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Worker in UK speaks out on the unsafe reopening of schools

Our reporter
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Colin spoke to the WSWs after participating in a recent meeting of the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee in the UK. He is an Operations Manager for a catering firm that looks after mostly corporate meetings in Central London. Colin is currently retraining to be an early-years practitioner.

He said, “This pandemic has given us a big reality check for the faults that were inherent within the system. As much as I was already a critic of capitalism, the severity of the downturn was still shocking to see.

“Most of my adult working life has been in the hospitality/catering industry. We have seen business drop to a virtual zero and do not expect substantial returns until the end of 2021. I have been lucky enough to be furloughed, but my confidence in my industry has been shaken--taking this as an opportunity to retrain into a field I love, working with children as a teacher.

“The forming of rank-and-file committees in schools is so important as the voices of teachers, students, carers, administration, and many others are being ignored. The union officials and Labour Party leader have stepped in line to open schools before they were safe to do so. Closing them until they are safe to open will not be a decision coming from the top down--it requires a groundswell. Just like the lockdown in March, that was not led by the government.

“The claims of putting the child first is rank with hypocrisy. From the bumbling of downgraded exam results, the cancelled then U-turn school meal vouchers for those in need, the lack of laptops and Wi-Fi for remote learning, this all points to a system in decay that

benefits those with more money or living in better areas. As the government's own study shows, without mentioning class, where a child grows up has an impact on their chance to earn more as an adult. We have yet to get support where it is needed to BAME communities or those with lower income, these are the families disproportionately paying with their lives.

“It is a matter of fact that schools are the vector for spreading this virus. They are being used as a pretext to keep parents working. None of the promises made for a safe reopening have been met. The lack of a robust testing, tracking, and tracing system will let this get out of control. It is a numbers game. The more people infected – the more that will die prematurely. We MUST close schools in order to save lives!

“My retraining to be an Early Years Practitioner has me working in a nursery where we do the best we can. But our best practices do nothing to stop the spread of this virus. Children playing touch everything with no concept of pandemic hygiene. They know to sanitise and wash their hands, but in a classroom designed to be well insulated for winter months, how can we get good ventilation? I am constantly wiping noses, cleaning drool, holding the kids, sharing contact points. We are asking families to be diligent and spot a mostly unspottable disease. And mandated practice is keeping the school open and only having the family that presents symptoms to quarantine.

“I also volunteer with a wonderful charity, Richmond Good Neighbours, where I do the shopping for the elderly and help them with whatever I can. I am so

worried now that an asymptomatic child will unknowingly pass the virus on to me and me onto one of our clients. I have now stopped bringing the shopping inside their houses. Will I have to start making the choice between helping those I have befriended and also caring for the children?

“Children are resilient and have the uncanny ability to adapt. These developing years are so important to build the foundation for their lives. We will get past this pandemic, but is it worth the risk of them feeling responsible for passing the virus on? It does not even have to be directly. The exponential growth means loved ones will be caught up and lost to this. I say that is the far crueller thing to put a child through.

“The mass sentiment will be to protect the lives of our children and loved ones. This is the human side that is not considered with the callous opening of schools. The teaching profession is not one you enter for fame, money, and glory. Essential workers have become, essentially, disposable. No one wants that... It is for these reasons and many more I stand with the call for a general strike.”

The Socialist Equality Party calls on all educators, parents and students to join the Educators Rank and File Safety Committee and attend its next meeting on Saturday, October 31 from 2pm-4pm. To register click [here](#) .



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