“Opposition to the herd immunity policy is overwhelming”: European Network of Rank-and-File Committees for Safe Education meeting outlines strategy to end pandemic

Our reporters
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Amid the exponential spread of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus across Europe, an online meeting of the Network of Action Committees for Safe Education was held last week, expressing the immense opposition and willingness to fight against the criminal “herd immunity” policies of governments everywhere.

Many students, teachers, caregivers, workers and other concerned individuals reported the consequences of the hated policy and discussed the fight against it. In his introductory remarks, Gregor Link, a leading member of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) in Germany and its youth organization IYSSE, described the seriousness of the situation:

> The state premiers essentially decided yesterday that they will let the new Omicron variant rip. Federal Health Minister Lauterbach, Chancellor Scholz and all the other politicians have reiterated that there will be no lockdown, neither before nor after Christmas.
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> The health care system and nurses are already completely at their limit. They have been fighting for every single life for two years, to the point of complete exhaustion. Policymakers have always allowed just enough infection to happen that the health care system operates at its very limit. Schools and nurseries play a central role in this continuous spread of infection and are being left open in the last week before Christmas, even though everyone knows that this is no longer about education in any form.

What is needed, Link said, was an internationally coordinated lockdown “that will reduce the economy to the absolute necessities of life, close schools, nurseries and nonessential businesses, with full wage compensation, while compensating for all social consequences.” To do this, he said, a mass movement must be built in the working class to stand up to the profits-before-lives policy:

> If we want to stop the pandemic, we must take up a political struggle against the ruling class. Rank-and-file Committees must be formed at all workplaces and institutions that can give voice to workers and initiate the policies necessary to defeat coronavirus and enforce a humane and democratic—i.e., socialist—solution to the crisis.

The international dimension of this struggle was illustrated by Tania Kent, a primary school teacher from the UK, founding member of the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee there and member of the Socialist Equality Party (UK).

Kent provided a comprehensive account of the Johnson government’s murderous policies that have resulted in Britain once again being at the forefront of the spread of the virus worldwide, “Omicron is now the dominant variant in UK and hospitalisations and deaths are catching up. It is anticipated that within the next few days there will be 2 million daily infections.” She added:

> The policy of “herd immunity” in schools is fully backed and implemented by the Labour Party and the trade unions. There are some 114,000 teachers suffering with Long COVID, 570 have died; and over 67,000 children with Long COVID and over 112 have lost their lives to the pandemic thus far. Five percent of infected children were hospitalised in South Africa.

Kent’s presentation also addressed the growing opposition from UK parents:

> There are over 40,000 parents who have been forced to deregister their children from education as they refused to send them into unsafe schools. Our committee has established strong relationships with groups who have fought the criminal coverup of the government’s herd immunity policy, and with parents such as Lisa Diaz and Sarah Paxman who express the determined fighting spirit that exists amongst broad masses. We will mobilise the independent strength of the working class to take matters into its hands and end the risk to humanity posed by COVID through the fight for eradication and

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elimination.

During the meeting, workers and young people from a wide range of backgrounds told of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and government policy on their lives and those of their loved ones.

Ertu?rul, an airport worker laid off by ground services provider WISAG in Berlin, highlighted the class antagonisms that have been brought into sharp relief during the crisis: “While big business is making peak profits, the health care system is almost collapsing, and they are trying to keep the working class in check through intimidation and layoffs.”

With these capitalist methods, Ertu?rul said, the ruling class sought “to advance its greed for profit and to reap the highest possible revenues.” To counter this agenda, “we need to unite as a working class and give voice to this unity.”

Tamino, who is in twelfth grade in Baden-Württemberg, reported on conditions in schools:

> As in all the German states, full classes and compulsory attendance is taking place here. Safe distancing and air cleanliness are not being maintained. There is hardly any testing in my grade because only the unvaccinated are systematically tested. But vaccinated people can become infected unnoticed and spread the virus. Especially with the emergence of the Omicron variant, this risk has increased greatly.

The impact of the government pandemic policies on those in need of care and high-risk patients was described by Christine, who worked for a private health insurance company for many years. Although Christine herself is considered high-risk, making COVID-19 an immediate daily threat to her life, she said she did not receive her second vaccination until late June.

The German health system, she said, had in many places been lacking even basic resources since the beginning of the pandemic: “In the beginning, medical services used to only provide manually sewn masks. Only over time were surgical masks available, and eventually FFP2 masks—but not until the first wave was already subsiding.”

The glaring shortage of health care specialists also meant that many people among her friends who are in need of care had no access to help at all, she said. Medically necessary operations increasingly had to be postponed or were cancelled: “They would say, ‘We can’t carry out the operation because there’s no ICU bed available.’”

From Italy, Olivia reported on the coverup of infections among students. She herself has a daughter in need of care. “The deliberate mass infection of children must be stopped immediately! We are the majority, but it’s not being portrayed that way in the media,” she said.

Several participants addressed the fact that to enforce its brutal policies, the German government was relying on extreme right-wing forces, which are calling for a repeal of all protective measures. David, from Baden-Württemberg, referred to violent participants in “coronavirus demos” who were “led by neo-Nazi groups and strengthened by finance capital.”

However, this “noisy mob” was in the minority, explained WSWS writer Martin Nowak, an educator in Saxony: “In fact, the opposition to the herd immunity policy is overwhelming, but it needs an organized expression. That’s exactly why today’s meeting is so important.”

This was reiterated by David:

> The herd immunity policy is in the interest of the ruling class—the fight against coronavirus is in the interest of the workers. The capitalists make profits while the workers are infected. Only the working class can prevent war and fascism, and that’s what it increasingly amounts to. That’s why building independent committees in all factories is an absolute necessity.

Based on the experience of the last decades, SGP vice-chairman Dietmar Gaisenkersting—who chaired the meeting—stressed that this struggle must be waged against the parties and trade unions, whose role has been to impose mass layoffs, deliberate mass infection and wage theft.

In both the WISAG workers’ struggle and the fight for safe education, it had become clear that the unions were “entirely lost for the cause of workers’ interests,” Gaisenkersting noted.

He appealed to all participants to provide testimony for the Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic and to contact the Network of Safe Education Action Committees and the Safe Workplace Action Committees Network.

At the end of the meeting, Gregor Link summarized the tasks ahead:

> Action Committees must be established at all workplaces and facilities. Workers must force through a real lockdown and take up the fight for a worldwide elimination strategy. A central aspect of this struggle is the Global Workers’ Inquest, which will reveal the social forces underlying the coronavirus disaster and the program of deliberate mass infection.

Contact us and send us your testimony, which we will publish as part of the Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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