

Germany's "hard lockdown" protects corporations at expense of lives

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On Sunday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the leaders of Germany's federal states announced a joint resolution that the media unanimously called a "hard lockdown." But the measures do not go anywhere near what is needed to bring the pandemic under control. The focus is not on protecting lives but corporate profits.

For example, large factories can remain open without exception, even if they produce nonessential goods. According to the resolution, corporate bosses are merely "asked to consider whether plants can be closed from December 16 to January 10 either through company vacations or substantial work-at-home solutions." The "operation of canteens" would "remain possible."

Only parts of the retail sector and businesses in the personal care sector will be closed and even these only from Wednesday. This means that in the days before, there will be even more crowds and the big chains can cash in on their sales at the same time.

For schools, winter vacations are only being brought forward and extended by a few days. At the same time, parents who do not get time off from work will still be able to send their children to school, exposing the affected families to a double risk of infection.

All other measures relate exclusively to the personal sphere, where only a small proportion of infections occur, given the already high level of caution exercised by the majority of the population.

In an interview with Deutschlandfunk radio, Economics Minister Peter Altmeier made it unambiguously clear that the measures are primarily about protecting the economy. He said he expected "that we will succeed in preventing a complete economic standstill in this second wave. After all, wasn't that what was decided yesterday?" Since the pandemic began, he said, the government had "kept almost all other sectors of the economy open, except restaurants, hotels and close-contact personal services."

In the spring, the government had done everything it could to ensure that the profit interests of industry could be pursued, Altmeier said. "The vast majority of factories and

businesses continued to work. In the spring, they had to stand still because there were no replacement deliveries from China, from Asia, from other European countries." At the time, German industry faced a temporary collapse in supply chains following the closure of major container ports on the east coast in China and mass spontaneous work stoppages in the supply industry in Italy.

Meanwhile, the economy minister said, even that business risk had been eliminated by the government. "This time, we have protected supply chains and managed to prevent a complete industrial shutdown." He said German industry had overcome the "biggest recession in postwar history" and showed "growth of 8.5 percent in the third quarter, compared with the previous quarter." He was "certain we will not experience a recession like the one in the spring this time" and assumed that "the economic figures will not have to be corrected very significantly." To that end, however, Altmeier threatened that the government must now "proceed wisely" and ensure that "the lockdown is not repeatedly extended indefinitely."

The same contemptuous profit interests are at stake when it comes to keeping schools open. If it were about the well-being of children, there would have been billions invested in digital education and ensuring the participation of socially disadvantaged layers. Instead, schools are now becoming mere child-minding institutions so that parents can work in unsafe businesses.

The government's resolution does not envisage any nationwide school closures at all. At schools, contacts are merely to be "significantly restricted." According to the resolution, this can be done through some school closures or by suspending compulsory attendance. In any case, emergency care is to be offered not only to children of parents working in essential industries but to all children whose parents cannot get time off from their employers.

Berlin is even keeping its schools open over Christmas. As Education Senator (state minister) Sandra Scheeres (Social Democratic Party, SPD) announced on Monday, emergency care for younger children is to be offered at Berlin schools

throughout the “shutdown.” The offer was to apply to all those students whose parents work in “essential” professions, including health care and transportation.

In Austria, the government had issued resolutions regarding schools last month like those now being issued by the German government. This had resulted in about one in four children in the state of Lower Austria, for example, attending school in person. At 49,000 students, this is more than 10 times as many as at the time of the first shutdown measures in the spring. At many elementary schools, nearly half of students showed up for class. Beginning December 7, students in the first eight grades and graduating classes were sent back to school in Austria. The day was marked by a relatively low level of new infections, but since then, the previous downward trend has reversed.

The same policy is being followed in Germany. As news weekly *Der Spiegel* reported yesterday, the chancellor’s office “has pledged that schools and day-care centres will be among the first to resume operations after the shutdown ends.” On the part of the state, these child-care institutions were “the last thing we close and the first thing we open,” Chancellery Minister Helge Braun affirmed to broadcasters RTL and n-tv.

In other words, as far as the federal and state governments are concerned, schools are to reopen just a few days after the official end of the Christmas vacations. “For the week beginning January 11, Scheeres plans for schools to reopen and begin face-to-face classes,” rbb wrote about the plans of the Berlin state executive, a coalition of the Social Democrats, Left Party and Greens.

The federal and state governments are thus continuing their policy of putting profits before lives. For months, they have kept schools and businesses open, already sacrificing over 20,000 lives. Even now, when the daily death toll averages over 500 and hospitals are on the verge of collapse, they are refusing to close nonessential businesses, including schools and day-care centres.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP, Socialist Equality Party) strongly opposes this murderous policy and calls on students, teachers, educators and all workers to take their safety into their own hands. In its statement, “Stop the wave of death! Repudiate the policies of the pandemic profiteers!” we demand the immediate closure of all nonessential businesses and schools to save lives. Our programme of immediate actions includes the following demands:

All workers must be provided with an income sufficient to guarantee a decent standard of living until a return to work is possible. There must be real

assistance to small businesses that face economic collapse.

The billions of euros hoarded by the pandemic profiteers, amassed through the looting of the public treasury, must be reclaimed to meet social need. The gigantic financial and corporate institutions must be converted into democratically controlled public utilities.

The SGP calls on all workers to organize rank-and-file safety committees and committees of action to take the necessary measures to save lives. Teachers, auto and other manufacturing workers, Amazon and logistics workers, students and young people should form these committees to organize common action. Workers have every right to refuse to work under these conditions. The health of workers must take precedence over the profits of the corporate and financial oligarchy!

These committees will forge ties between workers in the United States and workers throughout the world who are facing the same conditions and have the same interests.

The struggle against the pandemic is, above all, a political struggle against the capitalist system. Capitalism is being comprehensively exposed. The ruling elite is revealing itself in all its incompetence, brutality and criminality. The more the catastrophe unfolds, the more the need to put an end to the capitalist system in the struggle for socialism becomes apparent. The mass anger this will provoke will take the form of a socialist revolution.

Register here to participate in forming rank-and-file committees and for information about becoming a member of the Socialist Equality Party!



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