

# At inaugural public meeting, Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee calls for working class action to stop the third COVID-19 wave

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The Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (CERSC) held its first public meeting on Sunday to discuss a working class-led strategy to stop the third wave of the pandemic. The meeting featured an international panel of speakers, who explained the committee's demands for the closure of schools and nonessential production, and the provision of full wages to all workers and families so they can shelter at home, to an attentive online audience.

The meeting took place as Canada struggles with a reported 73,447 active cases of the COVID-19 virus, the grim milestone of 1 million cases having been reached on April 3 and a further 60,000 confirmed infections already added to the total since that date.

The meeting was chaired by *World Socialist Web Site* reporters Roger Jordan and Richard Dufour, and conducted in English and French. In his introductory remarks, Jordan underscored the devastating impact of the ruling elite's homicidal policy of keeping the economy and schools open, noting that the global death toll will surpass 3 million in the coming week. These deaths were not an inevitable result of the virus, but the product of the deliberate policy of placing corporate profits ahead of human lives.

Lafrance Lafrance, an educator from Quebec and a leading member of the CERSC, presented the opening report. Lafrance explained how the explosion of cases in recent weeks with the onset of Canada's third wave is directly related to the reopening of schools. Reviewing the experience of the pandemic's first two waves, he remarked that a study by Montreal researcher Dr. Simona Bignami found that it was Montreal children who infected their parents last fall, not the other way around.

"Now authorities are forced to acknowledge this," he said, "but schools remain open."

The vaccination campaign, instead of helping to curb the virus, is now the central pretext being invoked by the political establishment to justify the lifting of all remaining restrictions, he added.

Lafrance cited important facts, including the spread of new, more contagious variants, that demonstrate the pandemic in Canada is now at its most dangerous point ever. Since February,

for example, one in 43 Canadians who have contracted the virus have died, and at present, the number of cases in Canada is increasing at 2.5 times the global average.

Lafrance continued, "Unlike the US, where the situation has never been under control, Canada has experienced very definite waves, which were directly related to the reopening of schools."

Lafrance also shared his personal experiences as an educator during the pandemic, having seen firsthand the inconsistent health measures, lack of clear guidelines, and poor communication when there are COVID-19 outbreaks at schools and other workplaces. He related the refusal of his trade union to take any action to fight for the health and safety of its members. Senior officials even ruled out of order a motion at a union meeting calling for an emergency meeting to discuss how workers can protect their health and lives.

Summing up the strategy of the CERSC, Lafrance said in conclusion, "Uniting with teachers and other education staff in other countries is essential. Educators in Canada must also understand that they are involved in a larger struggle to unite the entire working class. To be blunt, the struggle that school personnel face will not be resolved by a struggle limited to the education sector. The pandemic, along with social inequality and all social problems, affects the entire working class."

The second speaker was Evan Blake, a writer for the *World Socialist Web Site* who has played a leading role in the formation of rank-and-file committees in the education sector in the US.

Blake reported on the execution of the "herd immunity" policy in the US, which the Trump and Biden administrations, while using different rhetoric, have both implemented, and the complicity of the corporate media and trade unions in the realization of this profit-driven agenda. He also stressed that these criminal policies are creating the conditions for a mass working class upsurge. "Nothing will return to normal and the pandemic has profoundly altered society," Blake declared. "It is a world historic tragedy that is shaping mass consciousness and moving workers to the left everywhere. There is an enormous radicalization taking place in the working class in America, the center of world capitalism, Wall Street and American

imperialism.”

Several workers and educators expressed their support for the committee and made contributions to the meeting, including two teachers from Ontario.

“Those of us who may have been holding out hope that the severity of the situation would force governments to act to save lives are being hit by the sobering reality that this homicidal policy is not going away,” said a high school teacher from Toronto.

A statement sent to the committee by an Ontario teacher was also read out at the meeting. The teacher voiced their anger at the lack of action taken by the teachers’ unions to protect workers, and how the pandemic has exposed the unions’ opposition to any struggle.

“The message teachers have gotten is loud and clear. No matter how bad of an outbreak happens in your school, we will never intervene on the membership’s behalf,” the statement read, referring to the attitude of the unions. “We cannot help you because the government says it’s illegal. This is the straitjacket workers need to break out of.”

The third featured speaker was Gregor Link, a writer for the *World Socialist Web Site* and a member of the Network of Action Committees for Safe Education in Germany.

Link reported on the state of the pandemic in Europe, where almost 1 million people have died of the virus and 25,000 people are currently dying each week. In Germany, as in Canada, deadly new variants are spreading exponentially, yet the federal and state governments unanimously refuse to close schools and businesses to contain the pandemic.

“In our view, it is crucially important to organize independently of the unions and reach out to workers all over the world,” stated Link. “We intend to fight for a general strike that includes and unites workers across Europe and beyond to shut down schools and non-essential production. All affected workers and small business owners must be completely compensated. The ill-gotten wealth of the corporate elite needs to be seized and the trillions in state funds taken back in order to fund a rational and internationally coordinated action program against the pandemic.”

In the discussion period following the speeches, a question was raised by a high school teacher from Peel Region. She asked about the committee’s position on claims that children’s mental health and social development are negatively impacted by online schooling.

In response to the teacher’s question, Jordan explained that the closure of schools was an emergency decision driven by the need to stop mass death. “Another key aspect of the program we’re advocating is for full compensation to all families and workers who are affected by the pandemic,” he added, “which is something that the ruling class refuses to do, even though it has vast resources at its disposal.”

“Just look at the amount of money that Canada’s billionaires alone have gained during the pandemic, or the hundreds of billions just in one country—Canada—that was handed over to the banks and the corporations at the beginning of the pandemic.” These funds, he continued, could be used to provide social and mental health support to children and families.

The meeting concluded with an address by Keith Jones, the

national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in Canada, who remarked that we now confront “the most perilous situation during the entire pandemic.”

The SEP national secretary emphasized that this disastrous state of affairs was the outcome of the ruling class’ prioritization of corporate profits over human lives. He also denounced the trade unions for sending workers back to dangerous schools and workplaces as the virus ran rampant. “When workers at the Cargill meatpacking plant in High River, Alberta, where there had been more than a thousand infections and three deaths, pressed for action against a premature return to work, their union, the United Food and Commercial Workers union, ordered them back on the job, denouncing a strike as ‘illegal’ and reiterating its commitment to the pro-employer, state enforced labour relations system,” said Jones.

“Atop the Canadian Labour Congress’s homepage it reads: ‘In Canada, we’ve weathered the pandemic by sticking together and supporting each other,’” he continued. “Thus speaks the privileged union bureaucrats, with their six-figure salaries, of a crisis that has demonstrated and deepened the enormous class divide in Canada, as around the world. If truth be told, the unions with the capitalist elite and its governments have stuck together, expanding the corporatist collaboration that has seen the unions that were in an earlier period associated with working class struggles transformed into junior partners of management and the state.”

Jones emphasized that a network of rank-and-file committees must be established in schools and workplaces across the country, under the leadership of the CERSC, to fight for an end to all in-class instruction and the closure of all nonessential production until the pandemic is halted.

“The fight for these demands, as part of the struggle against a pandemic that respects no borders or passports, inevitably raises the need for a broader struggle,” he said.

All teachers, school staff, students and parents are encouraged to join the struggle to halt the spread of the pandemic and save lives. If you are interested in joining the Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, visit our Facebook page or contact us at: [cersc.csppb@gmail.com](mailto:cersc.csppb@gmail.com). Workers within other sectors are encouraged to contact us for information on building a rank-and-file committee in their workplace.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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