

Germany's schools remain open despite a massive second wave of COVID-19

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According to the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), 267 more COVID-19 patients died in Germany on Monday, in the space of just 24 hours. By Tuesday morning, 14,419 new infections were registered.

Over the past seven days, there have been 145 cases per 100,000 inhabitants nationwide, with numerous hot spots reporting much higher rates. In Berlin alone, there are currently over 1,000 COVID-19 patients in hospital, 274 of whom are being treated or ventilated in intensive care units. The seven-day incidence rate in central Berlin is 360.

The virus has spread rapidly throughout Europe and has claimed 330,000 lives so far. In neighbouring Austria, high case numbers forced the government to tighten its lockdown and close schools on Saturday. Intensive care units in Italy, France, Spain, and Switzerland are on the verge of collapse.

In this situation, the federal and state governments are insisting that schools, day care centres and businesses continue to operate. On Monday evening, the chancellor's pandemic talks with the state premiers ended without any result.

Angela Merkel and the heads of the state governments agreed on nonbinding "appeals" and refused even to impose a simple binding obligation to wear masks in schools. With schools and day care centres remaining open, all further decisions have been postponed until November 25.

Meanwhile, the pandemic is continuing to spread throughout such facilities. According to a report in this week's *Der Spiegel* magazine, coronavirus infections in children have increased tenfold in the last few weeks. According to the RKI, more than 10,400 coronavirus infections in children under 14 years of age were registered in the first week of November. (At the beginning of September, there were less than 1,000 per week.)

A further study from Bavaria last week showed that six times more minors than previously known have been infected with the virus. The number of children who suffer from severe symptoms and must go to hospital has also risen.

The situation in the care sector is also critical. Intensive care units are reaching their limits, with almost 3,500 intensive care patients nationwide. In hospitals, medical practices and other health care facilities, 1,700 doctors and nurses are currently suffering from COVID-19. Since the beginning of the pandemic, there have been at least 24,500 cases among medics, although the number of unreported cases is high. According to the RKI, 25 medics have died.

While the German government is doing nothing to stem the spread of the pandemic and protect the lives of workers, politicians and the business media are increasing the pressure. Under the headline, "Teachers must realize that an extra contribution is necessary in the crisis," Barbara Gillmann in the financial daily *Handelsblatt* strings together a series of accusations and lies.

Echoing the notorious "lazy jerks" insult directed at teachers by former Social Democratic Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, Gillmann writes, "So far, schools are still not considered by virologists to be drivers of the pandemic." She adds that for some teachers, "all the effort with masks and ventilation in the classrooms is simply too much."

Health Minister Jens Spahn declared on November 13 at the German Care Congress that, if necessary, employees at hospitals and nursing homes testing positive had to continue to work. His latest proposal goes even further. He declared that if as a result of isolation and quarantine measures there is a lack of nursing staff, the question must be asked, "What is the second-best solution after the best possible one?" His "fallback position" consisted of "letting those who have tested positive work with very special protective measures."

This led to social media boiling over with angry comments. "SisterUncomfortable," who works in an intensive care unit, tweeted that Spahn's demand was "a state's declaration of bankruptcy in 5 words!" She continued: "We are worth nothing! Not even the dirt under the fingernails of the nation! WE. ARE. NOT. YOUR. COMMON PROPERTY!"

She added: "We deserve to be protected. And all I can do is sit back and watch helplessly as they burn us out."

Duncan Blues wrote, "Nursing staff have been consistently burned [out] for years, and now with coronavirus they are dumping kerosene on the smouldering funeral pyre of the nursing emergency."

Others confirmed that this has indeed been "like this for quite some time." One wrote, "As long as there are no symptoms, work must continue." Another said nurses are "used to being exploited and put under pressure (stepping in, even if you have time off or vacation)."

Ms. Flausch wrote, "This is bad. Have already been told by a friend who is a doctor. He should continue to work with an infection as an ENT at a large university hospital."

Neinhorn wrote: "It disgusts me deeply how nursing staff are used as service-providing sacks of meat and are treated like service

robots with helper syndrome. It made me sick even before COVID and it's becoming more and more perverted."

