

“We need an international fight against COVID!”

Teachers and students in Germany support Chicago teachers’ fight for remote learning

Our reporters
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The Chicago teachers who voted against a return to in-person teaching on Tuesday are part of a growing wave of opposition around the world directed against the reopening of schools as COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations skyrocket. The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) vote produced a majority of 73 percent in favour of fully moving to online schooling. Teachers in Detroit, Michigan; New York City; and San Francisco and Oakland, California, are also resisting in-person teaching.

In Germany, teachers, parents and students are following the struggle of Chicago teachers with great interest and agreement. Here, too, the coalition government led by Olaf Scholz (Social Democratic Party, SPD) is giving the virus free rein, keeping schools and businesses open at all costs. As in the United States, quarantine times are also being shortened here, meaning the virus can progress even more rapidly. In response to these criminal policies, the trade unions advocate keeping workplaces and schools open in the interests of the rich against the workers.

Here are some recent statements that have been sent to the *World Socialist Web Site* in support of the struggle of the Chicago teachers.

Tamino, a student from Baden-Württemberg, drew the obvious international parallels in his letter of support. He stated: “I support the Chicago teachers’ fight against the policy of deliberate mass infection in schools. The conditions you are fighting against are the same conditions that students and teachers face worldwide! Here in Germany, too, all the state governments are reopening schools after the holidays, endangering the lives and health of students and teachers.

“Even before the holidays, coronavirus was spreading rapidly in schools here. But now with the Omicron variant this will come to a head once again. At the same time, plans are being made to shorten the quarantine period. Schools are to be treated as ‘critical infrastructure’ so that pupils and teachers can be sent back as quickly as possible after an infection. This, too, will undoubtedly further accelerate the spread of the pandemic in schools.

“This policy is supported by the trade unions. The chairperson of the GEW education union, Maike Finnern, for example, stated that she would also back the shortening of quarantine if the federal government’s expert council recommends it. This makes clear that a fight for safe education—with us as with you—can only be successful if carried out independently of the unions.”

Primary school teacher Lara from Berlin said, “Solidarity with all teachers, whether in Chicago, Berlin or elsewhere! In their hypocritical school reopening policies, the elites clearly and inhumanely show that they are not concerned with the right to education or care. They leave us teachers, the rest of the staff and above all the kids unprotected in their ramshackle and crammed children’s barracks and callously provoke the resulting suffering. Instead of introducing sustained measures like better working conditions, hygiene, development and family support, schools are degenerating into forced labour for capitalist profit.”

Olivia, a mother from South Tyrol in Austria, pointed out the dangers of schools reopening: “I see that the Omicron variant is spreading uncontrolled worldwide. Even a so-called mild progression of the illness can produce long-term damage to organs. And the percentage in which this is also the case in children is, in my opinion, not yet known—but that it happens, is clear!

“With the much higher transmissibility of the Omicron variant, combined with the non-professional management of mask-wearing and hand/surface disinfection in schools, I see too high a risk of infection, especially among younger children. The consequences will be even more sick children, full hospitals and carrying it home to grandma and grandpa.”

Olivia concluded, “I am in favour of protecting children preventively through a short school lockdown. As soon as possible, children must also be vaccinated. Of course, the state must ensure the necessary financial help for needy families, as well as social supervision for otherwise vulnerable children.”

Laura described her personal experience of the pandemic in a letter of solidarity for the teachers in Chicago. She wrote, “I am a student, and before the Christmas holidays began, some of us came down with the coronavirus. Among them are classmates with whom I have close contact! I find it very scary that my closest friends got infected. My thoughts on this for a while now have been, ‘It’s only a matter of time before it gets me.’ Especially the rapidly spreading Omicron variant makes the worries grow when I must go back to school on 10 January.

“A global pandemic cannot be contained or eradicated at the national level. We need an international fight against COVID to successfully eradicate this virus. To do this, we need to unite globally and make clear our discontent with the inadequate measures that only end up putting profits over human lives.

“This is why I support the Chicago teachers’ strike. Given the high risk of infection that schools pose and the growing numbers of infections among children, the opening of schools is a major threat to the health of younger, unvaccinated students, but also to teachers. We need to support the Chicago teachers’ fight against the herd immunity policies in schools around the world!”

The following statement was sent by a teacher from the Ruhr area who wished to remain anonymous: “In Chicago, three-quarters of the teachers have stated that they are not ready to go back to in-person teaching in the face of the deadly Omicron wave. My colleagues in the USA not only have my full support but deserve broad solidarity from all German schools.

“The teachers in Chicago give us their courageous voice because they consistently act for their students, the weakest in society, as well as for their families and for themselves. Daily, I have seen my students fearful they could infect their parents and grandparents, lose their teachers as school caregivers or eventually contract Long COVID themselves, given the recurring waves of new SARS-CoV-2 variants.

“A 14-year-old girl from our circle of acquaintances has only narrowly escaped death after being hospitalised in a neighbouring town. This kind of thing makes many students very thoughtful, some even depressed, and prevents them from learning successfully. Our students know better than most politicians would have them believe that our cramped schools are among the most frequent and dangerous transmission sites for Omicron.

“We so often hear it said that it’s school closures that supposedly hinder focus on learning. In fact, the opposite is true. Students, parents and school staff need an encouraging perspective on how the virus can finally be eradicated. To that end, maintaining social distancing is paramount, and that includes temporary school lockdowns and online instruction, which we have already practiced since 2020.

“The Chicago teachers’ decision against in-person teaching sends an important signal to us as well: students, parents and all school staff can see that it is possible to stand up to the unrestrained policy of deliberate mass infection. COVID-19 must be eliminated, and ultimately this can only be done at the international level, as it is in the nature of this epidemic. We now need school rank-and-file committees worldwide. Form them now everywhere, including in Germany, and spread the word about the exemplary action of the teachers from Chicago!”

Joshua, a student from Bavaria, told the WSWS, “I completely support the Chicago teachers’ fight against the murderous ‘Back-to-School’ campaign. I strongly condemn the reaction of the Lightfoot administration to take away the pay of striking teachers. The strikers’ demands are life-saving measures and must be enforced!

“It is no different in Germany. I come from Bavaria, and next Monday in-person teaching is to continue regularly here too, although Omicron is rampant and the intensive care units are full. The lies of the ruling class that vaccination alone plus a few measly mitigation measures would suffice have already been discredited and refuted by leading scientists.

“The only way out of this pandemic is eradication. But this conflicts with the profit interests of the ruling class. Therefore, the

working class itself must fight to close schools and all non-essential businesses. The teachers in Chicago have led the way, and the German teachers and the whole international working class must follow them and start building independent action committees!”

These statements show that more and more young people and teachers are learning the lessons of the ruthless profits-before-lives policies and are courageously coming out publicly to call for an end to the pandemic, which is fraught with so much danger, suffering and death. The examples of this are multiplying day by day.

In Germany’s most populous state, North Rhine-Westphalia, trainee teachers have started a petition on Change.org addressed to the state government, which has already received more than 4,500 signatures in just a short time. They are objecting to the fact that state Education Minister Yvonne Gebauer (Liberal Democratic Party, FDP) has cancelled all pandemic-related special regulations regarding their teacher training. They write, “Despite all the measures, one thing remains: the fear of infection and the fear of not being able to cope.” They also demand, among other things, “the possibility of conducting seminars remotely.”

On Twitter, a video by school student spokesperson Mati Randow from Austria is currently circulating widely. In view of the spread of Omicron, Mati advocates school closures because he cannot see “any other responsible option in the current situation.” He objects to students being “society’s little lab rats,” adding, “The pretence is always that schools are kept open for the mental health of students. This is a hypocritical discussion ... Our mental health is already f***ed anyway.”

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and its sister parties around the world are fighting to build independent rank-and-file committees to stop the spread of COVID-19 in schools and workplaces. We call on all our readers to register as active supporters today to participate in building these committees.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact