

“The ruling class fears opposition to its policy of mass infection”

Network of Rank-and-File Committees for Safe Education discusses opposition to school reopenings in Germany

Our reporters
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Faced with the explosion of the highly contagious and vaccine-resistant Omicron variant, the Network of Rank-and-File Committees for Safe Education in Germany called an emergency meeting on Tuesday, January 18, to arm the opposition to the ruling elite’s policy of mass infection with a political perspective and develop a global strategy to eliminate COVID-19.

The meeting took place amid an international wave of school strikes and teachers’ protests—reaching from the US to France, Italy, Austria and Greece—and gave conscious political expression to this growing mass movement. The online gathering was attended by several dozen youth and workers from various fields.

“The immediate action of students, teachers and workers is necessary to end the pandemic once and for all and prevent further catastrophic suffering,” said Gregor Link, a leading member of the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) and writer for the *World Socialist Web Site*, at the beginning of the meeting.

“The governments of Germany, Europe and North America have made a conscious decision to infect the population with Omicron,” continued Link. “In the US, France and other countries with particularly high infection rates, hospitals are already at their limit and intensive care units are overcrowded. Every day in Germany an average of around 250 people die from COVID-19, which is like a medium-sized passenger plane crashing every single day.

“The virus could be eliminated within a few months and the pandemic ended through a globally coordinated policy to massively reduce contacts by closing schools and nonessential businesses, mass vaccination and comprehensive public health measures. But governments have refused to adopt such a policy for over two years because it would hurt bank and corporate profits.”

Referring to the recent report by the British organization Oxfam, Link described how an “unprecedented enrichment” was organized during the pandemic:

“In the midst of mass deaths not seen since World War II and the worst economic catastrophe in a lifetime, the capitalist oligarchs have enriched themselves enormously as never before. In the same period that 15 million people have died from the virus and 163 million people have been plunged into poverty because of the pandemic, the world’s top 10 billionaires have doubled their wealth to \$1.5 trillion. In Germany, the profits of the 10 richest billionaires alone during the coronavirus pandemic correspond to the combined assets of the 33

million poorest Germans.”

This “profits before life” policy, Link explained, is actively pursued by all mainstream parties and fully supported by the unions. To enforce them, the ruling class is resorting to foul lies: that Omicron is “mild” and could establish an “endemic” state of the pandemic, that the impact of infection on children is negligible, and that the infestation of students with COVID-19 is for their own psychological well-being.

According to Link, this class policy finds its sharpest and most ominous expression in the aggressive war propaganda of the imperialist NATO powers against the nuclear-armed power Russia. Under these circumstances, an international movement of the working class against disease, mass layoffs and war is crucial. Such a movement is currently developing around the world.

“But in order for the strikes and protests by students and teachers in the US, France, Italy, Greece, Austria and elsewhere to succeed and grow, we believe new democratic organizations of working class struggle are needed,” concluded Link. “We at the SGP are fighting for the establishment of rank-and-file committees in schools, day care centres, companies, social institutions and in all neighbourhoods, which must be independent of all bourgeois parties, unite internationally and organize a general strike to end the pandemic once and for all and defend all jobs.”

Alex Lantier of the French sister party of the SGP—the Parti de l’Égalité Socialiste (PES)—spoke next, focusing on the development of the international class struggle and the role of the trade unions and the pseudo-left. He stated:

“The enormous number of infections is leading to an international upsurge in the class struggle, which gives enormous urgency to this meeting of rank-and-file committees. Last Thursday, French teachers led a day-long nationwide strike against the Macron government’s pandemic policies in schools. The strike demonstrated the tremendous resistance of the working class to the policy of mass infection. Seventy-five percent of teachers joined in, temporarily closing about half of public schools in France.

“As the striking teachers told us, they deeply oppose Macron’s inhumane policy of allowing the virus to spread in schools. Many feared the unknown long-term effects of COVID-19 on children’s brains and health. One student was heartbroken by children in her classes blaming themselves for unknowingly infecting their parents or

grandparents who died from COVID-19.”

As Lantier explained, the unions, in cooperation with the Macron government, managed to end the nationwide teachers strike after one day. At the same time, pseudo-left tendencies, which are closely allied with the union bureaucracy, have called for protests led by right-wing opponents of vaccination. Lantier concluded that the building of new fighting organizations of the working class and the establishment of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in Germany, France and Europe was of crucial importance for the class struggles to come.

Following the introductory contributions, a lively discussion developed about the social catastrophe of the last two years and in particular the devastating consequences of the current Omicron wave of infections in workplaces, day care centres and schools.

