

German teachers, students and parents oppose keeping schools open as pandemic spreads

Gregor Link
5 November 2020

The Robert Koch Institute (RKI), Germany's main disease control agency, reported 17,214 new coronavirus infections on Wednesday. According to statistics from Johns Hopkins University, daily infections in Germany rose well above 19,000 in recent days.

In neighbouring Austria, daily infections have risen above 5,000, with hospitals on Monday reporting a 78 percent increase in patients requiring intensive care treatment within a week.

In late September, students in Greece occupied over 700 schools to protest the unsafe restart of in-person teaching and demand safe education for all. A few days later, similar nationwide protests erupted in Poland after two teachers and a student died of COVID-19. Students in France have been striking and protesting since Monday against the unsafe return to schools following the end of the autumn holidays. A parent organization in the UK has called a strike for Thursday to oppose the Johnson's government's refusal to close schools.

Under conditions of an explosion in new infections, which is the direct product of the German government's deliberate policy of mass infection, strong opposition to keeping schools open is also developing among students, teachers, and parents in Germany. After a rank-and-file safety committee was founded by students in Dortmund in August, students in Karlsruhe and other cities are now calling for such committees to be established and the closure of schools to be organised.

There is growing support for the call by the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) for the building of a network of rank-and-file safety committees and the preparation of a Europe-wide school strike against the policy of mass infection.

Tensions are running especially high in Bavaria, where

the state government will hold a school conference today with students, parents, and teacher representatives. As in other German states, hardly any local authorities in Bavaria are dividing up classes to keep groups small, even though most regions have a seven-day incidence of 100 infections per 100,000 inhabitants. Even though the RKI published guidelines two weeks ago advising that regular in-person teaching should be halted when infection levels reach such heights due to medical risks, the ministers of education in Germany's states simply ignored them.

In an open letter to the Education Ministry, the Bavarian State Student Council referred to a "grading spree" of up to four tests per week. This puts students "under incredible pressure to perform, which shows no regard for the current situation."

An open letter from the State Association of High School Parents and the Bavarian Parents Association complained that the "pace of performance assessment" has been "massively increased since the beginning of the school year," with the result that "children and their families are groaning." Hygiene conditions are also catastrophic: "Despite extra buses, students from different classes and different schools are still standing side-by-side. This contradicts all of the regulations we have been asking our children to follow since the beginning of the pandemic."

The letter continued, "Across Bavaria, the second wave of the pandemic is overwhelming many families. Children are at risk of being left behind. One quarter of Bavarian parental households are affected by short-term work or unemployment. The worry about incomes and jobs is oppressive...Financial resources are inadequate. The four walls of many homes are shaking."

Instead of easing the pressure placed on students to perform amid this unprecedented social crisis, it is being

intensified. “How is it possible to learn the material that was missed out last year and still internalise new content—effectively learning twice as much material?” continued the letter. Rules that previously applied to “regulate schoolwork are being tossed aside without any consultation in the school forums.”

The order for teachers to continue academic testing as if there is no state of emergency is leading to further social turmoil for children and poor families. “The teachers are supposed to dance around the golden calf of awarding grades and are not able to concentrate on that which is the essence of education. As a result, many children are losers of the pandemic...Social relief for the disadvantaged is essential but is neither being considered or granted.”

With the words “that’s enough, this far and no further,” the letter from the parents’ associations concluded with the appeal for “statewide assessments of learning progress without the awarding of grades,” “the repetition of the pandemic year without consequences,” and centrally coordinated digital learning material and significantly reduced learning plans.

In October, 20 parents’ associations from across Germany protested against the brutal policy of reopening schools and the efforts by health authorities to cover up cases. In a joint letter to German Chancellor Angela Merkel and several other federal politicians, they expressed their alarm “that the entire class or year group does not need to go into quarantine, but only often the person who was sitting next to the infected person.”

The signatories also pointed out, “But the ministries don’t allow the infection chains to be examined by scientific analysis. Due to the fact that there are many cases in which entire cohorts are not tested, asymptomatic infections can neither be pursued nor proven.”

This has resulted, according to the RKI, in the origin of 75 percent of all infections being “unknown.” This “diffuse spread” serves as a pretext for governments to adopt totally ineffectual measures, while schools, kindergartens, and factories and other business sites remain open.

Another report from Bavaria shows the disastrous consequences of the conscious policy of mass infection. A recent study by scientists at the Helmholtz Centre in Munich suggests that six times as many children and young people have been infected than were officially recorded in government statistics. The research led by Markus Hippich and Dr. Anette-Gabrielle Ziegler examined 12,000 children and young people between the ages of 1 and 18 for antibodies against the virus.

The scientists discovered that between April and July, an average of 0.87 percent of children and young people had antibodies, six times higher than the positive tests recorded in official statistics. Given the fact that around half of all infections among children are asymptomatic, and that health authorities have a policy of only ordering tests for the students who are directly affected, the virus was able to spread undetected.

Last month, the Princeton Environmental Institute (PEI), Johns Hopkins University, and the University of California at Berkeley published the largest contact tracing study to date in the journal *Science*. Working with the health authorities in the Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, the authors analysed the infection chains and death rate of close to 600,000 residents, who came into contact with close to 85,000 infected people.

The study once again shed light on the importance of “super-spreader” events, and concluded that environments like “offices, households, schools” and party-like indoor events are particularly dangerous. According to the researchers, children and young people play a “key role” in spreading the virus and are “very efficient transmitters.”

The research results confirm the warnings made by the *World Socialist Web Site* since the beginning of the pandemic: unsafe in-person teaching is part of the campaign of capitalist governments for the deliberate mass infection of the population. International studies have repeatedly proven that the closure of schools, kindergartens and industrial facilities is the most effective way to combat the pandemic. But this can only be achieved through the mobilization of the working class in opposition to the “herd immunity” policy of the ruling class.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact