

# Strikes against face-to-face teaching at Bavarian schools widen

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Students in Bavaria are striking against the state government's attempts to force graduating classes back into in-person lessons amid the pandemic. School strikes, which began in Nuremberg on Monday at seven schools, then spread to Augsburg within three days and met with a huge response on social media among students from all over the country.

Participating in the strikes in Nuremberg on Monday were high school graduates from the Hans-Sachs-Gymnasium, the Dürer-Gymnasium, the Bertolt-Brecht-Schule, the Neues Gymnasium and the state vocational high school (BOS). At the state-run Fachoberschule 2 (FOS 2), only 30 of the 400 students in the 17 graduating classes showed up for the face-to-face classes on Tuesday.

In an "urgent request" to the state government, student representatives at FOS had noted that they had received no response from the "responsible departments," in some cases for months. "The government is giving us an ultimatum," counterposing "our health and that of those we care about to education," the students said. "This is an ultimatum we cannot and will not agree to." The high incidence levels of 130, as well as the emergence of the new viral strains, were "deeply worrying." The student body had therefore decided by majority vote on Saturday "that a strike will take place against in-person teaching." This was "also agreed and supported in the upper secondary schools."

"The main demand of our strike has been met," Mike, a high school graduate from FOS Nuremberg, told the *World Socialist Web Site*.

"Originally, all non-attending students were excluded from online classes. Now, at our school, anyone who wants to is allowed to study from home. Citing 'fear of infection,' students can call in sick on days they should

attend in person and participate in online classes instead. Students who lacked decent technology have been given a tablet for this purpose." He and the other students, Mike said, were "proud and very positively surprised" by the growth of the strikes and the great support they have won among students and teachers.

In Augsburg, final year students at three secondary schools went on strike at the beginning of the week, starting with around 50 students from the Fachober und Berufsoberschule (FOS/BOS) on Monday. Student spokesperson Dominique Treske emphasised to broadcaster SAT.1 the risk of contagion associated with the journey to school. "Many come from the surrounding area and sometimes have to travel an hour and a half by train—and then by tram." Under the current conditions, public transport was "the main place of infection."

A petition in which the students demand, among other things, a "considerable reduction" in the number of exams and school-leaving examinations has already received over 8,000 signatures.

At the Holbein Gymnasium, final year students first wrote a letter of protest to state Education Minister Michael Piazzolo (Free Voters) after a survey showed that 90 percent of students rejected a return to alternating in-person and remote classes. Then, on Wednesday, only 25 of the 160 prospective graduating students showed up for face-to-face classes. "We all called in sick," explained pupil spokesperson Luisa Link, stressing "the health risk for pupils and teachers ... even more so now that the [COVID] mutations have been detected in Augsburg."

The 60 final year students at Bayernkolleg also went on strike on Wednesday. As pupil Hanna Zrayenko told the *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung*, the strike would continue after an examination next Tuesday. In addition

to the Abitur graduation exam, it was “also about our health and that of our teachers,” she said. The strike was an “act of solidarity” because teachers, (classed as civil servants), could not stop working. In a press release, the students demand, among other things, the expansion of digital teaching options and the hiring of new educators to relieve teachers and reduce class sizes.

If the state government has its way, Bavaria is currently threatened with a general return to face-to-face teaching from February 15. A spokesperson for the Education Ministry told the press that the “goal is to have as much face-to-face teaching as possible.”

“One is forced to weigh up between education and health,” commented Mike. “We all want to pass our exams, after all. But we wanted to campaign for everyone who is scared to stay at home. I know what it’s like to be scared—I myself was still in serious therapy just last year. We were expecting to strike until everyone was on the verge of being kicked out.”

The students’ fight for safe education enjoys the support of teachers and headteachers, who are unanimous in calling for the continuation of distance learning for all students.

“It won’t be long before the first students are back in quarantine for 14 days,” Bianca V., a teacher from Bavaria, told the WSWS. “You sit on top of each other all day with a mask on; at home you have to wonder if you might just be carrying the virus from the classroom into your family.

“Schools have nowhere near the internet bandwidth needed for connection from the classroom—so you only manage a fraction of the material relevant to the Abitur exams this way. The pupils in Nuremberg are therefore absolutely right: where distance learning works, it is the much better way for pupils in this age group. For pupils with poor internet connections, there would be a need for additional facilities in libraries, for example.”

However, the government and all the establishment parties have made it clear again and again in recent months that they are hostile to the legitimate and popular demands of students and instead intend to put all available resources at the service of militarism and trade war. While the current federal budget slashes expenditure on education and health, military spending is to be increased and the security agencies strengthened. Schools are to open so that parents can

work and businesses can make a profit.

“The many should not suffer for the profit of a few,” Mike said. “But the pandemic has shown that the greed of a few seems to outweigh the interests of the many.” The “real starting point” of the crisis, he said, is the “gap between rich and poor.”

“I get that feeling in schools, too, where attendance is supposed to be compulsory during a pandemic, even though online classes are available.” This leads to “struggling students either doing badly or living in fear—or not at all,” he said.

“I saw what happened in France,” Mike added, referring to the students who demonstrated for infection control in schools last year and were attacked by riot police using mace and clubs. “That might have happened to us too if we had all demonstrated in front of the school. To the French students, I say: Restez à la maison, restez forts! Et montrez votre solidarité avec les faibles de votre école! [Stay at home and stay strong! Show solidarity with the weakest in your school!]”

“I would personally support” a Europe-wide school and general strike, says Mike, “this is a Europe-wide problem.” He said the international unity of students and workers is crucial: “In Turkey, protesting students are called terrorists. If so many students of a multicultural society unite and all differences of opinion become unimportant, the government has a problem.”

Strikes and protests are not only growing in Europe. Throughout the United States, as in Europe, action committees for safe education are emerging, organised independently of the pro-capitalist parties and the unions, and uniting workers internationally. In Chicago, thousands of teachers have taken a stand against the reopening of schools.



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