“Only unvaccinated students are tested, although it is clear that vaccinated people can also spread the virus and become ill,” reported Tamino, a high school student from Baden-Württemberg. “The coronavirus tests provided by the state are also among the most unreliable tests that exist, with a sensitivity of only 54 percent.” Despite four-digit incidence rates, which means that there have been more than 1,000 infections per 100,000 people within the previous seven days, the government is not taking any real protective measures, he added.

Jennifer, a pre-school educator from Frankfurt, reported on the immense pressure exerted on child care workers to force them into service despite the risk of a potentially fatal infection. She described the fate of a colleague who suffered severe COVID-19 after her medical certificate was ignored. Jennifer said:

“Since December 16, a total of 92 of 145 day care centres in Frankfurt have had to close in whole or in part due to coronavirus cases. The age group of day care children can neither keep their distance nor pay attention to hygiene, cannot be vaccinated and is defenceless. There is neither the space nor the staff to separate the children. Even before the pandemic, the pedagogical preparation time was reduced from seven to one hour.”

Regarding the situation of the students, parents and carers, Jennifer explained:

“My nephew is terrified at the idea of going to face-to-face classes and possibly infecting his grandfather. It is unacceptable for parents to be fined or threatened with taking their children away because they refuse to expose their children to the disease. Nurses are forced to continue working despite an infection.”

As the discussion continued, the question was raised of how to reconcile the apparent contradictions between the right to education, the right to work and the right to physical integrity. Participant Marion emphasized, for example, that the long and irregular phases of changing forms of schooling were a considerable burden for children and parents. Many children have no access to digital learning materials and many parents also fear for their jobs if they resist getting infected.

Marianne Arens, national committee member of the SGP and WSWs writer, responded:

“All of these problems are solvable. But we are facing a political problem: We are dealing with governing politicians at all levels who put the wellbeing of the economy before the wellbeing of children and the entire population. They have a mass infection policy that is inhumane and they lie to our faces. You have to realize that.

“Above all, you have to reckon with the fact that they are not on our side. They don’t strive to establish good and decent schools for all

children, because that reduces the profits of the shareholders. They even punish parents and educators and, against their better judgement, force them into a practice that endangers them. The politicians will not listen.

“We must combine our initiative with a political struggle. We cannot rely on the unions—the strike in France also showed that. They called off the strike after a day to negotiate with the government. Instead, we must address the working class, who are being severely impacted by COVID-19 everywhere. If we succeed in combining these struggles, we can assert our demands.”

Christopher, a leading member of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) from Leipzig, underlined in his contribution the class character of the pandemic policy and emphasized that the planned mass infection of the population is rejected by the overwhelming majority:

“In my work as a cashier, every day I see working people suffer the consequences imposed on them by a government that—and this is true of almost all governments in the world—ignores all scientific facts.

“Let’s look at how many billions of dollars and euros have been amassed since the beginning of the pandemic in the wake of the so-called coronavirus bailouts, which were essentially gigantic cash injections for the top earners and top companies. We have to ask ourselves why the air filters that parents paid for themselves are being taken out of schools at the same time, or why people have to volunteer to help with vaccinations. Something doesn’t fit. There is money. It’s just in the wrong place.

“We cannot avoid asking ourselves the larger political questions that arise from this. We cannot fight this pandemic individually—nor can we move to an island and wait for it to be over. We don’t have to pretend to be a minority either. What we are discussing here is a majority opinion.”

Towards the end of the meeting it was stated that everything must be done to prevent a third year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Several speakers emphasised that rank-and-file committees must be set up in all schools, day care centres, workplaces and other facilities to take the fight against the pandemic and governments into their own hands and join forces worldwide. The only viable strategy is to eradicate the virus based on a “zero COVID” policy, as advocated by leading epidemiologists, virologists and other scientists.

To implement these policies, the growing global movement against COVID-19, mass layoffs and war must be armed with a socialist program directed against capitalism and the entire ruling class. This programme unites all those who are no longer willing to accept that every aspect of social life is subordinated to the profit interests of the super-rich. In the fight against the pandemic, the alternative is “socialism or mass infection.”

After the conclusion of the meeting, several participants expressed their support for the perspectives discussed at the meeting. “Tamino’s and Jennifer’s words were absolutely right—I’m glad I was there,” Heike Lein from Bavaria said. Tatjana from Hesse said, “I found it very interesting. Many spoke in exactly the way I feel. We have no time to lose. I can no longer accept that profit comes before health.”



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