

Network Meeting of the Action Committees for Safe Education: Pupils, workers and students discuss perspectives for a European-wide general strike

Our reporters
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Amid the largest mass deaths on the European continent since the end of the Second World War, the first meeting in the new year of the Network of Action Committees for Safe Education took place January 11.

In introducing the online meeting, which included several dozen pupils, teachers, parents and students, Gregor Link of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) referred to the now almost 400,000 confirmed COVID deaths in the European Union and noted that the coronavirus mutation B.1.1.7 was already spreading rapidly through open schools in many countries. In Germany alone, 6,000 people died last week—comparable to the crash of “thirteen to fourteen jumbo jets.”

“These people did not simply fall victim to a natural disaster. Their deaths are the result of a deliberate policy pursued by the ruling class throughout Europe. They have deliberately allowed the virus to spread and have refused to carry out the necessary closures of schools, day-care centres, offices and businesses that, together with comprehensive testing and quarantine measures, would allow the pandemic to be contained and eradicated.”

Instead, according to Link, all measures were aimed at “keeping profits bubbling away at all costs and protecting the fortunes of the capitalist oligarchs, many of whom have profited from the pandemic.”

All over the world, he said, caregivers, teachers, educators and parents faced the same life-and-death issues. In the US, workers confronted a state-directed conspiracy that culminated in a violent storming of the capitol building in Washington on January 6. The fascist coup attempt, which enjoyed the support of significant sections of the Republican Party, the state apparatus and the military, showed how the ruling class around the world was relying on authoritarian methods, Link said.

The international guest at the meeting was Thomas Scripps

from the UK, who heads the work of the IYSSE. Scripps explained that the devastating situation there was also the result of deliberate political decisions by the entire ruling class.

“The situation in Britain should be taken as a real warning to the rest of the world,” he explained. “More and more hospitals are warning that they are on the verge of collapse. For London, the certainty is that in a fortnight, there will be no beds left. The government has tried to shift the responsibility for this appalling situation onto the new, mutated strain of the virus. But it created the conditions for the mutation to develop in the first place with its murderous policy of ‘herd immunity’.”

As in Germany, Scripps commented, the British elite had imposed a supposed “lockdown” in recent weeks, designed primarily to protect corporate profits.

“The government,” he continued, “even threatened to take several local councillors to court before the Christmas holidays for attempting to close schools three days early. In face of massive opposition from staff, schools have now supposedly been ‘closed.’ But in reality, in many places, they still have 50 percent attendance because everyone has to continue to go to work.”

Scripps pointed out that Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s policy of “herd immunity” and opening schools was supported by both the Labour Party and the trade unions. While the unions categorically rejected any strike action against the COVID-19 threat, Labour leader Keir Starmer had thrown his full weight behind the government’s course in the name of “national unity.” Scripps concluded:

“The rank-and-file action committees are there to organise workers and young people independently of the fraudulent unions and to save lives. The real allies of students, educators and bus drivers are their colleagues in other industries and around the world. Every aspect of this

pandemic proves that there are no national solutions to the great crisis facing humanity. The virus must be brought under control at the international level and the big companies pushing the policy of ‘herd immunity’ must be fought at the international level.”

As the discussion continued, pupils, parents and students spoke about the growing opposition in their communities and the political conclusions that were being drawn. A medical student from Berlin recalled the desperate situation in intensive care units and the tireless work of the nurses. Two single mothers condemned the propaganda campaign in parts of the media and the immense pressure that government policies put on working-class families.

High school student Meret from Bremen recounted how she and her classmates had managed to halve the size of school classes on their own in December with the support of teaching staff and against the will of the education authority.

“In December, given the death toll, we realised that it could not go on like this. One night, we started spreading a statement via WhatsApp and various social media—within a couple of hours, it spread widely. So, from one day to the next, we managed to reduce the number of students to half in some cases.”

In the new year, however, Meret says the situation had worsened to such an extent that face-to-face teaching was no longer an option.

“I work at weekends as a nursing assistant and I strongly oppose the idea that students should return to face-to-face classes from next week. If our demand to close schools is not implemented, we will organise a strike again. Because of the situation, we have realised that we are the only ones who can help. No one else will close the schools unless we explicitly demand it. Just a few people can be enough to kick things off.”

Joshua, a student from Nuremberg, also stressed the importance of organising resistance to the pervasiveness policy independently of the bourgeois parties and trade unions.

“Since the outbreak of the pandemic in spring, all the establishment parties have resorted to brazen lies, cover-ups and propaganda to keep businesses open, force pupils to attend classes and children and educators into day-care centres. In Hamburg, a study by the University Medical Centre Hamburg-Eppendorf was suppressed for months, which proved that there had been several large outbreaks of infections in schools. Although the study was known, all state governments claimed that schools were ‘infection-proof’.”

The death of Kreuzberg (Berlin) teacher Soydan A. exemplified the effects of this criminal policy, he said.

Other speakers pointed out that the courageous initiative of

the Bremen students was part of a mass movement in the making. “Since November, there have been school strikes and protests in Bochum, Dortmund, Frankfurt, Essen, Bremen and Worms, among other places,” reported Florian, a student from Baden-Württemberg, for example. “They were organised by pupils who organised themselves independently.” He said that the protests by students, nurses and other workers in France, Poland and Greece in recent months showed that resistance—just like the pandemic—was developing on an international scale.

Clemens, who works in a day-care centre in Bavaria, linked the coronavirus crisis to unprecedented social inequality and pointed to the soaring stock markets that parallel the number of deaths.

“The DAX [German stock market] is feasting upon mass deaths, ending the year at an all-time high. Meanwhile, the pandemic is exacerbating social inequality. Many large companies like Lufthansa are using the pandemic to push through mass layoffs. The total wealth of the 2,000 dollar billionaires has increased by 8.7 trillion this year.”

Christoph Vandreier, Vice-Chair of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) took up these points and noted:

“It is obvious that there can be no individual answer to this pandemic. In face of policies in the interests of the super-rich that keep giving free rein to the virus, we must formulate a programme that places the protection of the population at the centre. This includes the defence of all jobs and incomes. The very real issue of educational inequality must not be played off against the fight against the pandemic under any circumstances! Instead, schools, day-care centres and all non-essential factories and offices must be closed.

“Workers must be fully compensated. The billions and trillions must be reclaimed from the banks and corporations and used to guarantee all families a reasonable standard of living and the necessary technical equipment. To do this, it is now necessary to build a socialist international movement against capitalist barbarism. In waging this struggle, we are confronted with a ruling elite that is prepared to walk over corpses—its real policies are no different from those of the Trump administration.”



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