For a mass movement to halt in-person classes across Canada and save lives!

Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
16 January 2022

The decision by provincial governments across the country to reopen schools to in-person learning amid a tsunami of Omicron infections is criminally reckless and must be resisted. The Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (CERSC) urges all educators, support staff, students and parents to organize mass walkouts and strike action to close schools immediately as part of a global COVID-19 elimination strategy to save lives.

Educators across Canada must take their place in the global eruption of opposition to the ruling class' policy of mass infection and death. Thousands of teachers and students in the United States have refused to return to school since the beginning of the new year, with job actions and major protests in cities like Chicago, New York, Oakland, California and Detroit. In France, a nationwide teachers' strike opposing the right-wing Macron government's policy of letting the virus run rampant took place last Thursday.

These struggles arise amid unprecedented levels of infection and hospitalizations. Case numbers and hospitalizations in every Canadian province have reached or will soon reach record levels. The number of daily deaths is rapidly rising towards their previous peaks, even though the vast majority of people have received vaccinations. Globally, around 15 million people are getting infected every week.

In reopening schools under these life-threatening conditions, governments are prioritizing corporate profits over human lives. The Trudeau federal government, which fully supports the back-to-school drive, and the provincial governments see schools not as facilities to educate young people, but as warehouses to detain them so that their parents can be "freed up" to go to work generating corporate profits for big business and the super-rich.

Faced with the choice of letting millions get infected by a potentially deadly disease or adopting lifesaving lockdowns that would interrupt the flow of cash into the bank accounts of the major corporations and the stock market, Canadian governments at all levels prefer mass infection and death. This is the only conclusion one can draw from reviewing the school reopening rules in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Quebec. They include provisions to merge classes into groups of up to 50 or 60 to compensate for mass staff absences, to ask untrained parents to "keep an eye" on students, and to stop reporting school infections to parents, never mind the public at large. Quebec even refuses to give teachers N95 masks, which are critical to prevent airborne transmission.

If there is anything more contemptible than the politicians and media talking heads advocating this strategy with lies about Omicron being "mild" and schools not being vectors of Covid transmission, it is the trade union bureaucrats' ridiculous claims that in-person learning can be made "safe" amid a raging pandemic. No education union has opposed the return to class across Canada and organized opposition to the back-to-school campaign. Instead, they have complained that governments did not involve them enough in drafting the rules that will guarantee mass infection, the hospitalization of thousands of students and educators, and the deaths of many of their own members. Throughout the pandemic, they have sabotaged every attempt by education workers and parents to fight for workplace safety and a Zero COVID policy.

Hundreds of thousands of educators, parents and working people across the country are rightly outraged by the total indifference shown by the political establishment for the wellbeing of teachers, who are

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supposed to prepare our young people to contribute to society, and the youth, our hope for a better future.

But merely complaining about the irresponsibility of the pro-big-business politicians and their union lackeys is insufficient if the looming catastrophe is to be averted. The ruling elite has a consciously worked-out policy, which is to let everybody get infected to protect Bay Street and the corporate elite's bottom line. This policy has already officially claimed the lives of over 31,000 Canadians. The working class must respond with a no less thoroughly worked-out policy that gives unconditional priority to its interests—for the protection of workers' health and very lives and an end to the pandemic—over any and all economic considerations.

This must begin with the understanding that only a mass worker-led movement can force the immediate closure of schools and all nonessential production as part of a comprehensive plan of public health measures to suppress transmission of the virus and bring cases down to zero. This movement should fight for workers to be paid full wages by the pandemic profiteers throughout a lockdown of two to three months, which scientists have shown would suffice to suppress all COVID-19 infections.

The virus is a global problem, which is why educators in Canada must unify their struggle with their colleagues in the US, Europe and around the world by building the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. They must also recognize that ending COVID-19 is above all a political rather than a medical problem. Scientists have a clear understanding of the public health measures needed to suppress the virus and avoid thousands more preventable deaths. But their implementation conflicts with the capitalist profit system and the interests of its political representatives.

To wage this political struggle, educators need their own organizations, built independently of and in opposition to the pro-capitalist unions. The CERSC calls for the establishment of rank-and-file safety committees in every school, university and college to organize mass strikes to halt in-person learning and fight for a global program of COVID-19 elimination. We pledge to do all we can to assist educators and school support staff to build such committees and encourage everyone wishing to take up this urgent fight to contact us today by emailing the CERSC at cersc.csppb@gmail.com or visiting our Twitter or Facebook accounts: https://twitter.com/cersc_csppb and https://www.facebook.com/cersc.csppb .

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