

On coronavirus, Merkel tells Europe: “Drop dead”

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Yesterday, in a statement of staggering indifference to the fate of millions, German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared in a press conference that her government expects 60 to 70 percent of the population to become infected with Covid-19.

She stated: “If the virus is present, the population has no immunity to the virus, and there are no vaccines or cures, then a high percentage of the population—experts say 60 to 70 percent—will become infected as long as this situation remains.”

With basic facts about the virus still not widely known, Merkel chose not to spell out the chilling implications of her statement. Five to 20 percent of coronavirus patients develop acute pneumonia, requiring intensive care and artificial ventilation to survive. If 48 to 56 million Germans contracted Covid-19, up to 11 million would require intensive care. With fewer than 500,000 hospital beds and one million nurses, Germany’s medical system would be overwhelmed, and millions of desperately sick patients left untreated to die. Across Europe and the world, the death toll would rise into the tens of millions.

Medical experts have repeatedly stressed that estimates that up to 70 percent of humanity might catch the disease is not a prediction, but a scientific warning of the dangers of a situation if prompt and aggressive action is not taken to prevent such massive loss of life.

Thus, after warning that 50 to 70 percent of humanity could contract the disease, coronavirus expert Dr Richard Hatchett told Britain’s Channel Four: “I don’t like to make predictions. Talking about the potential of the virus is important so you can understand how dangerous the threat is. It’s up to societies how they will respond to the virus.”

Pointing to the fall in the number of new cases in China, Singapore and Hong Kong—after strict testing,

monitoring and quarantine procedures halted the spread of the disease by isolating and treating the sick—Hatchett stressed it was possible to fight coronavirus: “The virus is here, it has tremendous potential to be disruptive, to cause high rates of illness and even high rates of death. But that is not a future that is locked in.”

Directly contradicting such expert advice, however, Merkel called for accepting the certainty of a continued, uncontrolled and devastating spread of the virus. Significantly, she did not call for a massive, international infusion of resources, industrial capacity and trained personnel into a global fight against the pandemic. Rather, she said, Germany should avoid “overloading” its medical system with coronavirus patients.

She stated: “We know there are special groups in the population—the elderly and those with pre-existing conditions—who suffer more severely from the virus, so our policy must be determined by the goal of not overloading our health system.”

Merkel did not say how this would be done. In France, however, hospitals turn away younger coronavirus patients to focus on at-risk elderly patients. In Italy, hospitals now only use ventilators on younger patients, leaving seriously ill patients over 80 to die. If 70 percent of humanity were infected, a policy of not “overloading” hospitals would mean denying care to tens of millions in Germany alone.

The alarm must be sounded in the working class. Only the implementation of quarantines and pouring massive financial resources into the health sector can prevent a disastrous pandemic. This requires the independent political mobilization of the working class in struggle. Currently, it is not being done largely because it would cut across the financial and political

interests of the ruling class, which over decades have amassed vast wealth and built up a military-police machine based on relentless austerity that has particularly targeted health care and other key social services.

These reactionary policies are Merkel's essential "priorities," which she listed later in the press conference. She stated: "It is important that all levels of government can work. This applies to the police, the Bundeswehr (armed forces), critical infrastructure, political decisions, so medical possibilities can be used... Then, it's a matter of maintaining economic life, to some extent."

What such statements reveal is not incompetence, but political criminality. Seventy-five years after the downfall of the Nazi Third Reich, a fascistic attitude towards the working class prevails in the financial aristocracy, mirroring that of Ancient Rome to its galley slaves: work until you die.

Having organized economic life since the 2008 Wall Street crash around austerity and trillion-euro bailouts of their own bloated stock portfolios, the corporate oligarchy is prepared to let countless millions of workers die so long as their own lives and vast paper wealth are preserved. In the article headlined "Super-rich jet off to disaster bunkers amid coronavirus outbreak," the *Guardian* reported that the wealthy are chartering "private jets" to "holiday homes or specially-prepared disaster bunkers," fleeing Europe to evade the "introduction of nationwide quarantine measures following Italy's lead."

No doubt, significant sections of the ruling class consider the coronavirus to be a gift from God. The deaths of millions of the old and sick would allow new cuts to social spending, flushing billions more into their pockets. This underlay financial commentator Rick Santelli's fascistic outburst that "we should just give everyone the new coronavirus" because prolonged market uncertainty over how widely it will spread is "wreaking havoc on global and domestic economies."

Workers in Europe and internationally cannot leave their fate in the hands of a ruling class that is historically bankrupt. They need a program on which to fight to prevent a pandemic catastrophe. Critical demands include:

*Free and equal, high-quality treatment for all!
Resources must be made available to provide the most

advanced medical care for all, regardless of their income or insurance coverage. The elderly, prisoners, refugees trapped in unsanitary camps, and the homeless need urgent special protection.

*Quarantines to contain the spread of the virus! To prevent millions from becoming infected and possibly dying in the coming weeks and months, all necessary quarantines must be enforced, while respecting democratic rights and the personal dignity of all. Workers, small businessmen and their families staying at home due to quarantines must receive social support, food and all necessities.

*Build independent factory and neighbourhood committees! Workers must organize themselves independently to coordinate and mobilize their collective strength to ensure the necessary measures are taken. The fate of humanity cannot be left to the police-state machine of the financial aristocracy, whose only goal is to protect the stock markets and its wealth.

A social system that not only fails to ensure public health but also coolly calculates the deaths of millions must go. The capitalist ruling class is beyond reform. For the working class, the socialist transformation of society is now a matter of life and death.



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