

Pupils in Germany resist in-person classes and demand “consistent lockdown”

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As the *World Socialist Web Site* has reported, a European-wide mass movement for safe education is developing, especially among schoolchildren, in face of the murderous herd immunity policy of governments across the continent. In Bremen, for example, students have been organizing another “hybrid strike” for almost two weeks.

Final year students at the Kurt-Schumacher-Allee High School have halved their in-person attendance at classes on their own initiative and without the approval of the education authorities. As the *Weser-Kurier* reported on Sunday, one-half of the 240 students work on the material at home, while the other half attend classes at the school. A change-over then occurs after two days. “We have the feeling that schools are being kept open at almost all costs,” explained student spokesperson Fabienne Pastoor.

In an interview with the Bremen news website *Butenunbinnen*, student Leonie Müller reported overwhelming support from the teaching staff. “Most people cooperate and think it’s good. The school management is also on our side.” Principal Christian Sauter described the students’ intervention in the fight for safe education as “great.” According to Leonie, the students were concerned with saving lives. “We don’t just want to protect ourselves, but also other people, for example, our families at home or people we pass by on the street.”

In carrying out the strike against in-person tuition, students, teachers and school management drew from experiences in the early summer, when alternating digital teaching was ordered nationwide and considered by the government to be the first step towards the complete reopening of schools.

However, several months after the end of the summer vacations, the herd immunity policy of the federal and state governments has led to a situation in which the daily number of new infections in Germany is forty times higher and the pandemic is claiming around fifty times as many lives every day. In the meantime, almost 500 people die every day of COVID-19.

The school strike in Bremen is part of the growing wave of

student resistance against the herd immunity policy of European governments. In recent months, large student movements for safe education have emerged in Greece, Poland and France, which have expanded to many hundreds of schools and, in several cases, have been crushed through brutal police violence. In Germany, there have been strikes and protests throughout the country in recent weeks, including in Bochum, Düsseldorf, Essen, Mönchengladbach, Bremerhaven, Worms and Kassel.

Last week, more than 300 students took part in a strike in Frankfurt am Main called by the city’s student council. They carried signs saying, “more education—more co-determination—more health.” The Hesse student initiative unverantwortlich.org, which collects and publishes photo statements from students, has also called for a digital protest action for next Friday.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) and Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) are fighting to establish independent rank-and-file committees to expand and network the protests and prepare a European-wide general strike to close schools and non-essential businesses. Only through a conscious internationalist and socialist perspective that places the lives and health of workers above the capitalist drive for profits can the greatest humanitarian catastrophe on the continent since World War II be ended and mass death stopped.

On Tuesday, representatives of the IYSSE spoke with Meret Göhring, who attends the 13th grade of a high school in Bremen and has been a member of the student council for three years. She spoke about the school strike there, the government’s “profits before life” policy, and the question of political perspective.

“Our class is extremely dissatisfied and frustrated,” she says, “They put us in a quandary and force us to choose between our graduation and the lives of our relatives. But we have been waiting since September for iPads promised to us by the education authority. The more we are approaching our final exams, the more we panic. It is becoming clear that half-solutions no longer work. What we would like to see is

a consistent lockdown for two to three weeks until the infection cases are down again. A big step must now be taken.”

According to Meret, the federal and state governments are pursuing interests which are fundamentally different than those of schoolchildren and their families. “It is quite clear what the politicians are motivated by at the moment—and that is not the well-being of the population, but to keep the economy and businesses running. They have set the priorities on profit. That is the crux of the matter, but politics is beating about the bush and justifying things by playing down the pandemic.”

Responding to the massive armament spending of the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) amid the pandemic, Meret added, “When you see the things that money is being put into, at a certain point, you can only feel like a fool as a pupil.” More and more young people were being forced to draw far-reaching political conclusions from this, Meret said.

“I believe that my social environment and my generation are currently becoming highly politicized—because of the experiences we are all going through. We have people in class who have lost their jobs. Others have lost their entire existence, and still others are working in nursing care. It’s quite something for a young generation when you go through such experiences. The idea that privileged people can get through the pandemic without it having any impact on their lives is absolutely incredible for me.”

Meret has been working in a nursing home since September. “In the last few weeks, conditions have deteriorated dramatically,” she says. “When I was at work last week, five of the fourteen residents in my hallway were transferred to the coronavirus ward. If nursing staff become infected at work, they cannot go into quarantine because that would have a direct impact on the operation and therefore on people’s lives. Some of my colleagues therefore simply collapse in the corridors. It is hard to watch how the people are affected and how my colleagues suffer from this and how the care staff shortage, which has been known about for decades, makes the situation even worse.”

The situation in hospitals is dramatic. As broadcaster Deutsche Welle reported on Sunday, there are currently 40 percent more COVID-19 patients in intensive care units than in the spring. Gerald Gass, President of the German Hospital Federation (DKG), told the press: “In individual states like Saxony, the number of intensive care patients is five times as high as in April. Clinics there are reaching their capacity or have already exceeded it.” The “personnel bottlenecks” were particularly devastating, he said, due to the well-known lack of qualified nurses, which is already leading to a further increase in the number of planned operations that have to be

postponed. Almost one in five intensive care beds in Germany is now occupied by a COVID-19 patient.

“Hospitals are not equipped for major natural disasters,” Berlin nurse Nina Böhmer said in a viral social media post. “That the intensive care units are full and overloaded” was “nothing new,” Böhmer says. “You can thank the Chancellor and her coalition of CDU/CSU (Christian Democrats) and SPD (Social Democrats) for this development, but also all 16 state governments, in which all the democratic parties are involved.”

That schools carrying out in-person teaching—where 30 children interact in close quarters in each classroom—play a decisive role in the spread of the virus has been repeatedly emphasized by serious epidemiologists and medical experts. Last week, for example, Professor Alexander Kekulé, Director of the Institute for Medical Microbiology at Halle University Hospital, spoke to the press about “serious outbreaks” in secondary schools. Young students, Kekulé continued, were “very strong drivers of the pandemic.”

The arrogant treatment by the ruling class of both the medical facts and the fate of millions of students became clear on Tuesday in an interview conducted by Berlin radio station Radyo Metropol FM with Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU). The Chancellor advised students, who spend hours in overcrowded classrooms with temperatures below zero and the windows open, to “bring something warmer to wear,” clap their hands and regularly do “little knee bending exercises.” Merkel rejected the widespread installation of air filters in classrooms, arguing that this could lead to “simply rolling the air around” instead of refreshing it.

The ruling class of Germany and Europe is fully aware of the catastrophe that their policies have brought about. EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen recently stated in a speech to the European Parliament that COVID-19 was currently “the number one cause of death” in the countries of Europe. According to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), by Tuesday, there had been almost 14.2 million cases in Europe, including more than 352,000 deaths.



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