

Emergency meeting of the Network of Action Committees for Safe Education

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Faced with death tolls unseen in Europe since World War II, the Network of Action Committees for Safe Education (Netzwerk der Aktionskomitees für sichere Bildung) in Germany convened an emergency meeting on Tuesday to advance the fight for school closures and discuss prospects for a general strike against the politics of mass infection with the coronavirus.

“Since our last meeting, the situation has worsened enormously,” Christoph Vandreier, deputy chairman of the Socialist Equality Party (SGP), stated at the outset of the meeting. “Almost 1,000 people a day are now dying in Germany, and according to experts, this figure will continue to rise, driving the health care system to collapse, which in turn will cause many more deaths. Even now, clinics have begun triage.” In this context, the emergence of a mutation of the coronavirus, which initial reports suggest is around 70 percent more contagious, is a deadly warning, said Vandreier.

“While thousands have died and 40 percent of the population have lost income, the champagne corks have been popping on the stock exchanges. This situation, in which hundreds of thousands have died, was deliberately brought about politically. It is a result of the policy of opening schools and businesses, pursued in order to secure profits. In fact, outside of retail and hospitality, not a single business has been closed.” All public talk about the current measures qualifying as a “lock-down,” Vandreier concluded, therefore constitutes a fraud:

“All these measures are aimed at keeping businesses open and the economy running while 1,000 people a day are dying. And despite the continuing surge in numbers and the

mutation in the UK, there’s already discussion about opening schools as soon as possible.” Already, he said, day-care centres and many schools are not in fact closed, but instead serve as “storage facilities” for children so that parents can be forced to work.

At the forefront of this policy are the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Greens and the Left Party, supported by the trade unions: “The GEW [teachers’ union] spoke out against school closures just days before the so-called lock-down and even ruled out alternate teaching at elementary school.”

That is why the work of the action committees is taking on such dire importance, said Vandreier. “We need to prevent schools from reopening in January and we need to organize massive school strikes. Businesses, schools, day-care centres and public transportation are the main drivers of the pandemic and must be shut down immediately. Non-essential production must cease and all workers must continue to receive full pay.”

To wage this political struggle, he said, a revolutionary and socialist perspective is needed: “The only force that can save tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands of lives is the mass of students and workers who must ensure that schools do not open and factories close. It is they who must enforce the lock-down.”

The weeks leading up to the winter vacation were marked by school strikes and protests for safe education that developed across Germany. Meret, a high school senior from Bremen, reported on one of these courageous strike actions: “Considering the increasing deaths and the rising case rates, at some point we thought to ourselves, ‘It can’t go on like this. We’re going on strike now!’ That very night, we

started writing an appeal and passing it through the various class groups via Whatsapp. It spread insanely fast and met with an extremely positive response!"

"As a result of the strike, we were able to reduce the number of students in all courses by almost half," Meret continued. "We organized internally so that students who didn't have a tech device at home were provided for. In the meantime, we've reached the point where we say: We're going to stand up to them, and we're going to do it with all the means at our disposal. After the winter vacation, we want to keep the strike going and extend it to all students. We're all going to stay home—that's the plan."

While the strike enjoys the support of the teaching staff and the good will of the school administration, the school authorities have strictly opposed the protective measures taken by the students. Meret reported: "As the student council, we submitted an official application, which was also supported by parents, to the Bremen education authority. But we didn't get anywhere at all with that request—the authority rejected it and kept saying the schools must stay open at all costs."

The fight in Bremen contains important lessons for future school strikes, Meret observed: "We achieved more in a few hours with conversations on social media and with organizational work among our fellow students than in all the weeks of application work and discussion with the education authority. Most important is to take initiative now—if we don't do it, no one will! Stand in solidarity with other parents and students! The education authorities will not help us."

Indeed, among students, teachers and parents across Europe there exists a tremendous willingness to fight against the deadly COVID policies of the ruling class. "Among my classmates, anger has grown enormously over the last few weeks due to more and more new COVID cases," said Florian, a student from Baden-Württemberg. Referring to the resolution passed at the network's last meeting, he said, "Students and teachers all over the world are confronted with the same issues and therefore need to work together internationally."

Two teachers from Berlin expressed enthusiasm about the students' initiatives and, for their part, reported how the pandemic has further exacerbated the devastating conditions and pervasive shortages in schools. Many teachers, one said, have already been forced to "just drop out for reasons of overwork," amid massively rising COVID-19 cases and high risk of infection. As teacher Jesse from Berlin pointed out, based on the government's "care regulations," it is impossible for parents to get time off from their respective employers. "The result is that more than half of the children in my elementary school are currently in after-school care.

Under these conditions, keeping classes separated is completely impossible!"

Other participants at the event reported on the lack of protection at day-care centres, the impact of coronavirus policies on working-class youth and the refusal of health authorities to enforce consistent testing and quarantine measures.

Katja Selin, spokesperson for the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, highlighted that the struggle against the pandemic really is a political struggle against the ruling class and capitalism. She advocated for massively expanding the movement internationally and provided insight into the development of class struggle on a world scale:

"There are already action committees in the UK, the US and other countries and our world movement is struggling to build these committees in every country. The anger and growing willingness to fight has been apparent in all corners of the world in recent weeks." Selin reported about student and teacher strikes in France and Greece, care workers' strikes in Spain and Chile, about autoworkers' strikes in the US and South Korea, and dozens of other protest and strike movements around the world. "It is now necessary to expand the movement of action committees to all countries and to network internationally."

Like Katja Selin, Christoph Vandreier emphasised the importance of a socialist perspective against the politics of mass infection, saying, "With the pandemic and the struggle for safe education, the question is coming to the forefront whether social life should be determined by the profit interests of a filthy rich elite that is willing to walk over corpses—or by peoples' vital needs? To fight the pandemic and to solve all other pressing problems of society, the big banks and corporations must be expropriated and put under democratic control in an international socialist movement."



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