

For a European-wide school strike against the pandemic

International Youth and Students for Social Equality
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The European continent is in the midst of a catastrophic development which dwarfs everything that has happened so far in the course of the coronavirus pandemic. If unessential businesses, schools, and day-care centres are not immediately closed, the overloading of health care systems and the premature death of millions of people is inevitable.

But governments of all stripes have made it clear that they will not take serious measures to contain the virus that might reduce the profits of the rich. As recently as Wednesday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron announced that despite exponential growth in infection rates, schools and businesses must remain open.

This policy is supported by all bourgeois parties and the trade unions. Schools and day-care centres were reopened under completely unsafe conditions, thus fuelling the infections, and should not be closed again, despite mass infections, so as not to endanger the parents' ability to work.

Under these conditions, students and young workers must take responsibility for their own health and the lives of their families. In Greece, students have already occupied hundreds of schools to prevent unsafe teaching. In Poland, thousands of students protested against the herd immunity policy and called for a school boycott.

These initiatives are of utmost importance and must be extended to the entire continent and made the starting point of a comprehensive general strike against the policy of the unchecked spread of the virus. This is the only way to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe.

On the basis of scientific research, the question has now been clearly resolved. Children and adolescents are just as likely to become infected as adults and pass on the virus with similar frequency. Given the lack of safety measures, schools and day-care centres inevitably become breeding grounds for the pandemic.

A department of Britain's health ministry recently admitted that almost half of the infections in the entire country were attributable to the education sector alone. Germany's Robert Koch Institute has also pointed out the

significance of schools in the infection process. Most recently, comprehensive studies by the Universities of Oxford and Vienna concluded that the closure of schools at the peak of the first wave was by far the most effective measure to combat the pandemic in a large number of countries studied.

However, these findings are being knowingly ignored and parents and students deliberately lied to and misled to keep schools running. For example, Stefanie Hubig (Social Democratic Party, SPD), President of the Conference of State Education Ministers, lied when she said, "Schools are not the drivers of the pandemic." Saxony's state Education Minister Christian Piwarz (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) had even falsely described children as "brake blocks" of the pandemic.

With these shameless falsehoods, a policy is being enforced that not only threatens the lives of millions of previously ill, weak and elderly people but also endangers young people. Recent studies confirm, for example, that even younger athletes can suffer heart damage, even if they were asymptomatic.

Keeping schools open is not about the welfare of children and young people, but solely about maintaining the ability of parents to work and thus guaranteeing the profits of the banks and corporations. And the capitalists insist that this should not result in additional costs.

If it were a matter of the welfare of children, billions of dollars of investment in the education system would have made it possible to conduct teaching in separate small groups and well-ventilated rooms, thus making a sustained improvement to the ailing education system, as demanded by leading virologists from the very beginning. Poorer families would have been equipped with the necessary technology for digital learning.

But for politicians of all parties, even the purchase of ventilation systems for €100 per child was too much to make the classrooms a little safer. Instead, hundreds of billions were thrown down the throats of the banks and corporations throughout Europe in the form of economic stimulus

packages and bond purchases. In Germany, the economic stimulus package of the summer alone also included 10 billion euros in armaments spending for the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces).

That it is not a matter of the welfare of young people can be seen from the fact that unlike the big corporations, young people receive no support whatsoever. Many working-class students must give up their studies because of the loss of their part-time jobs due to the coronavirus, with the government providing virtually no real support. Also, estimates assume that tens of thousands of apprenticeship places will be lacking this year.

In a particularly sharp way, the pandemic shows that capitalism can no longer offer the youth a future. Their right to education, to a decent job and even to their health is being sacrificed to the immediate profit interests of a narrow financial oligarchy. Without education and unemployed, they are once again to serve as cannon fodder in wars waged in the economic interests of the imperialist powers.

The precarious situation of the youth is part of the ferocious social attacks on the entire working class. The corporations are using the pandemic to push through long-planned restructuring measures and mass layoffs. The same personnel who were initially forced back to work under precarious conditions are being thrown on the streets en masse in industry, retail and aviation.

A general strike closing unsafe schools can only be the prelude to a comprehensive struggle by the entire European and international working class. It must force the immediate closure of schools and full wage replacement for parents who must look after their children. Non-essential production must be shut down. Only on this basis can safe conditions in education be created when infection rates fall, with billions invested in schools and day-care centres. The following demands are central to this:

Close schools and prepare safe education! Given the horrendous spread of the coronavirus in Europe, schools on the continent must be closed immediately. Only when the number of cases has fallen below 0.1 percent of the population may classes be held in small, fixed learning groups that are physically separated and safely housed. Special protection must be provided for risk groups.

Billions must be invested in safe and decent education! To ensure safe conditions when the number of infections has fallen, billions must be invested in schools and day-care centres, especially in hiring thousands of new teachers and educators. Their wages must be increased significantly.

Full wage replacement for parents who must care for their children! Parents must receive full wage replacement for the care of their children. Poorer families must be given special support and receive high-quality equipment for

digital learning.

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!

When students, teachers and workers fight for these demands, they face all the parties in the Bundestag (German federal parliament). Not only the ruling CDU and SPD but also the Free Democratic Party (FDP), the Greens and the Left Party are implementing the inhuman herd immunity policy at state level. In Thuringia, the Left Party plays the leading role in the ruthless reopening of schools and businesses under state Premier Bodo Ramelow.

In Spain, the pseudo-left Podemos, together with the social-democratic Socialist Party (PSOE), is particularly aggressive in implementing a herd immunity policy. While their government refuses to close production plants and schools, it sends police into the poorer districts to terrorize the population.

The unions are heavily involved in the campaign for opening schools and uninterrupted production. They have taken on the task of controlling any protest by workers to suppress any disruption of operations.

This united bloc of all bourgeois parties and organizations in all European countries shows that this is a fundamental tendency of capitalism. The pandemic is revealing the real social conditions: working conditions, the necessities of life and even the health and lives of millions are to be sacrificed for the profit interests of a narrow financial oligarchy.

Students, teachers, and workers must form independent action committees that coordinate internationally and are completely independent of the parties of the ruling class and their trade union partners. These committees must become the basis of a countervailing power that counterposes the programme of international socialism to the capitalist logic of inequality, war and disease.

To begin the fight for this programme, we urge young people to join the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, the student and youth movement of the Socialist Equality Parties.



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