

An open letter from Detroit teachers to autoworkers: Close the schools and plants to save lives, not profits!

Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
29 January 2022

The Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Committee invites autoworkers to attend its next online meeting Wednesday, February 16, at 7 p.m. Eastern, and discuss the way forward in the fight to stop the spread of COVID-19. Register to attend.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are the teachers of many of your children in the Detroit Public Schools. We appeal to you to join us in demanding that the schools remain closed and our children and communities kept safe, while the Omicron variant of COVID-19 continues to rage throughout the city and the state, as well as across the US and internationally.

By keeping the Detroit schools closed since holiday break, test positivity rates have fallen from 40 percent to 20 percent in the city, proving that the temporary closure of schools drastically reduces the transmission of this deadly disease. Now is not the time to retreat and unleash a new, even more horrific, surge of COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations and deaths.

For the first time in Michigan history, more state residents died in 2020 than were born, due to the unchecked spread of COVID-19. More than 30,000 Michigan residents have died since the beginning of the pandemic, a greater number than in all of Canada. Across the country, 1.1 million children were infected last week, the highest number since the pandemic began, and 27 died, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

We appeal to you because the only reason the politicians want the schools open is so workers can be kept in equally dangerous factories to produce corporate profits. We know COVID-19 is running rampant in the auto plants and that many workers have needlessly lost their lives. With thousands of Detroit area autoworkers

out sick, the auto companies are barely keeping up production by forcing many workers to labor 12-hour shifts, six and seven days a week.

Keeping the assembly lines moving, no matter how many workers get sick and die, is the only reason why they want the schools open. It's not about learning. They even went so far as to pass a law in Michigan allowing school bus drivers, cafeteria workers and other non-teaching personnel to substitute for sick teachers.

In her State of the State speech earlier this week, Governor Whitmer declared, "I want to be crystal clear. Students belong in school. We know it's where they learn best. Remote learning is not as fulfilling or conducive to a child's growth."

Is it "conducive to a child's growth" to infect them with COVID-19? What long-term trauma will children experience who inadvertently infect and kill their loved ones? Politicians like Biden and Whitmer, and their Republican counterparts, feign concern for children's emotional and mental health, while covering up and ignoring the reality that schools are hotbeds for infection and over 167,000 American children have lost their parents or primary caregivers to COVID-19.

The Biden administration and governments all over the world are carrying out a horrifying experiment with our children. Scientific studies have warned that the long-term impact of COVID-19 on the mental development of children can be as bad or worse than lead poisoning. Then there are the thousands of children suffering from Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome-Children, or MIS-C, a condition characterized by inflammation of vital organs such as the heart, lungs and brain.

It may be hard to believe, but the truth is, the politicians want to deliberately infect our children. This is part of their insane "herd immunity" policy, the quack theory

that if everyone is infected and COVID-19 becomes “endemic” that it will eventually disappear. They never state openly how many people will die from this reckless policy, which threatens to produce more lethal and vaccine-resistant variants.

In March 2020—when the number of US infections was around 10,000 and there were fewer than 40 deaths from COVID-19—workers at Jefferson North Assembly Plant and factories across Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and other states carried out wildcat strikes, forcing the shutdown of the North American auto industry and saving hundreds of thousands of lives. But the corporations, the politicians and the unions rushed to reopen businesses and schools because they were determined to save profits, not lives. As a result, there have been over 900,000 COVID-19 deaths in the US, with a current daily average of 2,500 deaths each day.

All these deaths were and remain entirely preventable. If the US and other countries had followed the basic public health measures implemented in China, New Zealand and other countries in the Asia-Pacific region, the transmission of the virus could have been completely stopped, and businesses and schools reopened safely.

It is not too late to act now and prevent an even greater tragedy from unfolding.

We know that autoworkers face the same problems as teachers. The United Auto Workers union, just like the Detroit Federation of Teachers, has collaborated with the corporations and city and state officials to keep us at work. That is why we have organized the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (MERFSC), independently of the unions, to unite teachers, parents, students and other workers to fight to close schools and save lives.

We urge you to build and expand your own rank-and-file committees to unite with educators and other workers to fight for this. In recent weeks, hundreds of thousands of teachers and students, from Chicago, New York, St. Paul, Oakland, and Okemos here in Michigan, to France, Greece, Israel and Austria, have engaged in strikes, student walkouts and other protests to oppose the reckless reopening of schools.

We are not appealing to the powers-that-be. They are interested in protecting profits, not lives. We aim to unify with autoworkers and other workers to prepare a city-wide strike to fight for the necessary public health measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 in Michigan, in unity with rank-and-file committees across the world fighting for the same global strategy to end the pandemic.

What must be done?

- All schools and nonessential workplaces must be closed, and full income provided to all workers and small business owners until it is safe to reopen. Scientists say if these temporary lockdowns are combined with mass testing, an aggressive campaign of contact tracing, the isolation of infected patients and the quarantining of the exposed, that it would take two or three months to eliminate COVID-19, just like smallpox and other diseases have been eliminated in the past.

- Instead of tax cuts for the corporations, billions of dollars should be immediately allocated to guarantee free, high-quality internet service and computers to carry out remote learning. Meals should be provided to low-income families whose children get breakfast and lunch in schools. This must be paid for through a sharp increase in taxes on the corporations, including GM, Ford and Stellantis, which have made billions during the pandemic.

If we draw the line in the sand in Detroit, we will win powerful support from workers throughout Michigan, across the US and internationally. We won't sit by and let our children, other family members and co-workers suffer life-long debilitation or death. We are humans, not machines, and we will fight for the right to live.

Join us in this fight today!

Faternally,

The Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee

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The WSWS is assisting workers in organizing rank-and-file committees, independent of the pro-corporate unions, in order to carry out a fight to stop the pandemic, save lives, and make sure workers' needs are met. To get in touch with us about joining or forming a committee at your workplace, fill out the form below:



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