L+ wrote of a "total failure in personnel recruitment in care and education," and explained that it was "the fault of politics."

Enije wrote, "Just because a minister says so, we don't have to take the bullshit. I can't remember having sworn an oath of service for better or worse."

For a few days now, the question of how those affected can defend themselves has been repeatedly appearing on the internet. For example, Ingmar V. wrote: "It is absolutely necessary to think about solutions, how nursing staff can conduct a kind of strike without endangering the people they look after. ... Proposals?"

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and its sister organizations in Europe and worldwide have formulated such proposals. We advocate establishing independent rank-and-file committees in schools and factories so that workers can network and take protection against the coronavirus into their own hands, independently of the trade unions. This should be directed toward the preparation of a European-wide general strike.

On March 7, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote: "The indifference of the Trump administration to the health of the population is no better, and perhaps worse, than the attitude of the pharaohs of ancient Egypt to the slaves."

The article went on to say that in responding to the disease, "one principle must guide us: that human need is primary." It continued: "Combating an epidemic that threatens millions of lives cannot be subordinated to considerations of private profit. ... It is necessary to build a mass movement of the working class to demand an immediate emergency response to the crisis, to be paid for by the corporations, the government and the financial oligarchy."

This past summer, when the government imposed a full reopening of the schools, the WSWS warned that it was only a matter of time before rising infection rates would spread to the elderly and result in thousands of deaths.

This is exactly what has happened. Currently, the number of people infected in nursing homes is rising at an alarming rate.

Over the weekend, a home for the elderly and a nursing home in the Berlin district of Lichtenberg had to be partially evacuated because 30 residents and 17 employees had contracted the virus. Within a short period, 14 of the sick residents had died.

Private elderly care operator Kursana, which belongs to the Dussmann Group and has the closest relations with the Social Democratic Party-Left Party-Green Party Berlin Senate, employs almost 7,000 staff at its 116 facilities, including numerous caregivers on temporary contracts. Comments on the internet speak of "too few and overworked staff who exceed their limits daily." They note that at Kursana, one nurse has to care for nine residents.

In Mannheim there were outbreaks at two facilities. More than 120 people (93 residents and 28 nursing staff) were infected, and eight residents died within a short time. There were further outbreaks in old people's and nursing homes in Bad Soden-Salmünster in Hesse, Fürth in Bavaria (with 63 people infected), and Karlsfeld near Munich, with 48 people infected and 13 dead in a single old people's home.

"The heads of government have blanked out the distress in old

people's homes," Eugen Brysch, head of the Patient Protection Foundation, commented in response to the chancellor's meeting on Monday. Brysch pointed out that so far half of the deceased COVID-19 patients have been residents of old people's and nursing homes.

Teachers, school principals, parents and students are increasingly aware of this, and more and more of them are calling for action to stop the pandemic from spreading throughout the schools—but meeting with resistance from politicians.

In early November, the city of Solingen decided to divide up classes and hold weekly alternating face-to-face and distance-learning classes. But the North Rhine-Westphalia state executive, a coalition of the Christian Democrats and Free Democrats, banned this. Education Minister Yvonne Gebauer cited "educational equity" as the reason.

When a comprehensive school in Lollar, near Giessen, decided to take part in a voluntary testing series, almost 90 percent of the students took part. Last week, the test results at the Clemens Brentano European School in Lollar became known, and of some 750 pupils in grades five to 10 who took the test, 60 were COVID-19 positive. As a result, the entire school was closed.

However, it will have to reopen next Monday, after just under two weeks, and resume normal operations.

A video of Markus Söder is currently circulating, in which the Bavarian state premier openly expresses the deeper political motives for the opening of schools and day care centres. On September 22, Söder explained that the real purpose was to keep the economy running.

He said: "Our children need to be cared for if we want to prevent an economic lockdown. That is the context: schools and day care centres also have the purpose of keeping the economy running."

There is no significant difference here from what Donald Trump promised Wall Street earlier this month: "This administration will not be going to a lockdown."



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