

Germany's Left Party spearheading deadly back-to-work drive

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The coronavirus crisis has thoroughly exposed the anti-working class and essentially right-wing character of Germany's Left Party. After voting for the multi-billion-euro coronavirus bailout package in the federal parliament in late March, the Left Party is now supporting the grand coalition's reopening of the economy. The aim of this drive is to revive business and enable the ruling elite to squeeze the hundreds of billions provided to the big banks and corporations from the working class. In the process, the party is risking the health and lives of thousands.

This is shown clearest of all in the federal states where the Left Party jointly governs, in Thuringia, Bremen and Berlin. Although the number of coronavirus infections and deaths continues to rise daily in all three states, and the consequences of the premature and uncoordinated lifting of restrictions are beginning to appear, the Left Party is aggressively pushing ahead with the reopening of the economy and schools.

In Bremen, the Social Democratic/Left Party/Green coalition government adopted a further relaxation of restrictions last Tuesday. Among other things, indoor sports and opening gyms will be permitted from Wednesday.

Indoor events more generally with up to 200 participants are once again allowed. Schools and kindergartens already opened last week and restaurants are once again accepting guests.

There is no requirement to wear masks. Only a table reservation is necessary "so that there's no crowding at the bar," stated Left Party senator for health Claudia Bernhard.

In the capital, Berlin, where businesses reopened two weeks ago, the Social Democratic/Left Party/Green state government is moving rapidly to lift the remaining

restrictions. As of yesterday, hotels and holiday homes could reopen, outdoor swimming pools began operating and outdoor events with up to 100 participants were allowed. Prior to that, events with up to 50 participants were allowed, including at indoor venues. Reports state that by the end of the month "all pupils" should return to school.

The reopening policy in Thuringia is being led by the Left Party with particular zeal. Left Party Minister President Bodo Ramelow announced over the weekend that he will end all general restrictions as of early June, including social distancing.

Prior to this, he ordered all city and district authorities to take their own decisions on the reopening of restaurants, shops, cinemas, gyms, indoor sport facilities, bars, dance studios, recreation parks and brothels. This resulted in restrictions being eased even more rapidly than originally planned. The entire hotel and restaurant sector, including recreational activities and holiday camps, reopened as of 15 May.

Ramelow's latest announcement so explicitly displayed the indifference of the ruling class to scientific advice and the health and lives of the population that it was criticised even by some right-wing newspapers.

"If the virus is as predictably unpredictable as many virologists say," wrote *Die Welt*, then Ramelow's proposal "is not sensible, but foolhardy." The newspaper went on to say that a spike of coronavirus infections following a church service in Frankfurt and the reopening of a restaurant in Lower Saxony had shown "that this new socialising can rapidly lead to a sharp rise in infections."

The actions of the Left Party expose in practice the hypocrisy of its formal criticism of the "back to work" policy. "As a whole... this dynamic of relaxing

restrictions will not lead us out of the coronavirus crisis, but into a second wave,” said Left Party leader Katja Kipping in early May. But now, the Left Party is triggering precisely such a development with its policies. The dangerous consequences of the reopening policy can be seen most clearly in the states where the Left Party is in government.

Bremen’s public health office has identified coronavirus cases or people who came into contact with an infected person at 11 schools over the past week. As a result, 70 pupils and 34 members of staff had to go into quarantine.

In Berlin, two teachers at two schools in Spandau tested positive for the virus, forcing one of the schools to temporarily close. Thuringia has two of Germany’s coronavirus hotspots, the districts of Greiz and Sonneberg. In both towns, the number of cases increased in recent days above the level of 50 per 100,000 residents, a figure both federal and state governments agreed should be the trigger for the reimposition of restrictions.

The Left Party’s ruthless and ultimately deadly policy is motivated by the same class interests that are driving the policies of the grand coalition and the other parties in parliament. This is underscored by an interview published in the weekly news magazine *Die Zeit* with Gregor Gysi, the Left Party’s founding father. On 5 May, Gysi was elected by the Left Party parliamentary group to succeed Stefan Liebich as the party’s spokesman for foreign affairs.

Gysi defended the Left Party’s support for the federal government’s bailout and left no doubt that the hundreds of billions of euros, which overwhelmingly benefit the financial oligarchy, will have to be paid for by the working class. Responding to a question on whether he hopes that “the suspension of the debt brake will be permanent,” Gysi answered, “On the contrary, my firm conviction is that everything adopted in an emergency must be withdrawn later.” This applies “also to the suspension of the debt brake.”

During the interview, Gysi also made clear that the Left Party unconditionally supports Germany’s militarist policy. “The issue of NATO is not the problem,” insisted Gysi, because his party is “certainly not calling for Germany’s withdrawal.”

Arms exports, which the party often denounces in holiday speeches, would also continue under a federal

government involving the “Left.” Gysi said that “a total ban” would “not be enforceable” with the other parties.

He added that the same applied to the German army’s military interventions, including the murderous occupation of Afghanistan. “If we withdrew the German soldiers, the Afghans who worked with them would face the threat of death,” he said. “We can’t accept that.”

Three decades after its Stalinist predecessor organisation, the SED/PDS, supported the restoration of capitalism in East Germany, the Left Party distinguishes itself from the openly right-wing proponents of German imperialism and militarism in name only. To enforce the interests of German capital at home and abroad, the Left Party is even prepared to cooperate with far-right parties.

In March, Ramelow used his vote in the Thuringia state parliament to secure one of the vice presidential positions for the right-wing extremist Alternative for Germany. Now, leading Left Party members, including deputy leader of the parliamentary group in the federal parliament, Andrej Hunko, are participating in the right-wing demonstrations to impose the unpopular “back to work” policy in the face of widespread opposition in the population.



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