

“I see the impact of the pandemic on my students and co-workers on a daily basis. Children are regularly out sick, and some have been infected multiple times” – Teacher in South Korea

## ***World Socialist Web Site readers in North Asia support online public meeting to fight ‘let it rip’ COVID policies***

**Our reporters**

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*World Socialist Web Site readers in North Asia, along with health workers and educators across Australia and internationally, are responding enthusiastically to the forthcoming joint online meeting by the Health Workers Rank-and-File Committee (HWRFC) and the Committee for Public Education (CFPE) on Sunday, November 20 at 3 p.m. (AEDT).*

*Health workers and educators have been in the vanguard of rising strike action over the past year in Australia and internationally. These frontline workers, however, are blocked at every point by the trade unions, which limit and isolate all industrial action, enforce sell-out deals and support governments’ “let it rip” response to COVID.*

*The meeting will outline a political perspective, including the building of independent rank-and-file committees, to unify health workers, teachers and other sections of workers in the fight for decent wages, working conditions and the elimination of COVID-19.*

*We urge readers to share these comments on social media, read the October 13 joint statement issued by the CFPE and HWRFC, and register here to attend the online public meeting.*

### **A worker and university student in Japan:**

As a university student and worker in Japan, I speak out in support of the *World Socialist Web Site* and in support of the November 20 meeting by the Health Workers Rank-and-File Committee and the Committee

for Public Education in Australia. My colleagues and other students sometimes speak in a tone of hopelessness and fear, unsure if they can do anything to stop the inhumane and unscientific policies of our administrators and government. I am glad this meeting exists because students and workers from Asia and beyond need to know that there are others willing to wage this fight with them.

There have been multiple surges of COVID-19 in Japan, especially this year. At university, there were bare-minimum measures like allowing students more grace in attendance and illness policies; sometimes there would be an air purifier in your tiny classroom; some classes were allowed online; they put hand sanitizer everywhere for an airborne disease; face masks are required in classrooms, and as a norm, the majority of people in Japan generally wear face masks in all public places.

The university, however, gave little communication on the number of COVID cases, but the surges were unending and impossible to ignore. Professors and students alike remain exhausted by the threat of sickness and the feeling that the government and university administration couldn’t care less if they got sick, as long as tuition gets paid and business grows.

Now in the fall, COVID numbers have only increased across Japan, and yet the mitigation policies that existed, even with how weak they were, have fallen by

the wayside. The Japanese government and its institutions have gotten in line with the United States and big business. The interests of global capital and the weakening yen demand workers and students advance profits as much as possible; risking their health and future is a given for the administration.

Students and teachers speak in frustration as we begin to notice more people coming down sick—no-one even mentions COVID by name anymore, we all just know. My professor and our class just last week had a long discussion about our fear of infection, and for those who have had COVID before, we are scared about how much reinfection could worsen our long-term health. Some are already experiencing long-term effects from COVID like brain fatigue, exhaustion, and weakened immune systems.

Workers and youth from all over the world must unite together and demand protection from COVID-19 and declare that lives must always be put before profit.

#### **John W, an office worker in Tokyo, Japan:**

I support the November 20 meeting of the Health Workers Rank-and-File Committee and the Committee for Public Education in Australia. In Japan, where I live, the government recently relaxed testing and reporting obligations. Even so, the case numbers are fast approaching those from late January and early February 2022, the peak of the first Omicron wave. We had over 100,000 new daily cases registered on Tuesday, and it is accelerating fast.

The dangers of long COVID were brought home to me when one of my acquaintances got it. He was an extremely fit semi-professional endurance athlete, but has spent almost a year now in and out of hospitals, and is a shadow of his former self. Decades of investing in and maintaining his physical capabilities all down the drain overnight.

The schools here have pretty much stopped any mitigation measures and treat COVID essentially the same as the flu, so no matter how much we adults take individual precautions, I feel it's just a matter of time before one of the kids brings it back home with them. We really cannot fight this at an individual or a family level.

#### **A teacher in South Korea:**

I strongly support this Sunday's meeting by the Health Workers Rank-and-File Committee and the Committee for Public Education in Australia. All

workers, students, and youth in Asia looking for a way to put an end to the COVID-19 pandemic and save lives should attend.

In South Korea, the Yoon Suk-yeol government has completely abandoned COVID-19 safety measures and both the ruling People Power Party and the Democratic Party have endorsed this. The trade unions have similarly backed this agenda. However, cases are once again rising. Over the past week, there have been more than 344,000 official new cases, second in the world only to Japan. This is almost certainly an undercounting as many people get sick, but do not seek a formal diagnosis.

I see the impact of the pandemic on my students and co-workers on a daily basis. Children are regularly out sick, and some have been infected multiple times. This has generated a tremendous amount of instability in their lives. The South Korean government has left the youngest and most vulnerable exposed to this deadly virus, because the capitalist class is more concerned with the impact on big business than in saving lives.

I must also mention the recent tragedy in Itaewon during Halloween that killed 157 people. As usual after such disasters, various politicians are attempting to score political points by demanding those responsible be found and punished. However, if they want to find those responsible, they have only to look in the mirror. The same indifference to human life that has led to the COVID-19 disaster is likewise responsible for the Itaewon tragedy.

I again call on all workers and young people to attend this critical meeting on November 20. The adoption of the “let it rip” agenda by governments around the world has shown that only the active intervention of the working class can end the COVID-19 pandemic.



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