

Despite strikes and protests over coronavirus, schools and day-care centres remain open in Germany

Marianne Arens
29 November 2020

The Coronavirus Summit, attended by German Chancellor Angela Merkel along with the 16 heads of the state governments last Wednesday, demonstrated one thing: businesses, schools and day-care centres are to be kept open no matter what, continuing the deadly “herd immunity” policy.

COVID-19 restrictions for the hotel and catering industry and cultural and leisure facilities are being extended until December 20, and in private, only five people from two households are allowed to meet. However, there are no binding regulations covering educational institutions.

The measures announced, such as the uniform regulation on alternating classes, air filters and systematic contact tracking in schools, are left, if at all, to the federal states, and have the character of “recommendations.” Moreover, they only refer to extremely high incidence rates of 200 infected persons per 100,000 inhabitants and the higher age groups from grade 8 on.

The federal and state governments continue to follow the false and long-refuted premise that younger children are less contagious than other sections of the population. Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) made this clear on Thursday morning when she told the Bundestag (federal parliament) that children up to the age of 14 need not be counted in contacts “because they are not so relevant to the occurrence of infection, that is the conclusion.” This is an outright lie, which she knows as a Doctor of Physics.

Even Merkel’s original proposal—that only window seats be occupied in long-distance transport throughout the winter to increase the distance between passengers—remains just a recommendation to the national rail franchise Deutsche Bahn AG (which belongs to the federal government). The restriction that only one customer per 20 square meters is allowed in retail trade is to be compensated for by longer Sunday business hours until Christmas. Over Christmas and until January 1, the heads of government want to relax all measures and allow private celebrations for up to ten people

from different households. New Year’s Eve firework events are also to be allowed.

On the day these decisions were made, which will further fuel the growth of infections, the number of deaths in Germany reached a sad peak: no less than 410 people died of SARS-CoV-2 in 24 hours. On Thursday, the number rose to 426. That is eight and a half times as many as on November 2, when 49 people died. The country’s previous highest daily toll was 315 deaths in mid-April. A further 389 deaths were also reported on Thursday.

The number of new infections is also still high—almost 19,000 on Wednesday and over 22,000 on Thursday—and the number of unreported cases is estimated to be very high because there is little testing. The total number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Germany has surpassed one million with over 16,500 deaths. The seven-day average is 17,600 new infections daily. Worldwide, the number of registered infections has exceeded 63 million, and so far, more than 1.4 million people have died of the cruel respiratory disease.

Three factors have prompted federal and state governments to extend their “lockdown light,” without, however, really imposing any consistent measures. In old people’s homes and nursing homes, ever new outbreaks are leading to desperate situations with dozens of deaths. At least one in ten facilities is affected by coronavirus, and half of all deaths come from these facilities. Secondly, intensive care units are at their limits, beds are increasingly full, and doctors are sounding the alarm. Both are the result of the ruthless refusal to close non-essential businesses, schools, day-care centres and transportation companies.

The third factor is the growing resistance in schools that governments are facing. Young people are becoming active at more and more institutions, and teachers and parents are increasingly on their side. In the last three days, there have been protest actions and demonstrations in Mönchengladbach, Düsseldorf, Essen, Frankfurt and Bremerhaven. Young people are demanding nothing less

than safe lessons, in which they do not have to risk the lives of their family members or their own every day.

The reactions to the Coronavirus Summit on social media, where many students, parents and teachers give free rein to their anger, are correspondingly critical. A “slap in the face for infection control in schools,” KinderdocNina called the decisions of the government politicians. Nicole wrote, “It is a scandal what is happening here! At some point, it will become public and they will pay—the sick and the dead will just have nothing to gain from it.”

Marjorie commented, “No forgiving, no forgetting. Politics has spat in our faces today.” Educator Miss Teached put a video of her students on the internet caricaturing the widely publicized government TV spots and showing the students’ desperation.

“I wish you reap what you sow,” wrote Kiouki, who reported sad news. She had “just learned of the death of my son’s godfather. Monday, just a fever, yesterday dead. And you KMs [Culture Ministers, responsible for education] and SPs [State Premiers] seriously want compulsory school attendance without protection!” In the comment section of the teachers’ news portal News4teachers.de a teacher remarked, “In our country, a 45-year-old father of a primary school child has just died of the coronavirus. Terrible.”

The gulf between working people and the politicians of all the establishment parties is getting wider and wider. The latter stubbornly maintain that younger children are “not pandemic drivers.” On news broadcast *Tagesthemen* on Tuesday, Ties Rabe (Social Democrat, SPD), the Schools Senator (state minister) of Hamburg, repeated this with his remark that “school is being somewhat overestimated in terms of the dangers.” He said it was “remarkable” that “by far the largest number of pupils were infected not in school but outside.” According to Rabe, the students must “pay a high price” for hybrid teaching.

The teachers’ union GEW based its demands to the Chancellor’s summit on this long-refuted fairy tale, demanding, “From the 5th grade on, 1.50m distance. For this, classes must be divided up.” But what about 4th grade and younger children? What about day-care centres? The GEW’s demands show it supports keeping schools and day-care centres open.

Educational institutions with in-face instruction play a significant role in the spread of infections. The Robert Koch Institute (RKI) public health body has repeatedly stressed this, and the Universities of Oxford and Vienna have shown in large-scale studies that closing schools at the peak of the first wave was by far the most effective measure to combat the pandemic.

Charité virologist Christian Drosten also made this clear in his latest coronavirus update for broadcaster NDR when he

said, “As we know, the biology of children is the same as that of adults. If we do nothing, the virus will spread explosively in schools.”

According to RKI figures, almost 28,000 children and 13,000 educators have been infected so far, and three students and eleven teachers have lost the battle against the virus. Many cases are being hushed up, as numerous students report. Several districts have been forced to close their education facilities completely because infection figures have exploded as recently shown by Hildburghausen in Thuringia, where the 7-day incidence per 100,000 inhabitants has risen to over 500.

The Leopoldina Academy of Science admitted in a statement on schools on November 16, “The threshold of 50 infections per 100,000 inhabitants in the last seven days has been exceeded, especially among 10- to 19-year-olds. Even the incidence among primary school children is extremely high, at 88.8 in calendar week 45. A high number of unreported cases must be taken into account, i.e., de facto, the incidences are likely to be significantly higher.” And the academy, which is normally known to be close to the government, concludes, “Pupils are a significant part of the infection process.”

But the heads of the federal and state governments are not committed to the health and lives of working people, but the share prices and profits of the corporations. Schools and day-care centres must remain open to look after children so that parents can continue to work and non-essential businesses can continue to operate and ensure the flow of profits. On Wednesday, the Christmas vacations were extended by a few days—a measure that also benefits business. Students, teachers, parents, and the entire working population confront a closed phalanx of politicians from all parties, including the trade unions.

Just a few days ago, the same government decided at its Auto Summit to raise another five billion euros for electric vehicles and truck scrappage premiums. It agreed to spend another nine billion to save Lufthansa, not to mention the many hundreds of billions in coronavirus aid packages for big business and the banks in the spring and the constant rise in military spending. But for safe, healthy, and good schools and day-care centres, government politicians refuse to make the necessary billions available.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact