“What’s the point in being in a union when they don't look after their members?”

Educators and parents denounce UK education unions over unsafe schools

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Opposition to the education unions from teachers, parents and other workers is mounting. On social media they have registered disgust at the unions’ preventing a fight against the spread of COVID in schools. Many are calling for strike action and for schools to close until further safety measures are implemented.

Last January, the threat by tens of thousands of workers to utilise Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act to assert their right not to work in unsafe conditions forced the Johnson government into closing schools and imposing a lockdown.

The National Education Union (NEU) marked the anniversary, January 3, in a cynical 450-word Facebook statement, “A day to be proud of.”

The NEU has worked to keep schools open throughout the pandemic. It now makes the lying claim that it organised the mobilisation of teachers and shutdown of schools last January, at the height of the pandemic.

It was only when it was clear that the opposition growing among educators and parents to horrifying COVID-19 death rates, which had taken the lives of at least 570 education workers, that the NEU said it would support any members who cited Section 44. It and other education unions did so only to legitimise their refusal to organise the strike action or walkouts being called for.

When the Conservative government tried to reopen primary schools on January 4, teachers stayed away, forcing the Tories, concerned that the action of educators could spearhead a broader movement of opposition, to announce the third national lockdown that day.

A year on, the NEU’s statement does not even mention rising deaths or hospitalisation among children, claiming that the situation is “very different” now with the vaccine rollout while complaining that the government is not doing enough to prevent further “disruption” to education.

The union is in effect herding hundreds of thousands of its members into COVID infested schools with the only proviso that they “report the CO2 monitor readings from their classrooms.”

All the NEU proposed in its anniversary statement was that an online Zoom meeting be held Thursday evening, which it stipulated would only be open to union reps. This is because last January 3, the NEU held an open meeting that was attended by 400,000 of its members, reflecting the massive rebellion of school workers with many saying they would not attend unsafe schools the next day.

The NEU learned its lesson.

The main items on the closed meeting’s agenda were “updates from Kevin Courtney and Dr Mary Bousted, joint general secretaries of the NEU, on Covid-19 and the NEU’s ‘Value Education, Value Educators’ campaign on tackling workload and fighting for a pay rise.” An “update” on COVID was tagged on as an afterthought.

The NEU’s attempt to bask in the reflected glory of the January lockdown has provoked widespread anger. One NEU member said in response, “That was a day to be proud of... But now I am not proud. Now we are not doing anything to fight and keep our pupils and communities safe... We should be refusing to go back until each class has a HEPA filter, masks on for everyone all the time. Not enough staff to open? Then nature is telling us we need to lockdown.”

A fellow education worker said, “Different this year! Say that to your member whose Christmas was ruined this year because she caught covid doing her job. I’ve never been so down and I’m going back tomorrow, covid negative but still suffering long term effects... And the absence among staff we will have this week are already stacking up... What are you doing? Right now?”

Another said, “Child safety out of the window yet again !!”

“I was also proud to be a member last year but this year it feels like primary schools and early years settings have been totally abandoned,” added another.

One pointed out, “But you have said nothing about ‘merged’ classes. One staff member to up to 70 kids. That’s a precedent not be set. Here is one teacher who won’t be doing that!”

Another commented, “but what are you doing this year—absolutely bloody nothing.”

Someone wrote, “Thursday [the day of the Zoom meeting] is too late. You need to recommend Section 44 letters again now. Maybe less people are dying due to vaccinations but people are dying and it’s the biggest rise of deaths in children. Masks are not enough, filters in 2 months time are not enough. Schools need to be safe now before millions more children and teachers are infected where at least 1/10 of them will suffer Long Covid.”

“Squeezing lots if classes into the hall when several teachers catch covid at once is not educating, It’s babysitting... it’s much safer they be allowed to work independently at home. Remote learning for some will slow down the spread so teachers and children are not at such a high risk of getting infected especially as there is another new variant in the Country from Cameroon.”

Responding to the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) who were promoting the joint statement of the six education unions backing the returns to schools, a service engineer supervisor responded, “I wonder if these unions will ever do anything at all or even bother protecting their members at any point at all.”

A NASUWT member said, “Demanding stuff hasn’t worked in the past. Why don’t our unions take action to protect us?”
This text is about the NEU's call for urgent action to reduce Covid disruption in schools and the government's response. The article highlights the government's efforts to reduce Covid disruption in schools, including the purchase of air filters for every classroom. The article also discusses the government's response to the NEU's call for urgent action, which includes the call for parents to remain vigilant and the government's assurance that they are doing everything possible to keep schools open. The article mentions the NEU's call for urgent action to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in schools, and the government's response, which includes the purchase of air filters for every classroom. The article also discusses the government's response to the NEU's call for urgent action, which includes the call for parents to remain vigilant and the government's assurance that they are doing everything possible to keep schools open.