

Tripling of new coronavirus infections in Germany in only one month

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On Sunday, the youngest COVID-19 victim in the city of Offenbach died age 51. Offenbach is currently the coronavirus hotspot in the federal state of Hesse. The sad death of a woman who could have lived for several more decades is a further indictment of a government policy whose unanimous credo is: the economy cannot tolerate a new lockdown.

According to this credo, everything is currently being done at the federal, state and local level to keep the economy running even as infections of the deadly coronavirus rapidly rise. This exposes not only production, care, and transport workers, but also students, teachers, educators and their families, as well as all public transport workers, to mortal danger.

At the same time, the rising number of cases—the inevitable result of this policy—is now being used to deploy the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) at home. At the crisis summit in the Chancellor's Office, Chancellor Angela Merkel decisively spoke out in favour of deploying the Bundeswehr in large cities to relieve the burden on health authorities. The self-created crisis thus serves as a pretext to accustom the population to the deployment of the military on Germany's streets.

The health authorities are being overloaded with cases. This, too, is a result of the policy of reopening the economy. During the lockdown, they had the aid of additional personnel from offices that had been shut down. Now, in many places, contact tracing can no longer be reliably carried out to identify and notify those who may have been exposed to the virus.

Last week, for example, the Mayor of Offenbach, Felix Schwenke (Social Democratic Party, SPD), asked the Bundeswehr for administrative assistance. On Tuesday, soldiers from a reconnaissance battalion took up work in the Offenbach health department. On Sunday, a representative of the Bundeswehr had already participated in the municipal coronavirus planning staff. Similarly, the mayor of Stuttgart, Fritz Kuhn (Greens), has called for soldiers, and Bundeswehr soldiers are already working in several Berlin districts.

The grand coalition's barely concealed herd immunity strategy has brought the virus back with force. For days now, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) has reported well over 4,000 new infections. On Wednesday morning, the RKI reported 5,132 new infections in only 24 hours, and 43 deaths. A total of 9,682 COVID-19 patients have died since March.

The R (reproduction) value of 1.4 is clearly in the range of an exponential increase. Especially since the beginning of the new

school year, the numbers are rapidly increasing. In just one month, from September 9 to October 9, the daily number of new coronavirus infections tripled from about 1,500 to 4,516. During this time, another 300 COVID-19 patients have died.

Not only Offenbach is affected; the city has a current seven-day incidence of almost 80 per 100,000 inhabitants. Also, Berlin, Frankfurt, Cologne, Bremen, Stuttgart, Munich, Düsseldorf, Duisburg and other cities currently exceed the much-cited limit of 50 new infections per 100,000 inhabitants. As reported by the RKI, about one in four people in North Rhine-Westphalia now live in a so-called coronavirus risk area.

The second wave is also affecting all those who cannot escape the virus, such as bus drivers and geriatric carers, nurses, teachers and educators, etc. They are now realizing with growing anger that they are being forced to bear the loss of their life and health as a result of the government's policy.

“Restarting schools for regular operations and opening day care centres is an economic rescue programme to enable parents to go to work,” writes Conny F, a Facebook user. “In addition, it apparently must not cost anything,” she adds, referring to the refusal of state politicians to provide schools with more staff and modern ventilation systems.

In the TV show “hart aber fair” (“hard but fair”), nurse Nina Böhmer, author of a book on the nursing emergency in Germany, confirmed on Monday that “actually nothing” had changed in hospital wards and old people's homes since April. “The personnel situation is still the same, the material situation is the same. Even before the pandemic, incredible cuts were made in equipment and personnel. We are still working at the limits of our capacity.”

In spring, Böhmer had posted on Facebook: “You can stick your clapping somewhere else ... if you want to help or want to show how much we are worth, then help us to fight for better conditions!”

The growing willingness to fight is already expressed internationally in youth protests. In Poland, students have been striking in some schools since last Monday for fear of infecting their families, while other students come dressed in black as they are forced to attend classes.

In Greece, students occupied over 700 schools at the end of September. For their demands for smaller classes, more teachers and safe, free transportation, they are willing to defy the state authorities, who blackmail and violently attack them. They stress,

“We are not costs—we are the future!”

