

Almost 1,000 daily COVID-19 deaths in Germany: The criminal outcome of keeping businesses and schools open

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The campaign to reopen businesses and schools in Germany amid a raging pandemic has led to a massive resurgence of COVID-19 in the country, with a record 952 COVID-19 deaths on Wednesday. Despite these horrendous figures, all parties in the Bundestag (parliament) continue to put profit before lives and health. The so-called “hard lockdown,” which came into force yesterday, mainly protects the economy and does not go nearly far enough to save tens of thousands of lives.

With the recent highs, a total of 23,427 people have been confirmed to have died from COVID-19 in Germany. If the numbers remain at this level, Germany could reach 40,000 deaths before the end of the year. It is more likely that they will be much higher, as the country’s hospitals are already on the verge of collapse.

In Zittau, Saxony, a hospital director explained that in the last few days, his facility has already been forced to decide who is to be connected to ventilators and who is to be denied necessary treatment. Nursing homes are turning into death wards as these profit-oriented, cash-starved institutions do not even take rudimentary protective measures.

Germany has long been advanced as a model for how to deal with the pandemic. Now, the daily death toll per capita in Germany has risen significantly higher than in the United States, the epicentre of the pandemic, where President Trump embodies like no other the ruthlessness of the ruling class and its anti-scientific ignorance.

Germany’s policy, despite all the concerned rhetoric, differs little from that of the White House, neither in its criminal methods nor in its deadly consequences. The federal and state governments of all stripes accept tens of thousands of deaths in order to protect the profits of major banks and corporations.

In the last few months, they refused to close any

businesses. They kept schools open and even refused to restrict classes in schools, despite rapidly increasing numbers of infections. Workers were to be available to the companies without restrictions despite the pandemic. Thus, with the support of the trade unions and all the bourgeois parties, infection figures were pushed up, producing the terrible situation that is now claiming thousands of lives.

Only when anger grew in workplaces and strikes and protests were organised at dozens of schools did the government feel compelled to act, though largely symbolically. Last week, the ZDF Politbarometer polls showed that 73 percent of the population favoured the closure of schools and daycare centres and a far-reaching lockdown of the economy in order to contain the pandemic, which 84 percent of respondents considered to be the most important political problem they face.

However, the “hard lockdown,” which was subsequently decided on Sunday and came into force on Wednesday, does not even begin to do justice to the demands of the population and the necessities of the pandemic.

As before, the government is not closing a single business, besides in the retail sector. For workers to be able to work in the businesses that are kept open, schools across Germany are also not being closed; only compulsory attendance is suspended. In Berlin, Education Minister Scheeres even wants to offer childcare in schools during the Christmas holidays. In Austria, a similar approach led to attendance in primary schools of up to 50 percent.

Daycare centres are kept open in regular operation in many places. This is because, unlike the lockdown this spring, parents working in non-essential jobs can also use “emergency care.” Not only are many workers

themselves forced to work in dangerous establishments, but they also have to expose their children to a high risk of infection in unsafe facilities.

With this policy, the ruling class in Germany is once again putting the profit interests of the financial oligarchy above social need. While the death toll rises, a small elite is earning fabulous fortunes. The German DAX stock market index has risen more than 60 percent since its low of March 18, reaching 13,546 points yesterday, Wednesday. In addition, a large part of the economic stimulus packages, amounting to hundreds of billions of euros, went to the big banks and corporations. On the other hand, new figures show 40 percent of the population suffered income losses, with workers earning less than €1,500 a month hit particularly hard.

The costs of the pandemic are to be passed on to the working class. Chancellor Angela Merkel categorically ruled out a wealth levy in parliament on Wednesday, making clear the super-rich will not be asked to contribute a penny to combating the pandemic. Last week, the Bundestag had already decided on massive budget cuts to health and education sectors in 2021, while military spending will be further increased.

The same ruthless policies that have led to horrendous death tolls in Germany are being pursued by the ruling class across Europe.

In the UK, schools and universities have been open continuously and without restrictions since September. As a result, infection and death rates immediately spiked again after the November partial shutdown, now standing at around 20,000 and 500 a day, respectively. Since November 12, the seven-day average of daily Corona deaths has never dropped below 400. In total, more than 65,000 people have already died from COVID-19 in the UK.

In France, the Macron government on Tuesday ended the partial lockdown introduced at the end of October, even though daily new cases are still far over the official target of 5,000. Yesterday, more than 17,000 new infections and 412 deaths were registered in France. Nonetheless, businesses and schools remain open. Macron has advised people to take children out of school two days early to comply with the quarantine before visiting family. Few workers can do that, however, as they are still forced into unsafe workplaces.

In Italy, which was particularly hard hit by the pandemic, mortality in 2020 is the highest since 1944, the penultimate year of the Second World War, with over 700,000 deaths. Italy registered 647,000 deaths in 2019,

and the rise this year can be attributed almost entirely to COVID-19.

The bankruptcy of capitalism leads to barbarism and mass death everywhere. The pandemic is exacerbating the crisis of a social system that can only survive through constant cash transfers to the financial markets and intensified exploitation in the factories.

Resistance is growing across Europe to this policy of death. In Germany, students are protesting cuts to public education. In Italy, 3 million public workers went on strike on December 9 against unsafe and poor working conditions. In Spain, thousands of doctors and nurses demonstrated against planned budget cuts in the health sector on November 29; two weeks later, educators and teachers went on strike in Portugal. In Greece, hundreds of thousands of workers brought public services to a standstill on November 26. Then there are the mass protests against the French police law.

It is crucial to unite these struggles, to conduct them under a socialist perspective and to develop them into a struggle against the rotten capitalist system. This means a conscious break with the social-democratic parties and trade unions through the formation of independent rank-and-file committees and the building of a new revolutionary leadership.

“The fight workers face against COVID-19 is an international political struggle against the capitalist system and a policy of mass death deliberately pursued by the financial aristocracy,” the European sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International declared at the end of September in the face of the opening policy, warning:

“After the premature lifting of lockdowns imposed this spring, the drive by European governments to fully reopen schools, workplaces and public gathering places has paved the way for a devastating resurgence of the virus. ... Only the mobilisation of the working class across Europe in an international general strike can halt the back-to-school and back-to-work drives launched by the European Union (EU), impose lockdowns to achieve social distancing, and prevent a horrific loss of life.”



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