

Committee for Public Education (Australia) holds successful online meeting on the COVID crisis

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The Committee for Public Education (CFPE) in Australia held a successful online meeting last Saturday, with people participating from across regional and urban Australia, as well as New Zealand, the Philippines and the United States.

The event, titled “COVID-19 spreads through Australian schools: Lives before profit! Stop the pandemic!” featured reports from Evan Blake, a member of the Socialist Equality Party (US) and a leading writer for the *World Socialist Web Site*, CFPE national convenor Sue Phillips, and SEP National Committee member Zac Hambides.

Central to the meeting was discussion on the Global Worker’s Inquest that has been initiated by the *World Socialist Web Site*.

CFPE member and teacher Patrick O’Connor, who chaired the meeting, began by explaining the crucial significance of the Inquest. “The emergence of the highly transmissible Omicron variant was predicted by many epidemiologists—and the *World Socialist Web Site*—as an inevitable price that would be paid for the failure of the ruling elite of nearly every country in the world to advance policies aimed at the elimination of the virus,” he said.

The first report was delivered by Blake who began by reviewing the present state of the pandemic and the spread of the Omicron variant internationally.

In outlining the catastrophe that is taking place in the United States during the latest Delta surge, Blake highlighted the impact on children, noting that schools are the number one source of outbreaks and that more than 100,000 children are being infected every week. The CDC reported that “974 children under 18 years old have died from COVID-19, including an extraordinary 306 children under the age of five.”

Blake also pointed to the enormous opposition brewing among students, teachers and parents to keeping schools open while politicians and their backers in the teachers’ unions double down on their homicidal policies.

Blake concluded his report by calling attention to the Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 pandemic, which will expose the ongoing criminal policies that have led to the death of millions of people.

He explained that the inquest will examine “every major aspect of the pandemic in each country—including the topics of what was known before the pandemic, what was done in the critical first three months, the Wuhan lab conspiracy theory, the impact of COVID-19 on children and the role of school reopenings on viral transmission, the role of the politicians, the unions, and the media.”

Blake continued: “In developing the Inquest, we seek to educate the working class and politically arm workers with an understanding of what has taken place and why, and who is responsible. This is not a scholastic exercise, but must be intimately connected to the fight for the global elimination and eradication of COVID-19 today, which is the only way to stop new and more dangerous variants from evolving.”

Blake answered a series of questions from meeting participants, including on the nature of the Omicron variant, the role of schools in the transmission of the virus, and the impact of Long COVID on children.

Meeting participants then unanimously voted for a resolution endorsing the Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic.

It read: “This meeting of the CFPE fully endorses the WSWWS initiative to hold a Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic. We resolve to support this initiative in any way possible and to encourage teachers, parents and students to participate as fully as possible. As

governments around the world have all embraced a ‘let it rip’ approach to the pandemic, we have to use the Inquest as an opportunity to educate the only force capable of undertaking a struggle for an eradication program to the pandemic—the working class.”

CFPE convenor Phillips was the next speaker. Reviewing the development of COVID in Australia, Phillips explained: “Decisions are being prioritised not on the basis of the health and safety of children, students and working people, but on the demands of the corporate elite for the resumption of full profit-making, especially over the Christmas and holiday season. In fact, far from raising concern about Omicron, government ministers, senior officials and sections of the corporate media have proclaimed their desire for the new variant to spread.”

To illustrate the impact of these criminal policies, Phillips outlined the impact in Australia on children, citing data collected independently by the CFPE. Phillips noted that “the shocking and unending dangerous spread of the virus in schools—the lack of accurate information has been covered over by teacher unions, which have been entirely complicit in this dangerous experiment—not only in this recent opening but from the beginning of the pandemic in 2020.”

Outlining a strategy for elimination of the virus, Phillips noted, “The response to the virus must be taken out of the hands of the ruling class. In every workplace and factory, in the US and internationally, rank-and-file committees must be built to enforce the shutdown of unsafe facilities and the closure of schools to in-person learning.

“The development of a mass movement against the criminal policies of capitalist governments requires the education of workers and young people on the nature of the pandemic. The Global Workers’ Inquest will play a major role in providing the social and political impulse for the mobilisation and intervention of the working class in the fight to end the pandemic.”

Zac Hambides gave the final report, focussed on the recent one-day strike by teachers in NSW and the opposition that has developed among teachers to the reopening of schools.

Outlining the role of the unions in the reopenings, he said: “The NSW Teachers Federation, Australian Education Union, and the Independent Education Union have all collaborated with the government to force teachers back to schools plainly repeating the lie that vaccines and minimal mitigation measures will keep teachers and students safe.”

He continued: “We insist there is no safe way to operate

schools during widespread community transmission of COVID, these must be shut as part of broader measures to eliminate COVID and place workers lives above the profit interests of the billionaires.”

The reports were followed by further questions and answers and included a short report by one of the CFPE members responsible for publishing daily data on school closures and school infections. Noting that much of our data comes from concerned parents and teachers who inform us directly, the CFPE member and teacher explained, “This work is so important to give a better understanding of the actual impact on schools and to educate the public and particularly parents and educators of that impact.”

At the end of the meeting, a resolution was passed in support of English parent and SafeEdForAll member Lisa Diaz.

The resolution read: “This meeting of the CFPE declares its full solidarity with Lisa Diaz, who is being persecuted by the UK government and Wigan’s Labour-run council for her struggle against the mass infection of students with COVID-19. The authorities are threatening to prosecute Lisa with a fine up to £2,500 and the Family court because she refuses to risk the lives of her children by sending them into COVID-infested schools.

“Lisa’s call for a global school strike was supported by educators and workers in Australia and internationally, underscoring that we face the same struggle. We strongly denounce the UK government’s stepped-up intimidation of parents who refuse to send their kids into dangerous schools, and pledge to do all in our power to build support for Lisa among educators, parents, and students in Australia.”



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