

German Chancellor Merkel's address to the nation: A declaration of criminal irresponsibility

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The central message delivered by German Chancellor Angela Merkel in her address to the nation Wednesday evening was that the federal government will do nothing to avert a catastrophe for the population.

Although Europe is, according to the World Health Organisation, the epicentre of the pandemic, with more than 10,000 new infections and hundreds of deaths on a daily basis, the chancellor did not announce a single practical measure to combat the pandemic. She neither promised to spend more money on the health care system nor to build more hospitals. Merkel also did not utter a word about the purchasing and production of urgently required medical equipment and test kits.

Merkel declared that “our country” faces “the largest challenge since German reunification, no, since the Second World War,” but proceeded to place all the blame for this on the population. She asserted that Germany has “an excellent health care system, perhaps the best in the world.” At the same time, she added in a threatening tone, “But our hospitals would also be overwhelmed if too many patients in too short a time are taken to hospital because they’re suffering from a severe case of Coronavirus.” Therefore, it is necessary to “slow down the spread of the virus, draw it out over months and thereby buy time.”

At the end of her speech, Merkel made clear that Germany’s ruling elite has already accepted that there will be large numbers of deaths due to the COVID-19 pandemic. “I am absolutely sure that we can overcome this crisis. But how many victims will there be? How many loved ones will we lose? It’s largely in our own hands,” stated the chancellor. The situation is “serious” and “open.” It is “not only, but in part dependent upon how disciplined each person is in following the regulations.”

Merkel’s remarks were cynical and criminal in several respects. Unlike in most other European countries, no strict quarantine measures are in place in Germany to restrict the spread of the disease. The closure of universities, schools,

kindergartens, businesses and factories was not only carried out belatedly, but has only been implemented in a half-hearted manner. Millions of people are still forced to go to work, putting themselves at risk as well as others. Public transport continues to run as normal with virtually no protection for staff and passengers.

As a result, ever larger numbers of people are becoming infected by the deadly virus. On Wednesday alone, the total rose by 2,916 to 12,327. By Thursday evening, it had surpassed 15,000. Over the coming weeks, the number will explode.

In remarks on Wednesday, the head of the Robert Koch Institute, Lothar Wieler, warned of the danger of 10 million infections within two to three months in Germany alone. “We have exponential growth. We are at the beginning of an epidemic that will last for many weeks and months,” he told a press conference.

Even though developments remain at an early stage, the healthcare system is already reaching its limits. According to a survey by the doctors’ network Colliquio, 50 percent of medical personnel stated at the beginning of March that they lacked protective equipment and disinfectant. A further 30 percent only had limited stocks of equipment. The situation has only grown worse since then. In an angry petition directed to Health Minister Jens Spahn, which obtained over 142,000 signatures in a short period of time, healthcare workers demanded “the immediate organisation of the purchasing of effective protective equipment by the use of all means available.”

Even if the government follows France and Italy by imposing a total shutdown of social life in the coming days, including a curfew, only the investment of vast financial resources into the healthcare system can avert the looming danger of tens of thousands of deaths. Despite sweeping quarantine measures in Italy, 475 people died on Wednesday, followed by another 425 yesterday. Due to overburdened healthcare workers and the lack of essential

medical equipment—such as intensive care beds and ventilators to help seriously ill patients breathe—thousands of new cases cannot be treated properly on a daily basis. Many, including elderly patients, are no longer even treated and are simply left to die.

Germany's ruling class has created the conditions for a similar catastrophe in this country over decades. The healthcare system has been cut to the bone and privatised by all governments. Hospitals, laboratories, and options for comprehensive treatment have been systematically reduced. Between 1990 and 2010 alone, some 180,000 hospital beds (some 26 percent of the total) were cut and 360 hospitals (15 percent) closed, resulting in a sharp reduction in the number of intensive care beds. The increase in intensive care beds now announced and the building of a temporary hospital with 1,000 beds in Berlin do not even represent a drop in the bucket.

At the same time, the largest transfer of wealth in German history from the bottom to the top of society took place over the past 30 years. While the Hartz IV welfare reforms thrust millions of people into poverty and social misery, the wealth of the banks and superrich was secured with hundreds of billions and even trillions of euros following the 2008-09 financial crisis. Across Europe, austerity packages imposed chiefly under the dictates of the German government laid waste to social services and healthcare systems. This is why the situation in countries like Italy and Spain, countries which Merkel never referred to in her speech, is so dramatic.

It is becoming ever clearer that the ruling elites view the coronavirus crisis as an opportunity to intensify their class war agenda. They are implementing the long-planned strengthening of the repressive state apparatus and are prepared to let millions of the elderly and sick die so as to increase the assault on social spending and funnel billions into the pockets of the economic, military, and political elites.

The new budget, which the federal cabinet plans to adopt next Wednesday, includes a vast expansion in military spending and the retention of the so-called debt brake that requires the government to abide by a balanced budget. The so-called emergency bailout package, which was presented at the end of last week by Finance Minister Olaf Scholz (Social Democrats) and Economy Minister Peter Altmeier (Christian Democrats) is aimed above all at protecting the interests of the financial oligarchy. While there is supposedly "no money" available for social services and healthcare, large corporations and the banks are being given virtually unlimited access to the state treasury.

After Merkel declared last week that 60 to 70 percent of the population would be infected with the Coronavirus, we wrote, "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."

On Wednesday the same stance was concealed behind Merkel's pastoral proclamation of solidarity, which workers and young people must decisively reject. They confront the task of settling accounts with a ruling elite and a social system which is not only incapable of providing a decent healthcare system, but accepts their death as the cost of doing business. Workers and young people require their own programme of action based on the socialist transformation and reorganisation of society. Immediate demands to avert the looming crisis include:

Free and high quality treatment for all! Resources must be made available to provide all people, regardless of insurance coverage and income, with the highest possible standard of care. The elderly, prisoners, homeless people, and refugees, who are forced to live in terribly unhygienic conditions, require urgent special protection.

Quarantine to suppress the virus! To protect millions of people from infection in the coming weeks and months, all necessary quarantines must be enforced. At the same time, the democratic rights and personal dignity of all must be respected. Workers, small businesspeople and their families forced to stay at home due to quarantines must receive social support, groceries, and other goods required for daily life.

For the building of independent factory and neighbourhood action committees! To coordinate and mobilise their independent strength, workers must organise to ensure that the necessary measures are adopted. The fate of humanity cannot be left in the hands of the police state of the financial aristocracy, whose primary goal is to protect their stock portfolios and wealth.



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