

Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education meets to oppose school reopenings in Turkey

Our reporters

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A Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education in Turkey held an online meeting last Sunday entitled, “Close schools and non-essential workplaces until the pandemic is contained!” featuring speakers from the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany. A recording of the livestream is available [here](#).

Like other the rank-and-file safety committees globally, it advanced a scientific analysis and international program for the working class against the capitalist governments’ murderous response to the pandemic.

In his opening remarks, Ula? Ate?çi, a writer for the *World Socialist Web Site* and a member of Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu (Socialist Equality Group) and the Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education, underlined the international character of the meeting. He explained that the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the WSWs spearheaded rank-and-file committees founded in the US, UK, Germany, Sri Lanka, Australia and Canada in particular after the pandemic began last year.

The committees raised the urgent and vital demand of today. “Close schools and non-essential workplaces until the pandemic is contained! Full income support should be provided to all workers and small business owners affected by these measures. With a worldwide vaccine campaign, other social distancing measures such as widespread testing, contact tracing and quarantines should be implemented.”

Although this is the only scientific and viable response to the pandemic, the obstacle to this solution was the global capitalist system, oriented not to the needs of society but to private property and profit. He said, “Therefore, the struggle against the pandemic and capitalism is inseparable, and this struggle has to be global in nature.”

He then explained on what basis educators, students and parents have created their committee amid the pandemic and school reopenings in Turkey.

Growing numbers of cases in schools in Turkey have vindicated the warnings made last month by the Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education in a statement, “No to school re-openings in Turkey before the pandemic is

contained!” He explained that the main purpose of reopening schools for in-person education in Turkey and internationally is “to get children out of their homes, so their parents can be sent back to work to produce profits for the corporations.”

He concluded his remarks with the global necessity of rank-and-file committees organized independently from the pro-capitalist trade unions and all establishment parties to defend the interests and lives of the working class.

Evan Blake, a member of the Socialist Equality Party (US) who writes on education for the *World Socialist Web Site*, also spoke at the meeting. Blake plays a leading role in the organization of rank-and-file safety committees among educators in the US. He began his remarks by stating that the founding of the rank-and-file committee in Turkey as part of committees all over the world was a highly significant development for educators and workers in Turkey and internationally.

Blake explained that these committees are critical weapons in organizing the entire working class on a global scale and to popularize a program to close all schools and nonessential workplaces, while providing full economic security for all workers affected.

However, this necessary program will only be implemented through “the conscious struggles of the working class in opposition to capitalism and imperialism, which place profits and the national interests of the capitalists in each country above all the social needs of workers.”

Explaining the continuity between the Trump and Biden administration policy on the pandemic, Blake cited Biden’s economic advisor Brian Deese, who bluntly stated the reason for back-to-school campaign: “We need to get the schools open so that parents ... can get back to work.”

He explained the reactionary role played by the teachers unions in this campaign, in particular, in Chicago where the Chicago Teachers Union rammed through a deadly deal last month to reopen schools in the third largest district in the US, setting a precedent for other cities.

Blake pointed out that changes had taken place in mass consciousness globally after this “world historic tragedy. ... There is an enormous radicalization taking place in the working class in America, the center of world capitalism, Wall Street, and American imperialism.”

In conclusion, he emphasized the fact that the pandemic has shown, above all, “the need to unite workers all over the world, which only the International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site* are fighting to realize.”

The next speaker was Tania Kent, a special education teacher and writer for the *World Socialist Web Site*. Kent is also a member of the Socialist Equality Party and chairperson of the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee in the UK.

Kent explained the recent school reopenings across the UK and the joint campaign launched by media, political establishment and trade unions on the so-called “safety” of schools. In fact, schools were “the key vector for the transmission of the virus and the single most significant cause of some 80,000 deaths from September to January” in Britain.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson made two things clear in late February: that “more deaths” will follow and that he and, in fact, the entire ruling class would not tolerate another lockdown.

She underlined that “it was in the UK that the policy of ‘herd immunity’ pursued by the world’s governments was first publicly admitted.” The ruling class was able to pursue this policy only due to the criminal role played by the Labour and trade union bureaucracy.

Kent summarized the struggles and experiences of educators and workers against the back-to-school campaign since the pandemic began. She recalled, “When schools were forced to close on March 23 last year, it was due to a mass rebellion of teachers and workers who refused to send their children to school.”

She concluded her remarks by declaring, “From these common experiences in every country, workers internationally must draw the same conclusion: Building a new political leadership is a life-and-death question.”

The final speaker was Gregor Link, a writer for the *World Socialist Web Site* and a member of the Socialist Equality Party and Network of Action Committees for Safe Education in Germany. He began by stating that “an independent intervention of the international working class is absolutely indispensable to finally put an end to the pandemic.”

Although Germany was hailed internationally as a role model for how to cope with the pandemic a year ago, “These times are over.” In December and January alone, 40,000 people died of COVID-19 in Germany, while 4,000 people

died in Europe each day.

Though scientists agree that if mass testing capacities are not in place, retail stores, schools and day care centers must remain closed. “On behalf of the German and European bourgeoisie, all parliamentary parties—from openly right-wing parties to the pseudo-left—are pushing through a murderous agenda of ‘profit before lives.’”

Link pointed to the WISAG workers struggle in Frankfurt against sackings. While the mainstream media and the major unions entirely abandoned and ignored them, the Socialist Equality Party is fighting to extend their struggle, and the coverage of WSWS is increasingly reaching a mass audience.

He reported the enthusiasm among the WISAG workers when they have heard the solidarity statements from rank-and-file committees internationally, including in Turkey. “It was met with enormous resonance and circulated widely.”

Link spoke of the widespread opposition among youth against the school reopenings, pointing to the school strikes by working class youth in Bavaria in February and student struggles in Bremen. The International Youth and Students for Social Equality is fighting to unite these struggles of students with the opposition of teachers, parents and the greater struggles of the international working class.

In conclusion, he stated that this meeting had shown that educators, students, parents and workers internationally face the same political tasks. “We aim to mobilize workers, teachers and students across all national borders against the horrors of capitalism in its death agony.”

This first online public meeting of the Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education in Turkey made clear that the only way forward against the ruling class’s deadly response to the pandemic and to save lives is through the independent political mobilization of the working class internationally against capitalism.



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