

Indian workers and students denounce school reopenings and support World Socialist Web Site's global webinar

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There is growing interest and support among Indian workers and students for the October 24 global webinar being organised by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

The online meeting will feature a distinguished panel of scientists and epidemiologists who will discuss and explain the case for the global elimination and potential eradication of COVID-19.

Contrary to capitalist governments everywhere claiming to have contained the virus, everyday almost half a million people contract COVID-19 and nearly 6,000 die from the disease. The current real global death toll is estimated at well over 10 million and more than four million in India.

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi boasted on October 21 that one billion people have been vaccinated, hailing it as a “triumph of Indian science, enterprise and collective spirit,” only 30 percent of adults are fully-inoculated. Children have yet to be vaccinated.

Although daily coronavirus cases and deaths have recently declined in India, moves by the Modi government and the state administrations to lift the limited existing restrictions and reopen schools will inevitably lead to a surge in infections. These unsafe measures are being opposed by ever-broadening layers across India and around the globe.

Several workers, students and parents voiced their concerns about the increasingly dangerous situation and said they would attend the October 24 global webinar.

Sumita, a PhD student in Kolkata, said: “Various Indian state governments have announced the reopening of schools, universities, businesses, cinema

halls and other venues, but what appropriate procedures were carried out before this was allowed? Though the number of COVID infections has decreased in recent months, the hasty removal of safety measures is dangerous for a developing country with poor infrastructure like India.

“I think it’s vital to consider a global strategy for eliminating and eradicating this lethal virus and that’s why the upcoming October 24 webinar hosted by the WSWs and the IWA-RFC is so important.”

Balakrishnan, a dismissed worker from the Motherson auto parts plant near Chennai, said: “I’m a rank-and-file worker, with four children, and want to share my thoughts with comrades and friends in the WSWs and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

“Some parents have given their approval to send their children to schools because their kids are provided, in addition to education, with free noon meals and protection at schools. The government, however, is indifferent to the dangerous implications of reopening the schools when the deadly virus has not yet been eliminated.

“The government fraudulently claims the parents have given their consent for reopening the schools. But that consent is probably impoverished workers, like daily labourers, who are under immense pressure to look after their children but want to go to work if their children can go to schools. That the government is using this poverty situation as its trump card is dangerous.

“The government is serving big business through these actions. Big business has reopened the factories and put the workers in an unsafe environment. Adults

are being infected with COVID-19 so I doubt that children would not be infected in schools which are places of mass gathering.

“When I took my children to school, I anxiously asked the teachers whether children would be safe from the deadly virus. I was told, ‘You can send the children if you like but it’s not compulsory.’ The government sent out a letter to all the schools for parents to sign giving their approval and making them fully responsible for the consequences. Neither the government nor the school administration would be held responsible for the impact of COVID-19.

“This is outrageous. The irresponsible actions of the government and the school administration will contribute to the further spreading of COVID-19. While the government and its officials live and work in a protected environment, school children and college students are being put in unsafe conditions.

“I strongly condemn the government’s action to reopen the schools and factories, the moves are for the selfish profit interests of big business. As a Thanikaimalai primary school teacher told me: ‘Anyone who has recovered from COVID-19 knows full well about the impact of the virus and would never send his or her children to school in an unsafe environment.’”

Leon, an ecologist from Bengaluru, said: “The failure of the top-down approach implemented by governments around the world proves that we desperately need a more collective, comprehensive and bottom-up approach. While the corporations have made a fortune by monetising the pandemic, the common man still suffers. The media claims that the pandemic has changed the status quo, but the working class is still stuck in the muck and unable to survive the social and economic onslaught of the current scenarios.

“Parents who have lost their jobs and those who have been paid lesser wages are not given any assistance by the government to pay school fees. Nor does the government force private education institutions to reduce their fees.

“The only way forward is to set definite goals, like eradication and elimination, and through collective decision-making. The WSWS webinar will add fuel to the burning fire of revolutionary progress and equality.”

Sanjivan, another Kolkata student, said: “I don’t

want to support the reopening of schools and colleges because it’s very dangerous. This is not just about the safety of students but of the surrounding communities. Schools are often the most densely populated buildings in the community. The more the virus spreads inside this sort of setting, the more it will be able to spread outside it, via public transport and family members.

“The reopening of schools isn’t just about the endangerment of children but also about threatening adults, many of whom are well within higher risk age brackets. It puts teachers and support staff in the terrible position of either imperilling themselves by returning to work or quitting their jobs and losing their incomes.

“No matter how educators and those working on building maintenance try to make facilities safe, schooling involves bringing together large groups of people, including unvaccinated children.”

Akash, a small trader in Kolkata, said: “When the second pandemic wave came early this year, the government was surprised. People died like animals but nothing was done to stop it. There was no preparation at all—all they did was under-report the death toll—and Modi declared on television: ‘We should save India from a lock down.’

“Although the death toll has come down, the number of children dying is too high. The reopening of schools in many states, such as Karnataka, Delhi and Tamil Nadu, has meant that COVID infections have spread among school children. Many students have died in Karnataka and Delhi but these governments are not talking about closing schools.”



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