

Committee for Public Education (Australia) sends messages of solidarity to Chicago teachers

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The Committee for Public Education (CFPE) in Australia met last Saturday to discuss the escalating surge of Omicron throughout Australia and worldwide, and the rising opposition to mass infections occurring in unsafe workplaces and schools.

This opposition is being led by the Chicago teachers who have taken industrial action, rejecting government plans to force them back to face to face teaching. They have been joined by teachers in California and Philadelphia, who are also mounting action to resist the drive to reopen schools.

In Australia, the pandemic is spiralling out of control as state and federal governments have systematically dismantled public health restrictions. Each day is bringing 100,000 infections. Due to a massive breakdown in the testing system, the official figures are severe underestimates.

Under conditions of unrestrained transmission and the never ending erosion of self-isolation and quarantining rules, teachers and children in Australia face the prospect of being herded back into the schools in late January and early February. Moreover, it is estimated that only about one third of all children aged between 5 and 12 will have received a dose of the vaccine at that time.

After a lively discussion on this situation at the CFPE's meeting, the following resolution was unanimously passed by participants:

"This meeting of the Committee for Public Education declares its full solidarity with the bold initiative taken by Chicago teachers who voted overwhelmingly to move all learning online at Chicago Public Schools, the third largest school district in the United States. Their courageous stand in defense of the lives and health of

children, educators, school workers and the community as a whole marks a major turning point in the class struggle in the US and globally.

"The Chicago teachers have defied the Democratic Party at the local, state and federal levels, which demands a homicidal back-to-school policy regardless of the surge in COVID-19 infections and hospitalisations. Predictably, the Democratic Party and the corporate media have reacted aggressively and ruthlessly against the educators.

"The CFPE warns that teachers can have no confidence in the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU). Their record throughout the pandemic has been to work closely with the government to suppress teacher opposition and get educators back into in-person learning. The CFPE calls on Chicago teachers to join the Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee founded last year against the reopening drive by the Democrats with the assistance of the CTU. This should be the first step in linking up the struggle of teachers in Chicago with that of Rank-and-File Safety Committees in cities throughout the US and internationally as coordinated by the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. These committees have been guided not by what is good for business, but what is necessary to save lives and prevent the lifelong debilitation of children."

The warnings about the union's role were confirmed this week. The CTU, in collaboration with the Democratic Party, is herding teachers and students back into the classrooms from Wednesday, before voting has even concluded on a sell-out, union-brokered "safety agreement" that would do nothing to address the dangers. The union's perfidy has been widely

denounced by educators on social media.

Teachers who attended the CFPE meeting, made the following comments, expressing their admiration and support for the Chicago teachers:

Judith, a teacher from Melbourne: “I applaud the stance taken by the Chicago teachers who, in the face of government propaganda and media attacks, voted to refuse to engage in in-person teaching. Your principled stand will undoubtedly save many American lives and is a beacon for all working people across the globe. We must work together to ensure that the wellbeing of the many triumphs over the interests of the few.”

A teacher from South Australia: “I wish to send my support to the teachers of Chicago, Oakland and California in their fight to keep children and young people safe from COVID. Thank you for taking a stand on the health and wellbeing of students and your colleagues in the face of government opposition, and without the support of the trade unions.

“As teachers, we know that we cannot keep children safe from COVID in overcrowded, poorly ventilated classrooms where infected people are in close contact with others for several hours of the day. We applaud you for strength and unity in this fight. And as teachers who are about to embark on a new school year at the height of our greatest COVID challenge yet, we look to you for inspiration.”

Rick, a retired teacher from Melbourne: “I send my support and admiration to the Chicago teachers for their courage and leadership example to workers and teachers facing terrible choices and choosing to fight back. The ruling class and their lackeys are terrified and hysterical. Stay united and strong and reach out to workers, youth, parents and grandparents, and to the Socialist Equality Party.”

Peter, an educator from Melbourne made these comments prior to the meeting: “The Chicago teachers are showing what the organisation of a working class movement can do. It gives motivation to the rest of us as well to consider similar actions here in Australia, or abroad where they are. The action of the Chicago teachers is being noticed worldwide. They are to be applauded for their exceptional leadership and their collective effort.

“Governments are placing the interest of big business above public health and safety, and using media manipulation to reinforce it. They are taking a big

gamble, crossing their fingers that people will get the virus and then it will all move on. The unions have been unsighted up to this point. The union is just going along with whatever the government tells them to do.

“The way the government has set up the system is to put pressure on the principal and on the school. They are using the idea of personal responsibility to blame the principal, the teachers, the parents, the kids for any outbreaks.”

Vicki, a former teacher in South Australia also expressed her support for the Chicago teachers: “I support the actions of the Chicago teachers which show both courage and moral decency. The attacks against the teachers show the bourgeoisie and elite classes as enemies of the working class in their contempt and disregard for working class life and their obsession with profit and their tendency for lies. I also support the call for a global strategy, and the distribution of wealth, created by the working class, for the benefit of the working class.”

The CFPE encourages all supporters of the SEP to send messages of solidarity to the Chicago teachers through the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Register for the CFPE meeting, “No to Australian school reopenings amid record COVID infections! Educators, students, parents—join the fight for rank and file safety committees!” It will be held online on January 23 at 11am (AEDT).



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