

Coronavirus death toll at record high in Germany: Merkel puts profits ahead of lives

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Germany is increasingly an epicentre of the international COVID-19 pandemic. Yesterday, the Robert Koch Institute reported 590 deaths within 24 hours, a new record. According to Worldometer, as many as 622 people died from coronavirus in Germany, more than in Great Britain (616), Russia (562) and France (491). With 18,319 new infections, this figure was also several thousand higher than in France, Italy, the UK or Spain—the countries with the highest overall infection and death rates within the European Union.

In relation to the total population, there are now almost as many coronavirus deaths every day in Germany as in the US. Especially during the autumn, the death figures have exploded. Since October 23, the total number of coronavirus deaths in Germany has doubled from 10,000 to 20,000. Put differently, half the victims have died in the last six weeks, 6,280 of them in November alone. This month, the situation is even more catastrophic, with 3,300 dead so far. If the death toll remains at the same rate, more than 14,000 additional people will die by December 31.

In view of this development and the growing concern and anger among the population, Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) felt compelled to address the dramatic situation in her government statement in the Bundestag yesterday. “The number of cases is far too high, and it is quite alarming to see how the number of people requiring intensive medical treatment and the number of people dying from the virus is growing,” she said.

However, Merkel did not propose the immediate measures necessary to prevent the deaths of tens of thousands. On the contrary, her exhibited concern and repeated appeals to “be careful” are intended to conceal the fact that her government and the ruling class as a whole are fully responsible for the disaster. The record deaths and infection rates are the direct result of the

“profit before lives” policy, which is to be continued despite the high death toll and case numbers.

In her speech, Merkel speculated that the winter holidays might be extended by a few days, but she ruled out a comprehensive closure of schools and non-essential businesses. “The lesson we learned from the spring was that we will do everything in our power to keep day-care centres and schools open,” she said. She added cynically, “However, airing is also part of the job in the winter months. This is simply because we have special conditions.”

The chancellor openly spelled out the priorities of the ruling class. These are not the health and life of the working population, but the economic and geostrategic interests of German capitalism. “This pandemic is something that will certainly reorganise the balance of power in the world, first of all economically, but perhaps also socio-politically,” she lectured, “which means we must see how we are embedded in the global context.”

Merkel noted that the German economy will shrink by 4 to 6 percent this year, similar to the US economy. She said that although the German economy is ahead of “many European countries” such as Italy, France and the UK, “all of which are recording an economic slump of around minus 10 percent for this year,” it is behind countries such as China, “which will emerge from these years with a plus of 1.9 percent.” Germany, she said, must “do everything possible to ensure that the path of recovery that we embarked on in the third quarter after a massive slump in the second quarter can be continued.”

The message is clear. Germany must use the crisis to increase its economic and political influence in competition with the other powers. “German companies should be able to keep up with international

competition,” stressed Merkel. We must also “make every effort to ensure that we maintain German strength not only in the economic sphere. It is not only about economic data, but also about worldwide competition between systems, which we are feeling, about different political and social systems.”

Significantly, the new budget for 2021, due to be adopted on Friday, foresees a further massive increase in military expenditure to an official €46.93 billion. Of this amount, €7.72 billion is for military procurement alone: €350 million is earmarked for the procurement of the A 400 M transport aircraft, €442 million for the “Puma” infantry fighting vehicle, €998 million for the procurement of new Eurofighter jets and €379 million for the construction of 180 multi-purpose combat ships.

While billions are being spent on war armament, the gigantic sums pumped mainly into large companies and banks as part of the so-called coronavirus rescue packages are to be squeezed out of the working class again. “We must also always remember what public debt means. It means, of course, the burden on future budgets, it means the need to pay it back, and it means restrictions on future spending and on future generations.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* has described the pandemic from the beginning as a *trigger event* accelerating the already far-advanced economic, social and political crisis of the world capitalist system. All over the world, the ruling class has further intensified its policy of social austerity and internal and external armament, which it has already steadily intensified after the financial crisis of 2008/2009. Now, the entire ruling class is literally walking over dead bodies to assert its reactionary interests.

The right-wing agenda of the grand coalition is the consensus in the Bundestag. Significantly, at several points in Merkel’s speech, not only representatives of the coalition parties (CDU/CSU and SPD) applauded, but also members of the FDP, the Greens and the Left Party. As usual, representatives of the AfD catcalled in between, but de facto the grand coalition is putting the policies of the fascists into practice: this applies to the massive armament of the Bundeswehr and the strengthening of “Fortress Europe” against refugees and migrants, as well as the deadly “back to work.”

The strategy of “herd immunity”—i.e., the mass infection of the population—has been the policy of the

federal government from the beginning. At a press conference on March 11, Merkel had already stated that the German government assumed that 60 to 70 percent of the population would be infected with COVID-19.

The WSWS commented at the time: “What such statements reveal is not incompetence, but political criminality. Seventy-five years after the downfall of the Nazi Third Reich, a fascistic attitude towards the working class prevails in the financial aristocracy, mirroring that of Ancient Rome to its galley slaves: work until you die.” And we predicted: “No doubt, significant sections of the ruling class consider the coronavirus to be a gift from God. The deaths of millions of the old and sick would allow new cuts to social spending, flushing billions more into their pockets.”

Workers and youth must counter the deadly logic of the capitalist profit system with their own independent policy and strategy. The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) calls for the creation of independent action committees that will network internationally and coordinate the growing resistance against open schools, factories and attacks on jobs and wages. The committees must become the starting point of a mass strike movement of the working class to take political power, expropriate the financial oligarchy and reorganise society on a rational, scientific and socialist basis.



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