

German parliament president calls for sacrificing lives for corporate profits

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Although the coronavirus pandemic continues to spread across Germany and Europe, the ruling elite is aggressively pursuing a policy of reopening the economy. Students in their final year at school returned to the classrooms in several federal states yesterday, while major auto plants, including Volkswagen's home plant in Wolfsburg with 63,000 employees, restarted operations. In major cities, large shops and shopping centres are reopening, with restaurants and bars likely to follow soon.

With these policies, the federal and state governments are endangering the health and lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Serious scientists and virologists, including Christian Drosten, head of virology at Berlin's Charité Hospital, are warning that a second wave of the pandemic will be much more powerful than the first.

To date, over 3 million people have been infected with COVID-19 around the world and more than 210,000 have died. In many countries, health care systems have collapsed under the weight of the pandemic, with horrific consequences. Pictures from Italy and the United States, where the military took bodies away and buried them in mass graves, have been burned into mass consciousness.

Despite the official propaganda, the situation in Germany is similarly dramatic. Over the weekend, the death toll approached 6,000 and total infections rose over 157,000.

The back-to-work offensive, which threatens a major resurgence of COVID-19, has been accompanied by a media-driven campaign with fascistic characteristics. Wolfgang Schäuble, the president of Germany's federal parliament and formally the second most senior figure in the state, has now positioned himself at the head of this campaign.

In an *Tagesspiegel*, with the headline "Schäuble: Die Menschenleben sind wichtiger als das Wirtschaftswachstum", he called for human lives to be sacrificed to reopen the economy and advance the interests of German capitalism and imperialism. "But when I hear that everything must take second place to the protection of life, then I must say: that is not correct in such an absolute sense," he declared provocatively. "Fundamental rights are mutually limiting. If there is one absolute value in our Basic Law, then it is human dignity. It is sacrosanct. But that does not exclude us from having to die."

Responding to a follow-up question from the newspaper on whether deaths from the coronavirus had to be accepted, Schäuble stated with virtually no caveats, "Yes." Although the state must "ensure the best possible health care for everyone, people will continue to die from the coronavirus." He added cynically, "Look, with all of my preexisting conditions and at my age, I'm part of the high-risk group. However, my fear is limited. We all die. And I think younger people actually have a much greater risk than me. After all, the natural end of my life is a bit closer."

With his repugnant attempt to weigh human dignity against the right to life, Schäuble is underscoring that 75 years after the downfall of the Third Reich, the ruling elite is returning to its fascist traditions. Article I of the Basic Law, "Human dignity shall be inviolable," was adopted in the wake of the Nazis' policies of terror and extermination explicitly to protect fundamental rights, not to undermine them. But the period in which the German ruling elite was forced to grit its teeth due to the defeats in two world wars is long gone.

Thirty years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and German unification, it is flaunting all of its ignorance, brutality and inhumanity. Schäuble, the longest-serving member of parliament and the former

interior and finance minister, embodies this development more fully than perhaps any other representative of the ruling class.

Responding to the *Tagesspiegel's* acknowledgement that “most virologists are appealing for a continuation of a strict lockdown,” Schäuble answered, “We can't leave all of the decisions to the virologists, but must weigh up all of the economic, social, psychological, and other impacts. Just shutting everything down for two years would also have terrible consequences.”

Asked whether things would have turned out better if the government had followed its own 2012 pandemic plan, he answered blandly, “The truth is we all hoped among ourselves that it wouldn't get so bad.”

Who does Schäuble think he is kidding? The fact of the matter is that the ruling elite simply had different priorities. Instead of preparing for the well-known danger of a global pandemic, it was focused on reviving militarism and German imperialism. Additionally, it concentrated on paying for the multibillion-euro sums funnelled into the banks following the 2008-2009 financial crisis by imposing vicious austerity measures across Europe. As finance minister from 2009 to 2017, Schäuble played a crucial role in this.

The ruling class sees the current coronavirus pandemic as an opportunity to intensify its brutal class policy.

In his interview with the *Tagesspiegel*, Schäuble defended the vast sums flowing into the bank accounts of the corporations and super-rich and demanded that they be recouped by intensifying the exploitation of the working class and cutting social services. The state “cannot permanently replace revenue,” he said. “Structural changes in the economy, society and politics” are required, and “the opportunity must be used to take on some excesses.”

Schäuble already made clear last autumn in his keynote foreign policy address, titled “Germany's role in a globalised world,” the type of “changes” the ruling elite is seeking to accomplish in its foreign policy. “Restraint is not an option, certainly not in terms of a viable foreign policy strategy,” he declared menacingly. “We Europeans have to do more for our own security, and that also means something for the security of the world around us.” That includes “ultimately the readiness to use military force.” This also “has a moral price. And carrying this burden poses

the Germans in particular with a great challenge.”

There is a direct connection between Schäuble's calls for wars and new crimes and his current appeal to sacrifice human lives for corporate profits. In order to enforce its foreign and domestic policy interests amid the deepest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s, the ruling elite is literally prepared to trample over corpses.

The working class must draw its own conclusions from this. To prevent a relapse into barbarism, workers must put an end to the subordination of society to the criminal interests of a tiny and fabulously wealthy elite. This requires the mobilisation of the widespread opposition to militarism and war, and to the policy of reopening the economy being pushed by the media and politicians, on the basis of a socialist programme.



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