

UK Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee discusses school reopenings and lessons of Trump's attempted coup

Our reporter
25 January 2021

The UK Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee meeting on Saturday was held following the extraordinary events surrounding the attempted coup in the US on January 6 and the inauguration of Joe Biden, and amid a dramatic worsening of the pandemic.

Introducing the meeting, special needs teacher Tania Kent said, "The UK is now leading the world in the death count from Covid. A staggering 21,024 people died in the first three weeks of 2021 with over 1 million infections since the new year. The lockdown imposed by the Tory government on January 5 is significantly less restrictive than the first in March, with 10 million classified as 'key workers', despite a new more contagious strain of the virus and worse hospitalisation rates."

"The closure of schools in response to overwhelming opposition amongst educators has not resolved anything. The unions have continued their collaboration with the government, allowing lives to be sacrificed over profits. Early years and special schools remain open... and up to five times more children [are] in school than in the first lockdown. This is not a lockdown. This is not safe!"

"The National Education Union along with the Labour Party have played the key role enabling the unsafe reopening of schools. The NEU like all trade unions is tied to the defence of the capitalist system, which exist to dissipate, disorient and block the development of a genuine opposition that exists within the working class....

"The only solution is the building of independent organisations of the working class... We call for an immediate closure of schools and non-essential industry with full compensation to workers. We fight for a political general strike to end the wave of deaths and for workers to take matters into their own hands."

US Socialist Equality Party member Evan Blake reviewed the situation confronting educators and all workers as the Biden administration takes office.

"The inauguration took place under a state of siege... roughly 25,000 National Guard troops occupied sections of Washington, D.C. surrounding the Capitol."

Any belief that a Biden administration represented a

"rejuvenation of American democracy" or would tackle the pandemic, which had by then claimed 423,079 lives, was illusory. "The new Biden-Harris administration will defend the interests of the ruling class as ruthlessly as the Republicans."

"There has already been an escalation of internet censorship," he said, "with leading members of the SEP in the US and others having their Facebook profiles deleted. The incoming Biden administration pledged to deepen the drive to war with Iran, China and Russia and will continue to persecute whistleblowers such as Rebekah Jones, Julian Assange, and Edward Snowden.

"Biden's pandemic plan consists of a limited mask mandate and promises of a slightly more rapid vaccine distribution. More than 3,000 people are dying every day, hospitals are overflowing with COVID-19 patients... Biden ruled out shutting down nonessential production to get the spread of the virus under control and declared most K-8 schools [elementary-middle schools] will be reopened within three months... this has already begun in numerous Democrat-led cities and states, despite enormous opposition among educators.

"Biden and the Democrats are doing everything to cover up Donald Trump's coup attempt on January 6, which marked a turning point in US and world history. The Socialist Equality Party in the US issued the call for a public, televised and live-streamed investigation into January 6."

Had the coup attempt succeeded, this "would have encouraged the ruling classes internationally to similarly turn towards far-right and fascist parties."

Evan referenced the report by WSWS chairman David North at a recent online meeting, *The Trump Coup and the rise of Fascism: Where is America Going?* "The horrific social implications of the modern form of financial parasitism were exposed by the pandemic. The sole concern of the government was to protect the markets, not save lives."

"Everything depends upon the independent initiative of educators and the broader working class," said Evan. "There is a growing radicalization within the American working class. Over the past week, there has been a major strike by 1,400 Hunts Point market workers in New York City, which the Teamsters [union] are trying to end. We have an Educators

Rank-and-File Safety Committee in New York City, trying to unite educators and all workers with the Hunts Point workers.”

“There are now 10 active education committees across the US, we have worked with autoworkers and Amazon workers to form their own committees... [for] ultimately international strike actions coordinated with your committees and others.”

Teaching assistant and SEP member Harvey Thompson said, “Infections and hospitalizations are sweeping through nurseries and early years settings.” Boris Johnson’s government lyingly said they are “unlikely to be playing a driving role in transmission”.

A survey by the Early Years Alliance “found an estimated 31,000 staff working in nurseries and pre-schools have tested positive for coronavirus since December 1. A further 3,000 childminders contracted the virus.” Thousands of key workers in the Early Years sector are not deemed by the government to be a priority to be given the vaccine. The Early Years sector is demanding access to testing for staff and for them to have priority status.

Answering to a question from Ruth, a teacher from the Isle of Wight, as to how many states in the US had in-person teaching in schools, Evan said roughly half. Attendee Ross questioned the feasibility of uniting workers, and whether workers would gain public support for school closures.

Kent emphasised the commonality of workers’ interests, within the US, the UK and internationally. The unions were dividing the working class. “There was a call for strike action in September, to oppose the opening of schools. The unions were saying, ‘There’s no support, teachers aren’t interested’... but you had this mass meeting on NEU members online, hundreds of thousands of workers wanting action. The unions knew this sentiment exists. They want to suppress it.

“We are confident the working class will move, forced by the conditions they confront. The issue is programme, perspective and leadership.”

Ruth raised that “over the summer, the NEU ran focus groups of small numbers of union members, and then told the membership repeatedly that the membership was not anxious and wanted to get back to work.” Kent said at their conference, the NEU executive refused to accept a resolution on strike action.

Blake added, “In the US some members of our rank-and-file committee thought there’s a passive acceptance of the conditions workers face. Since July, there’s been hundreds of protests, over a dozen wildcat strikes to oppose school reopenings... there’s been a major upsurge of the class struggle internationally since 2018. The crisis of capitalism is compelling workers into struggle, and radicalising hundreds of millions all over the world. There has been a shift in mass consciousness, a thoroughgoing exposure of the inability of capitalism to address the basic social needs of the working class.”

Lucia raised concerns about the government’s vaccination

programme, including why special needs staff are not being vaccinated. Kent replied, “We have to close schools until it is safe for workers... [and] fight for a maximum vaccination of all workers. The government can’t do it. because profits are involved. The only way is to take control of society.”

The meeting ended by proposing the resolution below in support of victimised Covid whistleblower Rebekah Jones, a critic of the US government’s herd immunity policy and back to work drive. SEP (UK) member and Learning Mentor Liz Smith explained Jones was fired from her job, subjected to a police raid and arrested.

“The UK Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee condemns the arrest of data scientist Rebekah Jones, which is a flagrant effort to intimidate the outspoken and courageous scientist who has exposed the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Florida and in schools across the US.

“Rebekah Jones, who is now sick with COVID-19, is being silenced because she took it upon herself to commit the crime of telling the working class the truth, both about the pandemic and the criminal response of the government to the public health crisis.

“The arrest is an attack on the right to free speech and access to information. Educators internationally must come to the defence of Jones and all whistleblowers fighting for full transparency and reporting of all data on COVID-19.

“We pledge and urge all workers to fight against this censorship and defend all democratic rights.”

The resolution was passed unanimously.

We urge all educators, parents and students to sign up for the Educators Newsletter and join and participate in upcoming meetings of the UK Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee.



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