interests of big business and the large corporations. To enable them to ramp up production, workers' children have to be looked after. The employers' organisation Bundesverband mittelständische Wirtschaft (BVMW), for example, declared that a “second lockdown must be prevented at all costs.” According to the association, the government must “not again give priority to excessive infection control over the appropriate protection of the economy and prosperity.” To this end, there was “no alternative” to the opening up of schools, even in the face of a rapid increase in infections.

The mass deaths of teachers, parents and even pupils are deemed acceptable to force workers back to work and to secure the profits of the wealthy. The hundreds of billions of euros handed out to the corporations and banks since the beginning of the pandemic are now to be recovered from the population—no matter the costs. At the same time, politicians claim in uncertain conditions that there is no alternative to restarting the economy.

Resistance to this madness is growing among teachers, parents and students. All over the world, tens of thousands of those affected are linking up in Facebook groups and, as in the US, organising themselves in independent action committees. Headmasters in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) wrote an open letter against the insecure conditions in reopening schools, while pupils and teachers in Dortmund joined together in an

action committee fighting for fixed learning groups and online teaching.

We aim to drive this development forward and to unite educators with young people, parents and the entire working class to fight against the dangerous re-opening of schools and against the social interests that are driving this murderous policy.

Teachers, students and workers first need the scientific facts to counter the misinformation and lies peddled by politicians and the corporate media.

The campaign to reopen schools is based on three fundamental lies.

Lie #1: Young people are less susceptible to infection and do not develop serious symptoms from COVID-19

According to the official figures of the Robert Koch Institute, the number of cases among children and adolescents has risen rapidly since the opening of schools. By September 6, 6,756 COVID cases among children and adolescents in care had been reported to the authorities from facilities such as day nurseries, schools and homes alone. Of these, just under 2 percent were admitted to hospital.

International figures confirm that one in three children in hospital has to go to intensive care, just as often as adults. Six percent of them need respirators.

Lie # 2: Young people rarely transmit COVID-19

Ten leading virologists declared in a joint statement shortly before the opening-up of schools, “We warn against the idea that children play no part in the pandemic and transmission” and warned of “a lack of prevention and control measures.”

Recent large-scale studies in the US, Italy and South Korea all concluded that children are more likely to transmit COVID-19 than adults. One of the studies from Chicago found that babies and young children who are infected with the virus can carry up to 100 times more viral load in their throat and airways than adults. The spread of the deadly disease in Israel was largely attributed to the reopening of schools.

Lie # 3: Routine classroom teaching can take place without danger

Neither masks nor social distancing offers sufficient protection against the transmission of the coronavirus via aerosols in crowded trains and classrooms. The spread of the virus can only be prevented if small and fixed study groups meet in well-ventilated places, separated from each other.

Therefore, in their joint paper on the opening of schools, the leading

virologists called for further measures, such as “reducing class sizes depending on the number of new infections, exhausting the space available and finding pragmatic solutions for improved air circulation in public buildings such as schools.”

But nothing of the sort happened. The summer holidays were not used to install good ventilation systems, nor were new premises acquired or measures developed for permanent learning groups. In NRW, scientific studies have categorized half of all classrooms as hygienically unacceptable, according to current workplace guidelines.

Under these conditions, schools inevitably turn into breeding grounds for the pandemic. But governments of all stripes do not care about the thousands of deaths that this policy will cause. They are only interested in the banks and corporations that walk over dead bodies for their profits.

It is therefore up to workers to take immediate action. The crucial task is to build a cohesive network of independent Action Committees for Safety to prepare for the immense struggles that lie ahead. These action committees must fight to unite all workers—teachers, school bus drivers, caretakers and workers in manufacturing, health care, logistics, retail and food processing—in a nationwide general strike to stop the regular operation of schools and save lives.

To lead this struggle, we raise the following demands and call on all workers to campaign for them:

*** Stop the dangerous “routine operation” in schools!** During the pandemic, teaching should only take place online or in small, fixed study groups that are physically separated and safely housed. This is especially true in the daycare centres, where other hygiene approaches are hardly practicable.

*** Billions for more teachers, new class rooms and online teaching!** To guarantee safe supervision and teaching, additional 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. In addition, all teachers and students must be provided with good computers and high-speed Internet access to ensure quality online teaching. Families need comprehensive financial and social support during the pandemic.

*** Full pay for all parents and carers who stay at home with their children!** Instead of throwing hundreds of billions down the throats of the banks and corporations, those who look after and educate their children at home must be supported. Tenant protection against eviction must be extended, and poor families, in particular, must receive additional support.

*** For complete protection of risk groups! No disadvantages for children, pupils and educators who stay at home!** Teachers and educators who refuse to work in insecure conditions must receive full income and benefits for the duration of the pandemic and must not be put under pressure. Children and young people with risk factors, or with family members at risk, must also be given the right to online education.

*** For freedom of speech and free access to all information!** All those who speak out against unsafe working conditions and expose abuses—whether in schools, factories, warehouses, hospitals or offices—must be defended against any harassment by employers, state officials and government representatives. All information about cases of infection and COVID-19 disease in schools and daycare centres must be disclosed. The public must be informed of the number of cases, the facilities affected, and the measures taken. Stop the authorities’ cover-up and game of hide and seek! Full transparency for parents, teachers and pupils!

For regular and comprehensive tests of pupils and teachers! Central to the safety of daycare centres, schools and other care facilities is the regular testing of children, young people and staff. Only in this way can immediate quarantine measures be taken and the spread of the virus limited.

*** Stop all unessential 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!

The fact that the pandemic has taken the form of a global disaster is above all a social and political issue, not just a medical one. The technology and medical expertise are available to contain the virus and ensure the safety of all workers, but under capitalism, everything is subordinated to the profit interests of the banks and corporations.

While share prices skyrocketed and the federal government transferred hundreds of billions to benefit the big companies as part of the so-called “Coronavirus package,” workers are forced back to work by the same companies under completely insecure conditions. At the same time, long-fostered restructuring operations are being carried out in the auto industry, retail trade and the airlines, and hundreds of thousands of workers are being thrown onto the streets.

This merciless policy in the interests of the banks and corporations is supported by all parties in the Bundestag (parliament). The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), neo-Nazis and coronavirus-deniers demonstrate against protective measures and the federal and state governments put their demands into action. Regardless of whether the Christian Democrats (CDU, CSU), Social Democrats (SPD), Greens or the Left Party head the government, they proceed with breath-taking ruthlessness.

The trade unions Verdi and GEW also support the opening up of schools and have often helped organise the insecure conditions. In the current round of collective bargaining, they have not tabled a single demand for coronavirus safeguards in the workplace for public sector workers, but are preparing a real wage cut for educators, carers, caretakers and refuse workers who are at the forefront of the fight against the pandemic.

Therefore, the action committees must be established completely independently of the parties in the Bundestag and the trade unions. They must be oriented towards the whole working class in Germany and internationally and fight for the unification of educators with workers in the automobile industry, health care, logistics, meat processing and all those who are exposed to the same deadly conditions worldwide.

These demands must not be based on what the corporations and politicians consider affordable, but on what is necessary for the life and well-being of children, young people, educators and the entire working class. By setting up action committees, we want to mobilise the working class as an independent social force against the insecure reopening of schools and for the defence of public education.

All educators, teachers, school staff, parents and students who support this initiative should join our Facebook page and contact us to set up local action committees in their school and neighbourhood. Please also provide us with all relevant information about the situation on the ground so that we can make it available to a worldwide audience. On Monday, September 14, at 7:00 p.m., we will organise a preliminary online meeting to discuss how to proceed.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact