German federal and state governments protect profits instead of lives

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In a video conference held on Thursday, German chancellor Angela Merkel and the state premiers of the Länder (German states) decided to continue their dangerous policy of opening up the country despite increasing infection rates. In doing so, they are implementing the demand of the corporations that under no circumstances should the measures taken to combat infection take precedence over their profit interests.

For three weeks now, the daily infection figures have been well above the 1,000 mark in some cases. Last Friday, they reached 2,034, the highest level since the end of April. Nevertheless, schools and day-care centres throughout the country have been reopened without any significant safety measures and almost all restrictions on businesses have been lifted. This is to ensure that production continues and to safeguard corporate profits.

With their decisions taken on Thursday, the state and federal governments are continuing this course. For example, the heads of government announced they will introduce a uniform federal regulation that "compensation for loss of income will not be granted if quarantine becomes necessary due to an avoidable trip to a risk area so designated at the start of the trip."

If, for example, workers from risk areas in southeast Europe visited their families, they would not receive compensation for the necessary quarantine on their return to Germany. Because these particular groups often receive very low wages and cannot afford to lose their earnings, the tightening of the regulations forces them to break the quarantine and return to their often extremely dangerous jobs. A rapid spread of the virus, as has already happened in many slaughterhouses, is thus inevitable.

In addition, coronavirus testing is to be significantly reduced. Citizens returning from non-risk areas following foreign trips will no longer be allowed to be tested free of charge from September 15. Anyone who wants to take a test will then have to go to a test centre and pay the €60 [$US71] or so out of their own pocket, which is a major obstacle, especially for low-income earners. From October 1, travellers from high-risk areas will no longer be subject to compulsory testing, but will merely be required to undergo a two-week quarantine, which can be shortened after five days following a negative test.

These restrictions are being justified by the reality that there is too little testing capacity. In fact, however, this capacity would have to be significantly expanded to effectively limit the pandemic. With 133,707 tests per million inhabitants, Germany is only 41st in the world, behind countries like Russia and Belarus. Germany is also far behind in Europe. Denmark alone has tested almost three times as often as Germany.

The federal and state governments also reaffirmed their commitment to the complete opening up of schools and day-care centres. "It is of great importance that hygiene concepts based on the cluster strategy are designed in such a way that school closures and extensive quarantine arrangements can be avoided as far as possible," the report of the meeting stated.

Teachers and students know what this means: without distancing rules, masks or adequate ventilation, they are crammed together into classrooms. If infections occur under these conditions, they are often covered up by the authorities or tests of all contact persons are simply omitted.

This policy is to be extended to all areas of society. As the Bavarian State Premier Markus Söder explained at the press conference, it should even be possible to allow large gatherings to take place again under certain

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conditions. Until now, these were completely banned as potential super-spreading events.

No further restrictions have also been decided regarding parties and family celebrations, which, according to the Robert Koch Institute [German federal government agency and research institute responsible for disease control and prevention], have played an important role in the pandemic over recent weeks. The German government had initially announced a limit of 25 or 50 people, but this was not decided.

There is little change in the fines for refusing to wear masks. A minimum fine of €50 was set for all federal states except Saxony-Anhalt. Since most of the federal states had long since introduced such a fine or a significantly higher fine, this affects only a few states with a total of 14 million inhabitants. Some of them had already announced the introduction of such fines anyway.

The federal government and the various state governments of all stripes are jointly implementing the deadly demands of the banks and corporations with their policies of opening up society. To secure their profits, they have been demanding for weeks that under no circumstances should there be any further major restrictions for business. Factories, public transportation, schools and day-care centres are to be kept open, even if this means the death of thousands.

For example, the President of the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHK), Eric Schweitzer, declared last week in the news magazine *Focus* that a lockdown would be "devastating for the German economy."

That is why schools must also be reopened completely. "Anyone who has to look after children or even teach them intensively [at home] cannot at the same time work [in their usual job]. It is therefore important for the functioning of businesses that we no longer have nationwide day-care and school closures," Schweitzer said.

In a full-page "special publication" in the same issue of *Focus*, the German Association for Small and Medium-sized Businesses (BVMW) declared that a "second lockdown must be prevented at all costs." "We see Germany's economic sustainability at risk," it says in an "Open letter to the Chancellor and all the State Premiers of Germany."

According to the association, the government must "not again give priority to excessive infection control over the appropriate protection of the economy and prosperity." To this end, the reopening of schools was "without any alternative" even in the face of a rapid increase in infections. Regardless of the pandemic, the paper concludes that the government must rule out a further lockdown.

These are clear statements. Even if the number of infections continued to rise rapidly, hospitals fill to overflowing and hundreds of thousands of people die, business profits must be given absolute priority. To continue capitalist profiteering and the orgy of enrichment on the stock markets, the ruling class is literally walking over dead bodies.

In June, a British research team at London's Imperial College published a study according to which, 3.1 million lives were saved by the lockdown in 11 European countries alone—560,000 of them in Germany. When politicians and industry now announce that this must never happen again, they are arguing, amidst rising infection figures, for these human lives to be sacrificed in the future for the profits of the super-rich.

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