Network of Action Committees for Safe Education (Germany)

Lively discussion among students, parents, and workers about an international counter-offensive against capitalism

Our reporters
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Last week, students, parents and workers came together at the bi-weekly online meeting of the Safe Education Action Committees Network. The lively discussion was marked by enormous anger and outrage at the pandemic policies of the ruling class and the dangerous conditions in schools and workplaces.

The introductory report and video segments of speeches from the ICFI's international May Day rally highlighted the importance of the newly formed International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which will unite workers across all national borders in opposition to the corporatist unions. The network had previously issued a joint resolution supporting the formation of the International Workers Alliance and calling for participation in the online rally on May 1.

The meeting took place under conditions of the continuing and devastating global pandemic. An excess mortality study by the US-based Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) had revealed just days earlier that the real number of coronavirus deaths worldwide is more than double the figure given by governments. In India alone, more than 22 million cases and more than 250,000 COVID-19 deaths have been reported since the pandemic began, and one in two infected people have contracted the disease in the past month.

According to official statistics, around 1,400 people in Germany are still dying from COVID-19 every week. Although the numbers are currently falling, infections have increased especially rapidly in the younger age groups. Among children, adolescents and their parents, the number of infections is two to three times higher than the average for the population. In this situation, the perspective of an international alliance of working-class action committees has met with a great response.

"The action committees are extremely important," noted participant Claudia, for example, who lives with her family near Munich and reported several COVID-19 deaths among her acquaintances. "It is imperative to publicise the committees so that everything is exposed that is currently being swept under the carpet," she said. Infections in face-to-face classes, as well as in emergency child care being conducted at day care centres and primary schools, were also being covered up and scientific concerns not taken seriously, Claudia said. This was evident in her immediate environment, "Although my friend had COVID-19, her death was not registered as a coronavirus case, but was attributed to the so-called 'Kawasaki syndrome.'"

Madeleine, from Cottbus in Brandenburg, added, "Although we are in a pandemic, in-person attendance in classes is compulsory—while we are all already under pressure!" Parents who demanded alternative solutions in this situation given the unsafe operation of schools were bullied and harassed by the authorities. "They even sent the youth welfare office to get my daughter into emergency child care," she reported. It was now crucial that "the grassroots" take action together and fight for a scientific programme against the pandemic, she said.

The discussion covered the key class issues in the pandemic—from the orgy of enrichment in the capital markets to the role of the trade unions. Marianne Arens, a member of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and writer for the *World Socialist Web Site*, pointed out, "By discussing 'relaxations for vaccinated people,' the ruling class is painting a false

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picture of the situation and trying to confuse and divide the population."

Far from coming to an end, the pandemic in Germany resembled an ember that could turn into a major fire again at any time, she continued. "The real division is not between the vaccinated and the non-vaccinated, but between the working class and the ruling capitalist class. While the latter is benefiting massively from the pandemic, mass layoffs and wage cuts that have long been planned are now to be enforced."

Joshua, a student, said that the capitalist elite in Germany had no interest in ending the pandemic, pointing to the extent to which they were profiting. "The price of Biontech shares, which were €13 in October 2019, is now €146. The company is now worth around $35 billion—yet the mRNA technology that forms the basis of Biontech/Pfizer's vaccine was developed at a public university." The German government's refusal to lift vaccine patents and allow the global distribution of the vaccine was a particularly sharp expression of the capitalist profit motive, he said.

The struggle against the profits-before-lives policy was linked by SGP member Andy Niklaus to the struggle against workplace infections. The Transport Workers' Action Committee for Safe Workplaces, set up by Niklaus and other Berlin bus drivers, had recently published a statement opposing the planned reintroduction of front boarding on buses in Berlin. As Andy explained, this reckless and dangerous measure would only serve to maximise profits through onboard ticket sales.

"In our statement, which developed a wide reach in a very short time, we demanded that the front doors remain closed and no onboard ticket sales take place for the duration of the pandemic. We also demand the provision of comprehensive protective equipment, no further cover-up of infection figures in transport companies, and daily high-quality cleaning of vehicles. Cleaning staff must be protected in the process. There must be no sanctions or harassment for colleagues who decline work duty or who talk about safety measures for fear of infection."

What was also needed was "immediate and regular compulsory testing for all staff and an immediate start on vaccinations for all workers," concluded Niklaus, who also made a strong case for building the International Workers Alliance. In New York and London, hundreds of bus and tram drivers had already died from COVID-19 at the time of the first and second waves of the pandemic because the necessary funds for their safety had not been provided.

From Hamburg, Timo, who has been working at a coronavirus hotline for about a month, reported on the desperation of people with serious pre-existing conditions in the face of the slow progress of vaccinations. "I talk to people from different walks of life every day who are desperate to get vaccinated. Despite the permanent risk, there are no free appointments for many at risk. Children can't be vaccinated but are still forced to attend school." In Berlin, Timo said, currently "all six vaccination centres are massively undersupplied with vaccine."

Together with the contributions from the May Day rally, which were also the subject of lively discussion, the reports painted a clear picture of the need for workers and youth worldwide to unite to oppose the profits-before-lives policy. Gregor Kahl and Martin Mauer, SGP candidates in September's general election, noted that to date, the trade unions had not organised any struggle against this policy worldwide. Instead, they acted as co-managers for the companies and government stooges to impose the opening up of the economy and job cuts against resistance from below.

"The call of the International Committee of the Fourth International to build the International Workers Alliance of action committees is therefore of historical significance," concluded Gregor Kahl. "Then as now, the intervention of the international working class is needed to end mass death, and at the same time, then as now, workers need a fighting party capable of building revolutionary leadership in the working class and uniting struggles on a socialist basis."

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