

Far right attacks scientists as coronavirus infections explode in Germany

Gregor Link

27 October 2020

Over recent days, well over 11,000 people have been infected each day with coronavirus in Germany. The Robert Koch Institute (RKI), Germany's disease control agency, reported 14,714 cases on Saturday on the basis of data supplied by local health authorities. Both previous days saw over 11,200 new cases registered, while there were 11,176 on Sunday and 8,685 on Monday. However, due to the reduced processing of tests in some local health authorities over the weekend, the real number of infections on Sunday and Monday is likely much higher.

Overall, average new infections are twice as high as they were at the end of March and beginning of April when the pandemic reached its initial high point with between 5,000 and 7,000 daily cases.

The available data shows that the drive by the federal and state governments to reopen the economy and systematically encourage the mass infection of the population is threatening the health and lives of hundreds of thousands. It will culminate in a matter of weeks in a catastrophic collapse of Germany's hospital networks unless a sharp change of course is initiated with the shutdown of schools and the economy.

In its situation report on Sunday, the RKI noted that 71 cities and districts had infection rates of 100 per 100,000 inhabitants or higher and are therefore potential hotspots. The share of those infected who have died in Germany was calculated by the RKI at 2.3 percent.

The current lower empirical death rate of 1 percent, the institute added, threatens to rise sharply in the coming days. The situation report commented on this, "However, the infections among elderly people is increasing. Because they tend to experience more serious symptoms from COVID-19, the number of serious cases and deaths will also rise." The institute called for the spread of the coronavirus to be prevented.

As *Der Spiegel* reported last week, the actual number of infections in Germany is systematically underestimated by the RKI's published figures. "The most important number in the pandemic, the new infections within the past seven days, is often falsely recorded by the RKI," wrote the newsmagazine. In the time period under review, at least 30 percent of these figures were incomplete and therefore flawed, because "the data from at least one day were completely" missing. The differential varied across states but was as high as 25 percent, an effect that can under-represent the exponential spread of the pandemic.

With the explosion of new infections, the number of patients

being brought into intensive care units is also increasing. As the *Tagesschau* reported, the number of intensive care patients has almost doubled from 690 to 1,121 in just a week. The figure two weeks ago was 510, and just 293 patients one month ago. This is typical of exponential growth.

Of the 487 patients currently on ventilators nationwide, statistics suggest that more than half will die. Coronavirus patients now account for 4 percent of all patients in Germany. Just 26.4 percent of intensive care beds remain unoccupied.

Speaking to the *Tagesschau*, Uwe Jansens, president of the German Interdisciplinary Association of Intensive and Emergency Care (DIVI) warned that there will be a shortage of health care staff during the winter. In fact, this shortage could be reached much more quickly. In France, where developments are approximately two weeks ahead of Germany, approximately 2,000 patients are being brought into hospital each day.

Health Minister Olivier Veran stated on Twitter that one coronavirus patient is hospitalized every minute. *Tagesspiegel* reported on figures from a study by the French professional association of nurses, which showed that 57 percent are on the verge of burnout. Prior to the pandemic, this figure was 33 percent.

Attack on the RKI

Regardless of the record spread of the virus, officials at the RKI and other scientists warning about the rapidity of the pandemic's spread are increasingly being targeted by right-wing extremist forces. Between March and July alone, the RKI received at least 200 emails with "threats, insults, and slanders." Among other things, the scientists were threatened with extermination in a gas chamber.

On Saturday night, the RKI was the target of an arson attack. According to the police, unknown assailants attacked an institute building in Tempelhof-Schöneberg with several flammable objects. A bottle full of flammable liquid was thrown through a window, triggering a fire inside a room. A security worker observing the attack was able to extinguish the fire.

Although there is much to suggest right-wing extremist forces were behind the attack, the division of state protection at the bureau of criminal investigations for the state of Berlin said that

they are “investigating in all directions.” A political motivation for the attack is being “reviewed.”

