

German student Yasmin's protest against unsafe in-person teaching sparks wave of solidarity

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The case of 13-year-old Yasmin from North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) shows the growing opposition to government pandemic policies. Because the courageous pupil from Hagen opposes participating in unsafe in-person teaching in a crowded classroom, amid the raging spread of the Omicron variant of coronavirus, she has been protesting in the cold outside the school since the beginning of the week, refusing to be infected.

The Heinrich-Heine-Realschule in the city of Hagen supports Yasmin despite massive pressure from the authorities and announced in a tweet: "With an unusual action, our student Yasmin wants to draw attention to how high the coronavirus infection risk currently is in school buildings and classrooms in NRW."

In freezing temperatures on Thursday morning, Yasmin, who suffers from asthma, told the local newspaper *Westfalenpost*: "I'll hold out here as long as I have to." Many young people had "followed all the hygiene rules" during the pandemic and "lost their youth," the newspaper quotes the schoolgirl. "All without any grumbling. Now, however, we are being dragged to school like lambs to the slaughter so that we are all infected."

Because of Yasmin's underlying medical conditions, infection with coronavirus poses a life-threatening danger to her, despite having had a booster vaccination. She is cold, but she will not enter the school building until it is confirmed that no infections take place there. "There are many children like me." She was looking for fellow campaigners for her cause, the seventh grader said.

In the meantime, at the insistence of the district authorities, the school administration has asked Yasmin to move into the vacant room of a substitute teacher, where she can take part in lessons using her laptop. The Youth Welfare Office had previously threatened the teenager with "taking her into care" if she continued her protest.

The images of the pupil being coerced into dangerous "lessons"—who instead sits stoically at her desk in the cold and refuses to be infected—have elicited an overwhelming wave of solidarity and sympathy on social media. Another tweet from Heinrich-Heine-Realschule defending Yasmin against the Youth Welfare Office's threat went viral and was shared many thousands of times.

Under the trending hashtag #SolidaritywithYasmin, parents,

students and teachers are defending the teenager against the attempts of the media and the authorities to intimidate her.

"The fact that the young girl has to draw attention to herself in this way at all because of compulsory school attendance is an indictment of politics," writes Verena A. on Facebook. "To go through with it at that age demonstrates a strong character that I miss in many adults. They too should have fought more for their rights and those of their children for almost two years. No child should have to catch the virus in jam-packed schools without any social distancing—whether vaccinated or not."

Teacher Dorothea S. from Lünen rejects the hypocritical indignation with which many media outlets and commentators have reacted to the pupil holding out in the cold. "Remember: cold in the classroom with coronavirus aerosols is good, cold outside without coronavirus is a threat to children's well-being. Another lesson learned. So, it makes a difference whether you freeze to death outside or inside, or whether you do it voluntarily or through compulsion."

Dorothea goes on to point out the dangers posed to children, particularly by the highly contagious and vaccine-resistant Omicron variant of coronavirus:

I think it is absolutely irresponsible. We know that coronavirus damages the organs even in mild cases. The risk of diabetes after an infection is also said to be increased, even in children, according to one study. And parents who exercise their fundamental right to protect their children are criminalised, fined and accused of endangering the welfare of their children. We will have serious problems in a few years when a whole generation has serious health issues.

I see my basic rights violated. My husband and I are high-risk patients and, even if we are vaccinated and boosted, we want to avoid infection at all costs—but that is not possible if our children are subjected to forced infection. It's a scandal!

"It would be a cool action if other children would join Yasmin outside in solidarity," Karoline, a political and media scientist who

lives with her daughter in NRW, told the *World Socialist Web Site*:

From the political side, any kind of caution and desire to prevent infection at all costs is framed as being “hysterical” or “pathologically fearful”—especially when it comes to children. However, current figures show that the concerns are justified, with COVID hospitalising far more children than common childhood illnesses—not to mention Long COVID. Thus, those who do not want to be infected are pressured to deviate from their position.

Meanwhile, politicians are denying children the protection against infection that science demands. On the one hand, “in-person teaching” is presented as “child protection,” on the other hand, politicians are not willing to protect those very children from the potentially deadly or medically dangerous virus through appropriate infection protections. It becomes obvious that this is a bogus argument: Many politicians have meanwhile said that schools should be kept open so that parents can go to work, and children are looked after.

The “shop should be kept running” and children are thrown under the bus. The worst thing is that parents are being fined for protecting their children and not sending them into the classroom. They are threatened with having their children taken away—while distance learning is technically possible and is being successfully implemented in many countries.

If it were really about the welfare of children, those who want to protect themselves would be given the opportunity to do so: Distance learning would be made possible and, on the other hand, balanced out with recreational opportunities realised in small “bubbles,” as has already been successfully practised by some families during the school closures. Existing problems such as family violence, psychological problems, etc., would be targeted—instead of promoting “face-to-face teaching” as a “magic cure” that doesn’t exist.

The widespread solidarity with courageous student Yasmin comes alongside a growing international strike movement of teachers, students and workers. On Thursday, tens of thousands of teachers across France went on strike for coronavirus protections and safe education. According to reports, 75 percent of all teachers participated in the strike and 50 percent of schools remained completely closed.

Meanwhile, in the US, a large working class movement against mass deaths from coronavirus is emerging after teachers in Chicago voted overwhelmingly against face-to-face teaching and thousands of students in the Brooklyn borough of New York spontaneously walked out. In Germany, too, more and more students, parents and teachers see themselves as part of this global movement.

Karina N. from Rhineland-Palatinate, for example, told WSWS:

A single child of 13 has shown more courage and brains than a whole government. This little girl was immediately admired by my daughter, and I wish her many, many followers. The fact that she is now threatened with being taken into care is the height of impudence. Where are we living? What about free will, self-development, the right to personal integrity, the right to education, the right to health?

My vote goes to the gal who is simply right and to all the teachers in the US and all over the world who are striking and showing responsibility by pleading for distance learning. For them, it’s not about simply looking after children, they’re concerned with safety, health, equality and education.

In a Twitter message to the WSWS, Eva calls on students and teachers to join Yasmin and the strikers in France and the US in a mass strike movement for safe education in Germany, too:

If we live in times when a girl, Greta [Thunberg]-like draws attention to the unacceptable and inhumane herd immunity policy of the education ministers through a strong declaration and the state reacts to this by wanting to take her into care, then this must be the inevitable start for thousands of students to sit down in front of schools starting tomorrow and join her!

If the politicians, like Roman emperors, preach abstinence while sipping wine, the consequence can only be strikes, as in France. The [right-wing demonstrators] on the streets must be outnumbered by tens of thousands of striking pupils and teachers. France and the USA have started, Austria is about to. Germany must now follow suit!

Next Tuesday at 7 p.m., the Network of Action Committees for Safe Education in Germany is organising an online emergency meeting for school and workplace closures, to organise and advance resistance to the policy of deliberate mass infection. The meeting will discuss the global opposition to this murderous policy and the need for a global elimination strategy to eradicate COVID-19.



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