

For remote education to protect lives and public health!

Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education in Turkey
6 February 2022

The Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education in Turkey calls on educators, parents and students to oppose the reopening of schools for in-person education on February 7, and to take action to demand remote learning amid the rapid spread of the Omicron variant of COVID-19.

The ruling class is removing the remaining measures against COVID-19 in Turkey and internationally, effectively ditching the pretense that it is trying to fight the pandemic. According to its policy, nonessential workplaces and schools must be kept open, regardless of how many millions of people are infected or die.

Growing mass opposition to this homicidal policy around the world shows the way forward. In the US, Canada, France, Austria, Britain and Greece last month, teachers and students went on strikes and walked out of classrooms against the unsafe reopening of schools.

Social opposition to this policy of mass infection is rising in Turkey as well. On February 3, more than 100,000 tweets were posted demanding the resignation of Education Minister Mahmut Özer. In an online survey of more than 1,400 people, 93 percent of respondents said there should be "remote learning" in the second semester. University students are campaigning on social media for final exams to be online. Moreover, high living costs due to deadly pandemic policies are driving a wave of wildcat strikes spreading across Turkey.

The Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education calls on educators, parents and students to give this opposition a conscious and organized character and to take action by forming rank-and-file committees demanding an immediate transition to high-quality remote education. They must unify their struggles with the developing movement of the working class.

The Omicron variant, which is known to affect children heavily, is spreading rapidly. The reopening of schools is not based on children's educational or social needs, but

on the ruthless profit drive of the ruling class. They aim to use schools as nurseries so that parents can be forced to go to work. However, all experience to date shows that schools are one of the main centers of spread of the virus.

Health Minister Fahrettin Koca's claim that there is "nothing to be afraid of" is based on profit calculations, not scientific facts. According to the Turkish political establishment and trade unions, which directly or indirectly support this policy, it is not a cause for concern that more than 100,000 people are officially infected and over 200 die from a preventable disease every day!

After the supposedly "mild" Omicron variant became dominant, the number of daily cases worldwide rose from under 1 million to over 3 million. The global daily death toll also surpassed 12,000 for the first time since last May.

While the total official death toll worldwide exceeds 5.7 million, the actual death toll from the pandemic is estimated to be near 20 million. The official death toll in Turkey has exceeded 88,000, but the actual number is estimated to be at least 250,000.

There is no limit, however, to the number of people the ruling class can sacrifice for capitalist profit and wealth. The massive loosening of isolation and quarantine policies, the limitation of COVID-19 testing, and the propaganda that the pandemic is coming to an end reveal that governments are committing a public health crime.

The Turkish Medical Association (TTB) and public health experts warn that intensive care units are starting to fill up and that the death toll will surge due to an unhindered spread of Omicron.

Contrary to the unscientific claims of Health Minister Koca, the health disaster caused by COVID-19 cannot be compared to influenza. While statistics show that COVID-19 causes about 10 times more deaths, the devastating impact of the pandemic is not limited to this.

In addition to the damage by Long COVID, studies show that children are at substantially higher risk of

diabetes after COVID-19 infections. As the *World Socialist Web Site* recently explained, “There has also been an unprecedented surge in the rise of croup and tracheitis among children. The Omicron infection of children’s narrow upper airways can cause their breathing to get obstructed and cause a characteristic barking cough.”

The Turkish government does not allow vaccinations under the age of 12 and also hides statistics on children. However, pediatric data released in the US indicate what kind of disaster is taking place in Turkey and other countries as well.

According to data from the American Association of Pediatrics (AAP), more than 3.5 million children were infected just in January in the US, when schools reopened with the New Year. The total number of confirmed cases in children is currently 11.4 million. In 2022, the number of children who died from COVID-19 in the US rose to 72. Throughout the pandemic, a total of over 1,100 children have died from COVID-19 in that country of 334 million people.

A US psychologist points to another devastating impact of the pandemic, which has been totally ignored by the political establishment, media and unions: “I would argue that mental health has been compromised due to experiencing an ongoing collective trauma... Children who lose their caregivers, specifically those who inadvertently infected them, are likely to experience survivor’s guilt, which is a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can lead to depression, anxiety, and difficulties with relationships.”

This disaster is not inevitable! In China, with a population of 1.4 billion, which continues to implement a science-based Zero COVID policy, the total deaths have been kept below 5,000. The total number of cases has reached only 105,000 so far, despite widespread testing of millions of people.

The elimination strategy implemented in China combines public health measures such as temporary lockdowns, isolation of infected persons, widespread testing and contact tracing with massive vaccination. Thanks to these measures, since May 2020, schools have been kept open and social life has been largely uninterrupted in China without causing mass infections and deaths.

Such a scientific policy must be implemented worldwide. Appealing to establishment parties or unions that have supported or implemented policies of mass death for two years is useless. Implementing a scientific

strategy depends on mobilizing the working class and youth, including educators, independently of all establishment parties and trade unions. To save lives, workers and youth must take matters into their own hands and fight for the following demands raised by other rank-and-file committees around the world, with whom we stand in solidarity:

* Close all schools and nonessential workplaces until reaching Zero COVID cases.

* Funding and implementing high-quality remote education

* Financial support for all workers and small businesses affected by temporary lockdowns

* Financial support for parents who must stay at home with their children

* A program of global mass vaccination, including of children

* A program of mass testing and rigorous contact tracing, establishing readily-accessible testing centres in each city and town

* Reinstate a 14-day isolation or quarantine for all infected or exposed individuals, with full financial support

* Mandatory high-quality masking in all public places. Masks must be provided free of charge.

* A science education program for the population, conducted with the assistance of scientists and physicians

* Expropriating the wealth of billionaires to meet the needs of society and implement a global Zero COVID program

We call on all educators, parents and students who support this perspective to contact us, establish rank-and-file committees for safe education, and expand this vital struggle for public health.



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