The threats and attack on Germany’s main disease control agency amid a global pandemic, which has already claimed the lives of at least 1.1 million people, is a serious warning. Just like in the United States, where far-right militias with close ties to President Donald Trump’s reelection campaign have plotted to kidnap and kill governors who implemented limited lockdown measures, attacks on politicians, scientists and critical journalists have all been increasing in Germany over recent months.

Benjamin Piel, editor-in-chief of the *Mindener Tageblatt*, published a photo on Twitter showing a puppet that had been hung. A sign was attached to it reading “COVID-press,” and it was hung from a bridge over the Weser river by unknown people.

On the same day in Berlin, there was another march by far-right forces against public health orders. According to police sources, 2,000 people participated, with many disregarding social distancing regulations. Although videos show that the police initially allowed the protesters to proceed and later persistently protected them against counterprotests, at least 18 officers were reportedly injured.

RBB journalist Olaf Sundermeyer reported from the demonstration that death threats were made against the virologist and government adviser Christian Drosten and Social Democrat health expert Karl Lauterbach, as well as demands to visit the home of health Minister Jens Spahn, who is currently infected.

While threatening rallies have been held in front of schools in Baden-Württemberg, Hesse and Schleswig-Holstein, a growing number of reports on social media say that workers in restaurants, on public transport and other sectors have been exposed to increased insults and physical attacks by right-wing provocateurs.

The right-wing attacks are part of an international wave of far-right terrorism, which is being encouraged by the lurch to the right of the entire political establishment. The right-wing dregs of society are being mobilized in order to intimidate the opposition to the reckless policies of reopening the economy and promoting mass infection.

The *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* reported on Monday that 20 protesters forced their way into the office of the local district to demand the abolition of the requirement to wear a mask, which had just been imposed in the face of exploding infections. The incident has striking parallels with similar developments in the United States, such as when armed right-wing extremists made their way into the State Capitol in Michigan.

Profit interests

As in every country, the political measures and edicts issued by the federal and state governments and local authorities are dictated by the profit interests of big business. While growing numbers of workers view with astonishment the inactivity of the government, which is refusing to invest anything in the health care system, the politicians incessantly declare that a life-saving shutdown of the

economy and closure of schools must be avoided at all costs.

Yet there can now be no doubt that the opening of schools and businesses is the main cause for the exponential growth of the pandemic. Leading virologists and epidemiologists around the world have repeatedly demonstrated that crowded spaces with poor hygiene and air ventilation create perfect conditions for the virus to spread.

According to the RKI, outbreaks are growing in elderly care homes, hospitals and institutions for refugees and asylum seekers, community centres, kindergartens and schools, as well as “various professional settings and in connection with religious activities.”

The scientists thus refute the claim made by the federal and state governments of all political stripes, according to which infections do not occur in schools.

After school students in Greece and Poland organized school occupations and boycotts, mass opposition to in-person learning is also growing in Germany. On Sunday, the hash tag #BoycottSchools was among the widely discussed hashtags on Twitter.

Teachers, students and parents increasingly realize that the federal and state governments will not lift a finger to contain outbreaks at schools and in kindergartens. As the ARD program *Monitor* reported, even the installation of air filters by the responsible education ministries was rejected as too expensive. This was in spite of the fact that they are proven to reduce virus-bearing aerosols from the air.

The policy of “herd immunity” pursued by governments in Germany, Europe and other countries, as well as the growth of right-wing terrorism bound up with this, once again make clear that the working class confronts tremendous political challenges. While the opened schools spread the virus increasingly undetected among ever larger sections of the population, workers are being forced to keep slogging away under dangerous conditions to boost corporate profits.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls upon all of its readers to put an end to these policies. Form rank-and-file safety committees in factories, schools and public sector institutions to fight for safe education and a general strike to force the closure of all non-essential economic sectors. Contact us today!



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact