

German government ends lockdown, putting hundreds of thousands of lives at risk

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Three weeks after the decision of the federal and state governments to gradually withdraw the coronavirus restrictions imposed in March, the end of the lockdown in Germany has largely been completed. This was announced by Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), Bavarian Prime Minister Markus Söder (Christian Social Union, CSU) and Hamburg Mayor Peter Tschentscher (Social Democratic Party, SPD) at a press conference on Wednesday.

“The current situation makes it possible to make further openings,” Merkel began her remarks. “We have passed the first phase of the pandemic.” Then, together with the representatives of the different states of Germany, she announced a veritable orgy of business reopenings, which will provoke a massive spread of COVID-19 and puts the health and lives of hundreds of thousands at risk.

First of all, the social contact restrictions that have been in place until now will be softened. From now on, members of two households will again be allowed to meet—for example, two couples, two families or members of two shared flats. The restrictions for hospitals, nursing homes and institutions for the disabled will also be relaxed. According to this, each patient or resident will be allowed to be visited by a particular person on a recurring basis.

“Shops can now open without restriction,” Merkel announced further. Previously existing restrictions, such as the limitation of the sales area to 800 square meters, will thus be dropped. The soccer Bundesliga is also to “resume playing in the second half of May” and training operations in popular and recreational sports in the open air are to be permitted again.

Relaxation is also planned in numerous other areas. The federal states have already “prepared concepts for

which this is increasingly possible,” Merkel said. She mentioned the “expansion of emergency care for children,” i.e., the gradual opening of day care centres, and concepts being developed for “theatres, concert halls and cinemas.” All in all, she said, there had been a “very constructive discussion” with the prime ministers of the federal states.

There is now a real competition between the federal states as to who opens up which areas first and goes the furthest. Already on Tuesday, Bavaria, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Hesse announced comprehensive plans for “a return to normal operation” in schools and day care centres. Yesterday, Söder announced that Bavarian beer gardens would open soon. In Berlin, the SPD-Left Party-Green Senate (“red-red-green”) wants restaurants and cafés to reopen as early as next week. And in Hesse, too, the CDU/Green state government plans to reopen restaurants, hotels and campsites this month.

A key objective of the measures is to boost the economy and revitalise industry. “We have not imposed any bans in large parts of the economy,” Merkel stressed. In other countries, large parts of production have been shut down. Germany is following a “very open and courageous path.” Merkel did not explain what this “courageous path” meant for the health of workers and their families. Over the past few weeks, hundreds have become infected with COVID-19 in individual factories.

As in previous weeks, Merkel combined her announcements with appeals to the population to continue to exercise “caution” and not to endanger the “successes.” “We want to prevent infections from spreading quickly,” the chancellor explained at the press conference. In view of the federal government’s policy, this can only be described as cynical and

criminal. It is already becoming apparent that the loosening of the containment measures that have been adopted will lead to a renewed spread of the virus.

According to official figures from the Robert Koch Institute, there were 679 new infections on May 4; May 5, 685; May 6, 947; May 7, 1,284. The number of deaths is also increasing. There were 43 deaths on May 4; May 5, 139; May 6, 165. According to Johns Hopkins University in the US, the number of deaths even rose by 282 on Wednesday, to a total of 7,275. The number of infected persons reached 168,162, of which 23,191 cases are active. In the clinics the situation remains dramatic despite the official propaganda. At present, 1,937 COVID-19 patients are being treated in intensive care, 69 percent of whom are on ventilators.

The pandemic is also spreading internationally. On Wednesday, the number of infections in the US rose again by more than 25,000 to over 1.26 million, of which more than 975,000 cases are active. In Europe there are over 794,000 active cases, out of a total of over 1.5 million infected persons. Almost 31,000 new cases were added on Wednesday alone, most of them in Russia (10,559), the UK (6,111) and France (3,640). Across Europe, over 2,500 people again succumbed to the corona virus, bringing the total number of deaths to 146,631.

The government's assertion that it can control the occurrence of infections in Germany under these conditions and intervene "if regional centres of infection occur" (Merkel) is absurd. Its main purpose is to divert attention from the deadly logic of the course taken. With its policy of loosening up, it risks provoking a situation like that in Italy and the US, where the health systems are collapsing due to rapidly increasing numbers of cases and tens of thousands have already died under terrible conditions.

Like President Trump in the US, the ruling class in Germany is waging a downright war against society and is prepared, if necessary, to sacrifice hundreds of thousands of lives for its interests. From the very beginning it has seen the coronavirus crisis as an opportunity to intensify its class war agenda and to transfer hundreds of billions into the pockets of the big corporations and their shareholders. For social and medical care and protection of the population, meanwhile, there is almost nothing.

The gigantic sums of money that were mainly given to the financial elite in the corona emergency package in Germany are now to be squeezed out of the working class again. Hence the aggressive "back to work" offensive, which is being organised by all parties in the Bundestag (German federal parliament) and the trade unions. Another factor is the geostrategic and economic interests of German imperialism, which is seeking to outdo its international rivals and is massively arming itself and looking for new markets and cheap labour.

"Several staffs in the Ministry of Economics, supported by a hundred consultants, are devoting themselves to the period after the crisis: Initial scenarios are being developed as to how Germany could lead the way in a global race to catch up," *Der Spiegel* had already reported at the beginning of April. "In public," government officials "don't want to talk about it yet ... but internally they see the chance to finally get rid of all the paralysing factors." What this means is now becoming fully visible: the "paralysing factor" is not only the social rights of workers, but also their very existence.

The working class can only counter the existential threat posed by the pandemic and the ruling class policies through its own independent programme. The assets of the super-rich must be confiscated and used to fight the pandemic and overcome the social and economic consequences of the lockdown. The big companies and banks must be placed under the democratic control of the workers. Capitalism, which means social impoverishment and death for the majority of the population, must be replaced by a socialist society.



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