

Students, teachers, parents and nursery staff in Germany oppose school reopenings

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Opposition on the part of students, teachers, parents and nursery staff is growing in Germany to the life-threatening consequences of the government's school opening policy. As the country's various state governments, in close cooperation with the unions, rush ahead with the policy of opening schools, growing numbers of people are expressing their opposition to the move on social media and in schools and neighbourhoods.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with Tatyana from Iserlohn, a single mother of three children. "I think the school openings are totally insane," she said. "My school-age 13-year-old child is seriously and chronically ill. I had to fight for weeks here in the state of North Rhine Westfalen (NRW) to get my child out of classes. Just one day before school started I was able to excuse my child from attending classes until further notice."

Tatyana has launched an initiative against school openings among her friends and on the internet. "We are fighting together to ensure that anyone who so desires can have their child taught remotely," she said. "Unfortunately, the schools are not being closed, so we have to fight for our rights.

"Yesterday I learned that an action committee has been set up by students in Dortmund. I think that's great—I come from Dortmund myself. Several members of our group would like to see students come to us and report on the situation in the schools."

Referring to the fact that German courts have regularly rejected petitions by parents that their children not be forced to go to school, Tatyana said: "The Constitutional Court ruled in May this year that children cannot be forced to attend school during the pandemic. But it is being done anyway. It is horrific and human rights are being profoundly undermined and

violated. Mrs. Gebauer, Minister of Education in North Rhine-Westphalia and other education ministers are, in my opinion, committing serious, inexcusable crimes! Doctors are being put under pressure and Mrs. Gebauer is putting pressure on the health authorities not to close schools."

On Monday, the school directors' association of NRW published an "urgent letter" to the state premier Armin Laschet, who has called the ruthless school opening policy a "field test." The letter declared that the government was not fulfilling its "responsibility for precautionary measures and health protection for students, teachers and school directors in the state."

"And why are they doing all this?" asked Tatyana. "Because of the 'duty to educate'? What about the duty to care, what about the law that says every person has a right to health? The whole thing stinks to high heaven, it's frightening. I do not want to have to visit my child in intensive care!

"Where are the computer terminals for digital learning promised by the MSB [Ministry of Education] for groups at risk? Before the summer vacations, the government complained that students were not available for home schooling! And how could that be without internet for everyone? Did any of those in charge ever think about that? Who thinks about those families who cannot afford an internet connection because they have too little money to live on, but too much to enable them to die? During a pandemic the federal government must make the internet accessible to every household."

"It is a policy with fatal consequences," declared Alexandra Paul, a nursery school teacher from Lower Saxony. "Protection is simply not possible—you cannot force small children to stay apart. The fact that children are increasingly not being tested is as catastrophic for

us as it is for teachers. I believe the risks for teachers and nursery school staff are not that different.”

Alexandra wrote a letter to the *World Socialist Web Site* earlier this week on her experiences with smaller nursery school groups during the previous period of emergency care: “I think the only way [to prevent coronavirus outbreaks] is to minimise the size of groups, to keep them as small as possible and avoid constantly mixing the children,” she wrote. Under the current conditions, she said she could “bet on the number of infections that will badly affect me!”

Ily M., a mother with pre-existing health problems, joined a group including other parents and a teacher to resist the dangerous school openings. She told the *World Socialist Web Site* she was shocked by the unscrupulous way in which the lives of children and teachers were being put in danger, all on behalf of the capitalist economy.

“I have never been so desperate in my life because I am being denied the law-given right to self-determination and integrity. I can find no trace of the ‘liberal democratic values of our society’ in the type of dictatorship being enforced by the ministers of education. This is a shock I will never forget and which has massively and lastingly harmed my opinion and trust in Germany.”

The massive media campaign and the unanimity of all political parties about the need to rapidly open up schools, Ily said, makes “it seems as if we are irrational and frightened weirdoes. As an already disabled person, one ends up in the position of a petitioner, and as a parent in the role of an incapacitated citizen. I am in a situation in my life that I could never have imagined.”

On the other hand, the founding of the Dortmund School Committee and the widespread resistance across social media has encouraged her, Ily said: “I am glad and grateful that so many people are also opposing these decisions. I think there should have been a strike a long time ago.”

Milla B. lives in the state of Baden-Württemberg with her nine-year-old son. “So we still have the complete opening up of schools ahead of us,” she told the WSWS. For the time being, her child will continue to take online lessons with a teacher who is herself at-risk, but in March “everything was chaotic.” “I had already reported my child sick at school at the beginning of March, when Mr. Wieler from the Robert Koch

Institute said in a press release that children can have also be severely affected and die. The school was closed until June 15 and in the meantime the teacher sent material for working at home.”

When the school reopened in June, according to Ily, hygiene had not been thought through: “It was complete chaos.” Her child was “scared and never wants to go to school again.” Her child said: “‘Mom, there is Corona at the school, if I bring Corona home, you won’t be there anymore.’ This was an alarm call for me as mother revealing that the opening of the school had an affect on the psyche of my child.

“So I spoke to my doctor, who is Italian and had dealings with coronavirus in his own family. He gave me a sick note, but the school tried to dissuade me. The school principal also took a more direct approach and tried to label me as ‘overly anxious.’”

A teacher from Berlin, who wants to remain anonymous, confirmed similar incidents. He reported on Twitter about a colleague who was told to present herself to the principal “at the next opportunity” after she “pointed out that the virus has not become less dangerous and that there were now more active cases than in March.

“I am shocked to see so many families scared and desperate, as I was. In my opinion, what is never mentioned publicly is how the whole chaotic situation is psychologically disturbing for children at school. Especially the thought of infecting one’s own family. There is real psychological terror being exercised in Germany, I would never have dreamed of such a state of affairs in Germany!”



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