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International are fighting for workers and youth to unite in independent action committees, network nationally and internationally, and prepare a general strike to jointly stop the second wave in Europe.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the trade unions are in the same camp as the ruling class and big business. Verdi and IG Metall belong to those who downplay the seriousness of the coronavirus and the politicians who advocate a herd immunity policy. Although Verdi is currently organizing nationwide protest strikes in the public sector and public transport, it has not put forward a single demand for greater safety in the pandemic. The union will not lift a finger against the untenable situation in schools. The token strikes only serve to provide an outlet for the growing anger and to try and keep the situation under control.

As a result, more and more workers are seeing where the unions really stand. As Kaya, a Berlin bus driver, remarked in an interview with the WSWS: “One reason why they are not working to protect their colleagues from coronavirus infection is that the contracts are certainly already signed. We already know that from the past.”

Her colleague, who drives for Berlin Transport GmbH, reported: “They don’t even fight to protect the drivers in private companies, who often have to drive around with only warning tape. They follow the motto: ‘I don’t bite the hand which feeds me.’”

“An important 10 months were not used,” he continued. There should have been regulations in the depots imposing the wearing of masks and keeping safe distances in January. “Everything should have been shut down. We have seen that many people have died in China. Now—after 10 months—to announce the compulsory wearing of masks is a joke. The firms just want an alibi so they can say they did something. An enclosed driver’s cab could have been installed by that time.”

The rising coronavirus figures are all the more alarming because they do not reflect the current infection rate, but what it was seven to 10 days ago. This means that even in the unlikely event of an effective countermeasure, the figures would continue to rise for at least 10 days. With the current policy, a level of 10,000 and more new infections per day is firmly pre-programmed. As a result, several hundred people will be hospitalized every day with severe illness and dozens to hundreds will die every day.

On Friday, Charité director Heyo Kroemer pointed to the figures in France at the federal press conference with Christian Drost. “In France, they are always two to three weeks ahead of us,” Kroemer said, and that was already the case in the spring. On Friday, the number of new coronavirus infections in France had exceeded the threshold of 20,000 per day for the first time, and on Saturday, it was almost 27,000 in 24 hours. Over 32,600 people have died in France from the virus since the spring. Spain, Austria, the Czech Republic, Poland, the Netherlands, Portugal and practically all of Europe are also reporting rising coronavirus numbers again.

Reports of outbreaks in nursing homes and refugee shelters are already increasing again.

In the Vitalis residential facility in Bad Essen (Lower Saxony),

27 residents and 13 employees tested positive for COVID-19 on Saturday, while an 85-year-old resident died. Elsewhere, 24 of 29 residents and seven employees in a nursing home for dementia patients in Freudental (Baden-Württemberg) had been confirmed infected with the virus.

One week ago, a coronavirus outbreak became known in a residential home for people with disabilities in Schleiz, Thuringia. More than 20 people, including staff, had become infected there. In the Esslingen district, at least 26 schools, five day-care centres and several refugee hostels are affected. One source of infection is a DHL freight centre in Köngen, where refugees work and live in shared accommodation nearby.

Schools are also severely affected, and school closures have soared, not only in Baden-Württemberg. There have been 531 confirmed cases of coronavirus at schools, day care centres and after-school centres since the beginning of the school year, and 23 teachers have fallen ill. As the *Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung* reports, all classes were open in mid-September, on September 24, there were already 172 class closures and on October 6 the number rose to 444.

Also, the challenges of the cold season are now being added, while regular school operations are to be maintained at all costs. The German Philologists’ Association advises teachers and students to “dress warm” in the classroom so that ventilation can continue.

Comments on the internet are also increasing. “This is the ultimate testimony of the poverty of our unions,” comments Lanayah. And a teacher, Gustav, writes, “They should rather advise school administrators to close the school when the minimum temperature according to the Occupational Health and Safety Directive is not reached. Why [must we] always bend? Shut schools for two weeks, everyone would put pressure on the KMs [ministries of education] and no one would have to freeze because suddenly there would be money.”

But leading politicians of all stripes, from the Christian Democrats (CDU) to the Left Party, stick mercilessly to the back-to-work policies. While they insult people for “unreasonably partying,” impose useless bans on alcohol and curfews and mobilize the Bundeswehr, they see no reason to restrict the actual super-spreader events—the full schools and day care centres and overcrowded buses and trains—and make them pandemic-proof.



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