

The pandemic is not over! Build a movement of educators, parents and students for COVID-19 elimination!

Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
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The Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (CERSC) issues a call for all education workers, parents and students who are opposed to the capitalist “let it rip” policy to join us in building an independent movement to protect our schools and put an end to the pandemic once and for all using a global COVID-19 elimination strategy.

Contrary to the claims by the major parties and the corporate press that the “worst is behind us,” the pandemic has only intensified with the emergence of the Omicron variant. The ruling elite’s dismantling of all protective measures has allowed the virus to propagate widely, creating new variants that could prove more immune-evasive and virulent. It is now the third year of the pandemic, and 20 million people have perished across the globe. Over 40,000 Canadians have officially died of COVID-19, including 37 children.

This is 37 children too many! In addition to these senseless deaths, it is estimated that close to half of all Canadians have caught COVID-19. Hundreds of thousands, and perhaps millions of children and adults will develop symptoms of Long COVID, leading to years, if not a lifetime, of chronic illness and pain, and/or a reduction in life expectancy.

Millions of Canadians have been thrown into financial hardship, including many education workers who have been forced by COVID-19 or fear of infection to stop working. Inflationary pressures are making life more difficult by the day. At the same time, 15 new billionaires have been created since March 2020, and the country’s 59 billionaires increased their wealth by \$111 billion during this period.

To paraphrase the great novelist Charles Dickens, this is a tale of two pandemics. It was the best of times for the top 10 percent, above all the millionaires and billionaires, and it was the worst of times for the vast majority of the population, the working class.

A social crime of monumental proportions

This social catastrophe did not just “happen.” It was the byproduct of deliberate political decisions by capitalist governments across Canada and internationally to prioritize the

profits of the banks and corporations over the lives of the working class, even in the face of a mountain of scientific evidence explaining that to do so would produce levels of death not seen since the two world wars of the 20th century. Workers were forced back to work, and their children to school, so that the corporations and banks could continue amassing record profits.

With the emergence of the Omicron variant of the virus, and following the violent intimidation of the far-right Freedom Convoy, governments dropped all public health measures, including mask mandates in schools and workplaces, proclaiming COVID-19 to be “mild.” COVID-19 testing and data reporting has been reduced to such a point that it is virtually impossible to track the spread of the virus. The population has been left to fly blind through a snowstorm of a pandemic, with no headlights or wipers.

All of the major parties view the pandemic in the rear-view mirror. In the Ontario provincial election campaign, the pandemic barely merited a whisper. Neither the Progressive Conservatives, Liberals, New Democratic Party or the Greens even bothered to address the pandemic in any meaningful way.

The complicity of the pro-capitalist unions

The pro-capitalist education unions, which have presided over decades of pay cuts as well as benefit and pension rollbacks for their members, never once launched strike action to demand safe schools. An endless stream of union bureaucrats lamented the runaway spread of the virus in schools, before uncritically claiming that a mitigation strategy was sufficient to protect both education workers and students. Now that mitigation has given way to a full-blown let-it-rip policy, they have fallen completely silent.

Whenever rank-and-file workers took the initiative to demand the closure of unsafe schools or the provision of better personal protective equipment, the union bureaucrats sabotaged their struggles, ordering them back to work without addressing their grievances or censuring them for demanding better than the flimsy employer-supplied PPE that the union leaders agreed to. Instead, the well-paid bureaucrats told teachers, caretakers, and support

staff that all they could do was file unsafe work complaints to the provincial ministries of labour, all of which were denied.

The unions insist that workers can only solve these pressing life-and-death matters through a collective bargaining process that heavily favours governments who regularly pass strikebreaking legislation or send negotiations to rigged arbitration procedures—all with the unions' active collusion. And without fail, as they have repeated countless times before, the unions claim that voting for their Liberal or NDP partners at the ballot box will address the same disastrous conditions that these parties played a major role in creating.

The CERSC rejects with contempt the lie that the pandemic is over and that the working class must “learn to live with the virus.” The health and lives of children and education workers, and indeed all workers, must be the priority—not the profits of the corporations and the wealth of the rich.

Fight for global elimination to stop COVID-19

We are at a critical stage in the pandemic. The proliferation of countless new variants threatens to produce unimaginable death and suffering for years to come. Opposition to herd immunity and support for basic protective measures remains strong among broad sections of working people. These widespread sentiments must be directed towards the mobilization of the working class to fight for a global strategy to eliminate COVID-19.

As long as the virus is allowed to spread, no matter how limited, it can flare up at any time and cause fresh outbreaks. We must follow the example of China, whose zero-COVID elimination strategy has kept illness and death at levels far below Canada's, despite its much larger and more urbanized population. Contrary to the incessant claims by the political establishment and corporate media that stopping COVID transmission was made impossible with the arrival of Omicron, the recently concluded lockdown in Shanghai, a city of over 20 million people, proves that COVID can be suppressed with a minimal loss of life.

To achieve COVID-19 elimination, workers must demand the following:

- Closure of in-person schooling and full funding and resources for quality remote education
- Closure of all non-essential workplaces, with full and adequate compensation to all workers and small business owners affected
- Comprehensive testing, tracing and quarantine protocols, including for regional and international travel
- Gradual reopening of affected regions once transmission has been contained

When community transmission is suppressed and public services can reopen, a range of protective measures must be adopted, including:

- Reinstatement of all previous mitigation measures in schools, workplaces, and indoor settings, including mask and vaccine mandates
- Resumption of widespread PCR testing and contact tracing

protocols

- Reporting of infection data to all education staff and parents at every school
- Mandatory quarantine for all those infected for a minimum of 14 days, with full compensation for any missed work days

Canada possesses the wealth and resources to adopt an elimination strategy, but this wealth is monopolized by the capitalist ruling class. Beholden to and serving the interests of this ruling class, the establishment parties instead orient all political decisions to increasing the profits and wealth hoarded by this parasitic social layer, while millions of Canadians fall ill or die.

More importantly, a global pandemic requires global coordination. The production and distribution of vaccines, the coordination of lockdowns and reopenings, and the sharing of effective health care practices must be systematically pursued across national boundaries if we are to end this pandemic.

Attempts to pressure capitalist governments, the political opposition or the union bureaucracy have proven fruitless, because these organizations serve the interests of capitalist private profit, not the working class. In order to end the pandemic, education workers and parents must organize a network of rank-and-file committees independently of and in opposition to the pro-capitalist unions in every school, workplace, and neighbourhood. To fight for the demands advanced in this statement, these committees must take up a political struggle to break the grip of the financial oligarchy over all aspects of social and political life, and redistribute society's vast wealth to meet social needs, not private profit.

Education workers, parents and students must turn more broadly to the working class, who are entering into historic struggles to improve their jobs and living conditions. Over the past several months, there have been strikes of tens of thousands of public sector workers in New Brunswick, rail workers at Canadian Pacific, and over 40,000 Ontario construction workers, to name just a few. In the coming months, teachers in Ontario and public sector workers in British Columbia are also expected to strike.

These struggles must be unified across Canada and internationally to enforce a global zero-COVID policy. The CERSC fights for this program through its affiliation to the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, which provides the socialist perspective and international coordination necessary to eliminate COVID-19, and oppose capitalist austerity and imperialist war.

To get involved with the CERSC, contact us at cercs.cspgb@gmail.com or follow our Twitter account.



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