

“It’s going to take us, the working class, to do this”

Southern US teachers discuss the fight to eliminate COVID-19 and stop the threat of war

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To contact the Southern Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees, reach out here.

The Southern Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees, a regional group which represents committees from Alabama, Tennessee and Texas, held a public meeting Sunday to discuss the pandemic and its relationship to the danger of war. Educators were present from Alabama, Texas, Tennessee, Arkansas, Virginia and the West Coast.

The presentations and discussion at the meeting offer insight into the deep shifts taking place in the consciousness of the American working class, which over the past two years has experienced the pulverizing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and is starting to assimilate its lessons.

Workers are increasingly aware of the fact that the richest country in the world also has the highest official death toll from COVID-19. Amazon workers see the purchasing power of their miserly paychecks dwindle, while Jeff Bezos flies himself to space.

Donna, a Tennessee teacher, reported on the state of the pandemic, the efforts of the Biden administration to cover it up, and the escalating push for war against Russia by the US and NATO.

Under conditions in which more than 2,000 people continue to die from COVID-19 each day in the US, with more than 950,000 reported deaths total, there is a concerted effort to declare the pandemic over.

Democratic and Republican states, spearheaded by the Biden administration, are lifting all remaining measures to slow the spread of the disease, including reducing or ending contact tracing and removing mask mandates.

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), recently called for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to provide an “off-ramp” for masks in schools, which Donna described as “another calamitous betrayal by the trade unions which have

put workers in harm’s way during an unprecedented and deadly pandemic.”

Donna provided a striking timeline of the Biden administration’s adoption of a “herd immunity” approach in the middle of the Omicron wave.

In early January, Ezekiel Emanuel, adviser to Biden and infamous for his eugenicist proposals, introduced the concept of “a new normal,” or learning to live with COVID-19. Then, on January 21, CDC Director Rochelle Walensky signaled to *Politico* her support for ending mask mandates and isolation of infected individuals.

On February 2, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) ended its requirement that hospitals report daily in-hospital COVID-19 deaths to the agency, an essential system that provided the most accurate real-time measure of mortalities.

Finally, on February 7, *Politico* reported that the White House sought to change the criteria for classifying COVID-19 hospitalizations in a manner that would reduce the number.

The campaign to force the population to live with a “new normal” has been accompanied by a pseudoscientific push to label COVID-19 “endemic,” a charge being led by California’s Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom with his plan, SMARTER. Notably, one scientist has warned that such an approach likely means death on a scale of 200,000 to 250,000 per year in the US.

Finally, Donna drew attention to the fact that the US and its European allies have abandoned the necessary war against COVID-19 for the “war of choice” against Russia. She discussed the link between the fascistic herd immunity policies implemented at home and the funding, arming and promotion of fascist and neo-Nazi forces inside Ukraine, such as the Azov Battalion. She referenced the Pentagon’s 1992 Strategic Plan, released following the dissolution of the

USSR, which declared that the United States would not allow a challenger to its world hegemony.

Donna concluded by stressing that the drive to war is “the result of a bourgeoisie in complete crisis. The aggression towards Russia does not come from a place of strength, but rather from the collapsing of the unsustainable growth model of the ruling elites.”

Clare, an Alabama educator, gave a presentation on the need for a global elimination strategy to end the pandemic. There is not only historic precedent for eliminating viral diseases, she said, but COVID-19 itself has successfully been suppressed in multiple countries.

“It is 100 percent possible. The only reason it hasn’t happened is the ruling class doesn’t want it to. There is a political and monetary strategy behind it. The ruling class doesn’t want elimination. It’s going to take us, the working class, to do this.”

With an infographic showing a general definition of endemic, epidemic and pandemic, she stressed, “This virus is not endemic. We have no *low spread*, no *limited population*. It is global and spreading uncontrolled.”

Comparing the pandemic response of the US to that of China, which has a robust Zero COVID program, Clare noted that China has fewer than 5,000 deaths to date, most of those from early 2020. “This is a preventable disease. 900,000 people didn’t have to die for the sake of capitalism,” she said.

Discussing the need for a *global* approach, she explained, “People are traveling, going to other places. If we are not doing this globally, then we’re spreading it. No country is an island. We are completely and 100 percent connected. If we don’t approach this globally, then we will have more and more variants. The more it spreads, the more it changes and adjusts. That’s the nature of a virus. But the nature of a virus is also that it needs a host. If we lock down, then there is no transmission and no host for it and it dies off. Then we get to live.”

She made the essential point that the money exists to end the pandemic. “We just heard the report about Biden asking for \$770 billion for a war against Russia, but that could be used for financial support for parents, for quality remote education and mental health. If that money could be used for war, it could be used to eliminate this disease.”

Clare concluded, “Why does it have to be the working class to carry out a program of elimination? Because the ruling class has already shown us that it is not part of their program. They let us know that they are OK with us continuing to die while they amass their wealth. Over the years and over history it has been the working class to come together to make change, and that means that we have the power, even though it may not feel like it at times. We have

the power to put a stop to this and to get this done.”

Following the two reports was a stimulating discussion. An Arkansas teacher remarked, “I hate to think we are being lied to this much.” In a heartfelt contribution, she described the difficult conditions in her district, which has dropped isolation requirements and isn’t allowed to even suggest masks. The union, she noted, “isn’t supportive. It’s just on paper that it’s a union.”

In an important exchange, the Arkansas teacher expressed weariness in the face of mass confusion, a sense of isolation, and feeling alone in her concern about COVID-19. Clare immediately jumped in and told her, “Don’t give up. Don’t feel bad for standing up for yourself. When you come to rank-and-file meetings, you’re not alone and other teachers think like you. Keep your ears to the ground, the pandemic will turn again, and some folks will come back your way.”

The Arkansas teacher also raised serious concerns about the mobilization of the far right, including QAnon and the Canadian “freedom convoy,” to force the removal of all public health measures. This prompted discussion on the social makeup of these forces, particularly the fact that they are financed by extremely powerful corporate and political backers within the US, from Elon Musk to Donald Trump.

The course and tenor of the discussion, from a teacher on the West Coast who expressed the need for solidarity and an independent movement of the working class, to a worker in Virginia who spoke about Russia’s coveted natural gas reservoirs as it relates to the war drive, demonstrates that the working class is grappling with difficult and complex questions.

Evident from the meeting is the increasing intersection of the perspective and work of the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) with the objective movement of the working class, which has been thrust into struggle by the catastrophes produced by capitalism.

Workers seek scientific answers to the problems they confront, and this is leading them to the Marxist perspective advanced by the WSWS that the working class is *the* progressive force within capitalist society and that humanity’s future depends upon it consciously taking up an independent struggle against capitalism.



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