

German government prepares for internet censorship and deployment of the armed forces

Ulrich Rippert
23 March 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic is highlighting the class character of politics. The health care system has been cut to pieces, hospitals privatised and trimmed for profit, laboratory capacities and nationwide treatment options massively restricted.

Despite warnings from China, no preparations have been made to protect the population. The government cares only about the interests of big business and is making unlimited financial resources available to corporations and banks. Although the danger of the virus was known, and public life has been drastically restricted, many workers are being forced to continue their work without adequate protection.

Resistance is growing against this criminal irresponsibility by the government and employers. Various opposition groups are forming on the internet to refute government propaganda and describe and fight against the dramatic conditions in hospitals, rescue stations, care facilities and factories, but also the devastating effects of government measures on workers in precarious employment.

Politicians have responded to this opposition with calls for censorship and dictatorial measures.

At the beginning of the week, Lower Saxony's state Interior Minister Boris Pistorius (Social Democratic Party, SPD) called for sanctions against the distribution of so-called "fake news" in connection with the Coronavirus pandemic. He demanded that the government urgently intervene, saying, "It must be prohibited to publicly spread false allegations about the supply situation of the population, medical care or cause, ways of infection, diagnosis and therapy of COVID-19."

According to Pistorius, the government must examine

whether bans could already be based on the infection protection law. If not, the penal code or the law on administrative offences should be amended "as quickly as possible."

The greatest misinformation currently being spread comes from the government itself. It claims that the German health care system is well prepared for the spread of the pandemic, and no one need worry. For weeks, the government played down the dangers.

Now that reality has refuted its propaganda, any criticism of it is to be criminalised and suppressed. If Pistorius has his way, the government will rigorously enforce its monopoly on information and opinion. This is a call for censorship and dictatorship.

Pistorius has long been known as a right-wing social democrat in the tradition of Gustav Noske, who during the November Revolution in 1918 allied with the German army and far-right Freikorps to suppress working-class opposition to the bourgeois order.

For seven years as Lower Saxony's interior minister, he has been advocating a strict right-wing course against refugees and for stepping up the repressive powers of the state. In summer 2017, he presented an SPD position paper on domestic policy, the central point of which was strengthening the federal police force financially and with more personnel. One year later, more than 10,000 people demonstrated in Hanover against the new police law of Lower Saxony, which Pistorius had drafted, because it massively expands the powers of the security authorities while at the same time restricting elementary civil rights.

With his call for censorship and police-state measures, Pistorius speaks for a party that has always responded to crisis situations and resistance from the

population by calling for the strong state and dictatorial measures. Pistorius comes from the same political stable as former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who brutally smashed up the welfare systems with the “Hartz” laws. For the past three years he has also been living in a relationship with Schröder’s fourth wife, Doris Schröder-Köpf, from whom the former chancellor separated in 2015.

There is no doubt that the fight against the pandemic requires the restriction of social contacts and individual freedom of movement. However, it must not be allowed that the conditions for a dictatorship are created under the slogan “necessity knows no law!” The coronavirus pandemic, its ominous health, social and economic consequences and the drastic measures required to combat it raise the question of who exercises power and controls the state—the financial oligarchy or the working class?

The ruling class everywhere is trying to use measures against the Corona crisis to strengthen its power. According to information from DPA and *Der Spiegel*, the president of the Bundestag (federal parliament), Wolfgang Schäuble (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), for example, has proposed to the leaders of the parliamentary groups that they expand the Emergency Laws by amending the constitution.

The Emergency Laws, which were passed in May 1968 in the midst of the largest workers’ strikes and student protests of the post-World War II period, give the state quasi-dictatorial powers in crisis situations (natural disaster, uprising, war). Among other things, they allow for the Bundestag and the Bundesrat (the upper chamber of parliament) to be replaced by an emergency parliament, the “Joint Committee.” This committee consists of only 48 selected members but has the full powers of both chambers of parliament and would thus largely override the existing parliamentary system. Schäuble has now brought up the idea of including a similar regulation in the constitution for the case of an epidemic.

The deployment of the Bundeswehr (armed forces), which Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer announced at a press conference on Thursday, must also be seen in this context. For the time being, the focus is on logistical tasks. The Bundeswehr has five hospitals of its own, 3,000 doctors, mobile military hospitals as well as logistics and transport capacities

that can be used in the fight against the virus.

But Kramp-Karrenbauer has more in mind. In addition to the deployment of up to 50,000 soldiers, there is also talk of mobilizing 75,000 reservists. At the press conference, the defence minister emphasized that the troops will only be properly deployed when the civilian authorities and organizations “have reached the end of their capabilities.” She claimed that in the area of security and order, assistance from the military would “only be available under strict conditions,” but in a daily order to the troops she wrote, “We will help with health care and, if necessary, with ensuring infrastructure and supplies as well as maintaining security and order.”

Chief of Staff Alfons Mais wrote to soldiers saying the Bundeswehr now had the task of maintaining operational readiness for any required support. “We are at the beginning of a road whose direction and length we cannot yet estimated,” he declared.

In Bavaria, the conservative state government declared a disaster situation last Monday. This enables them to take far-reaching measures against the spread of the coronavirus and to call on citizens to help in the form of “services, material and work.” However, the disaster situation also means a far-reaching encroachment on democratic rights, which can be used to suppress social and political opposition. The working class must be on its guard.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact