

Meeting of the Network of Action Committees for Safe Education In Germany, dozens of students, parents and teacher representatives call for school strikes and safe education

Our reporters

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On Friday evening, the Network of Action Committees for Safe Education held its largest online meeting to date. Around 40 participants from all over Germany spent almost three hours discussing their experiences at the height of the pandemic. At the same time, new record infections and deaths were registered. The high numbers that have been reported for weeks are pushing the health care system to its limits.

Under these conditions, the initiative to establish Action Committees for Safe Education is meeting with a growing response. Several representatives of ongoing student protests and school strikes took part in the meeting. Together with parents, teachers and educators present, they reflected a cross-section of the broad opposition to the unsafe conditions in schools and day-care centres.

The central topic of discussion was a statement brought to the meeting by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) and the Socialist Equality Party (SGP). Following the discussion, the declaration was adopted by an overwhelming majority.

In the statement, the Action Committees stated that policy of opening up schools and businesses is being driven by “governments of all stripes” and serves exclusively the profit interests of the banks and corporations. Therefore, Action Committees must be developed independently of the parties of the Bundestag (federal parliament) and the trade unions, the statement reads.

“We strongly oppose this policy, which places the interests of the rich before the health of the people and call on students, teachers, educators, and parents to take their safety into their own hands,” it says. For this reason, it was necessary to call for immediate school strikes if the demands of students and teachers were not implemented.

Finally, the students, parents and teachers state that the Action Committees must network internationally and turn to

the struggles being waged by workers. “Therefore, resistance in schools must be linked to workers’ struggles for safe workplaces and to defend jobs. It must be part of a broad mobilization for a general strike that places the needs and health of the people against the profit logic of capitalism.”

During the discussion, students, teachers and educators from 10 cities reported in detail on their situation, providing further evidence for the correctness of the statement.

Marlon, a pupil of the Gauss-Gymnasium in Worms, remarked at the beginning how enthusiastic and positively surprised he was by the event, to which he had been invited as a pupil representative. He described the protests, which had already started almost two weeks ago, and the conditions on the ground. In particular, he denounced the negligent decisions of the health department. Marlon also underlined the burden placed on teachers and made clear, “The alternative [safety] concepts are there,” but they fail because of politics.

Angelina, a student representative at the Walle school centre in Bremen, reported on the mood of discouragement among the students, as many felt powerless. She also criticized the coverup of cases by the authorities and thus the jeopardy faced by relatives, especially those in risk groups. She also explicitly defended teachers who, although bearing the brunt of students’ frustration, suffer just the same in the pandemic.

Meret, also a student from Bremen, reported how a successful hybrid teaching concept (alternating in-person with online lesson) had already been implemented at her school thanks to a conscientious principal. Now, however, on the instructions of the politicians, regular operations are to take place again next week. She referred to the enormous burden the situation places upon students, especially in the stress of preparing for their graduation exams. “Something

has to happen quickly, otherwise things won't get any better at all," she concluded.

Pascal, a student in Baden-Württemberg, also reported on his experiences. He explained that the school had not even informed him when the pupil who sat next to him was quarantined. He also used examples to illustrate the grotesque dimensions assumed by the contradictory measures being imposed. For example, students had to wear masks in the classrooms, which had to be regularly ventilated, but did not have to take any safety measures whatsoever during physical education classes. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of keeping the declaration universal, to show everyone the way of "what needs to be done."

Joyce, from Essen, described the mental and physical stress the current physical education programme leads to. She said she had never been "as unmotivated for school as she is now" and how, as a student, she felt "the government has ignored me."

In addition to further contributions from students from Munich, Karlsruhe, Bremen and Lünen, a discussion developed. After a pupil had asked how one could make oneself heard even better by the authorities and political parties, several speakers warned against holding out hopes for their insight and understanding.

Marlon referred to the experiences of his student council, which had received a lot of attention, sympathy and encouragement from politicians of many parties after the protests had started. However, since the latest government decisions on Wednesday, none of the politicians were speaking to the students anymore.

Martin, an educator from Dresden, pointed out that all parties in one or another federal state were implementing the same policies as the government in Berlin, and that therefore their hypocritical opposition could not be believed. It was not a matter of differentiating between good and bad people, but rather of understanding that the unscrupulous herd immunity policy in schools and day-care centres was being administered from the top to the bottom.

Diane, a mother who belongs to the high-risk group, also described her own experiences and those of her parents' initiative, which has included writing to the authorities, politicians and the media in vain for months, appealing to their humanity. But they should have realized that "we have no lobby." In particular, she complained about the cold and heartless way in which the authorities dealt with her worries and concerns, from which she was still "frozen in shock."

When a student representative from Bremerhaven criticized using expressions such as "herd immunity policy" and the sharp choice of words such as a "policy of contagion" or "government propaganda," numerous

participants opposed him.

Several speakers used examples to demonstrate that these words are absolutely correct. For months, governments have ignored all scientific recommendations, including those of the Robert Koch Institute, thus accepting an escalation of infection, said IYSSE representative Gregor Link. Contrary to all scientific findings, they continued to spread the lie that school pupils posed little or no risk of infection.

The establishment parties are also supported by the Education and Science Union (GEW), explained Philipp Frisch, a teacher from North-Rhine Westphalia and a member of the IYSSE and Socialist Equality Party. The union was calling for schools to be kept open and claimed that children under 12 contributed less to the pandemic. The GEW saw its task in keeping teachers in the workplace despite the adverse conditions, he said.

Samea, a kindergarten teacher from Bremen, and Clemens from near Munich, undertaking a year as a volunteer, also reported on conditions at day-care centres. Samea complained that she and her colleagues had to work completely unprotected, essentially as before the coronavirus pandemic. "That the government does nothing," she said, was the "irresponsible treatment of human lives."

Philipp Frisch summed up the discussion after the vote on the resolution, noting that a broad mobilization of students, teachers and workers was now needed to stop the madness of the herd immunity policy. He called on all those involved to register with the Action Committees for Safe Education and to expand their work.

From the experiences that were exchanged at the meeting, he said, important political conclusions could be drawn. He said that the herd immunity policy was not limited to individual parties or individual federal states but was a widespread phenomenon. "This shows that capitalism is unable to overcome the pandemic humanely. Therefore, we require a socialist perspective that puts the needs of the people before the profit interests of big business." He concluded with a call to join the IYSSE and support the struggle for socialism.



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