

A deadly Christmas in Germany

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In his Christmas address, President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democratic Party, SPD) shed a few crocodile tears on behalf of the ruling class. But this cannot disguise the fact that governments at federal and state level bear full responsibility for the greatest mass deaths since the end of World War II.

For countless families, this year's Christmas was not a happy, but a deadly one. Thousands of people are gasping for breath in intensive care units, and many families have already lost parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters and even children.

On Christmas Eve, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) reported 24,470 new infections and a record number of coronavirus deaths in Germany in one day, 962. This already makes December by far the deadliest month since the outbreak of the pandemic. In the first 27 days of the month, 13,667 people died, more than 500 a day. In the 10 days before Christmas, the average was more than 680. Since the death toll reflects the infections four to five weeks ago, it is already clear that thousands more people will die from COVID-19 in the coming weeks.

The explosive spread of the virus is the direct result of the ruthless "profits before lives" policy of sending people into workplaces in unsafe conditions and keeping schools and day-care centres open at all costs. In doing so, the ruling class has provoked a situation like the one in Italy in the spring, when the health system collapsed due to exploding case numbers and tens of thousands died in terrible conditions.

In numerous German cities and regions, hospitals are completely overloaded. Due to the high death toll, bodies are kept in temporary storage. The dead would be stored "in the flood defence facility" and only brought to the crematorium "when released for cremation," the city of Zittau in Saxony announced before Christmas. In Hanau, Hesse, the bodies of coronavirus victims are stored in a specially erected

refrigerated container at the city's main cemetery.

While politicians and the media had expressed shock at the pictures from Bergamo, Italy, in March, now, they play down the mass deaths. The RKI's grim statistics can be read daily in the media, however, there are hardly any depictions of the terrible situation in hospitals or serious reports about the tragic fates suffered by so many individuals. Above all, the fact that measures could be taken to stop the catastrophe is kept completely out of the picture. The avoidable deaths of almost 1,000 people every day in Germany alone is now considered "normal."

"All quiet on the Western front," states the army report in Erich Maria Remarque's world-famous novel of the same name on the day when the 19-year-old protagonist Paul Bäumer falls at the front towards the end of the mass deaths in World War I. Today's indifference of the ruling class to the fates of individuals, such as the death from COVID-19 of the young teacher Soydan A. in Berlin a few days ago, can be summed up in the sentence: "All quiet in the pandemic."

With the normalisation of death, the ruling class is pursuing definite social and political interests. In April, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) had already warned in a statement :

The ruling class aims to make the pandemic the "normal state of affairs," i.e., to accustom the population to the idea that death will continue for the foreseeable future. Workers are supposed to accept this as inevitable. That is why reports about the number of deaths in the news are increasingly shifting into the background.

There is a vicious class logic behind these efforts. Workers are treated as a kind of

disposable commodity. Their deaths are regarded as a normal part of the generation of profits. Those who succumb to the virus can be replaced.

And a few days ago, the *World Socialist Web Site* stated in a perspective :

Under capitalism, what is meant by “the economy” is the exploitation of the working class. To the extent that the “cure”—that is, the most elementary measures to save lives—impinges on the process of profit accumulation, it is unacceptable. Anything that undermines the extraction of surplus value from the working class, or diverts this surplus value from the capitalists through emergency measures and social services, must be rejected.

Governments worldwide have already sacrificed more than 1.7 million lives to their capitalist and imperialist interests and are willing to continue this course in the new year. The ruling class in Germany openly says this.

“This pandemic is indeed something that is first of all reordering the balance of power in the world economically, but perhaps also socio-politically,” emphasised Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) in her last government statement in the Bundestag (federal parliament). Germany must “look at how we are embedded in the global context” and “do everything possible to ensure that the path of recovery we have taken in the third quarter, after a massive slump in the second quarter, can be continued.”

In other words: there must not and will not be any measures that endanger the profits of the German economy and the orgy of enrichment on the stock exchanges. On the contrary, the hundreds of billions of euros that have flowed to big business and the banks in the course of the coronavirus bailouts are to be extracted from the working class again. “Public debt means ... of course, a burden on future budgets” and “the need to pay that back,” Merkel stressed.

With next year’s budget, the government has also

underlined its determination to tighten its political trajectory, the basic direction of which is supported by all parliamentary parties as well as the trade unions. While the budgets for health, education and social affairs will be cut by a total of almost €12 billion compared to this year, spending on the military and domestic security will increase by more than €4 billion. This is a warning: instead of emergency measures to save hundreds of thousands of lives, the ruling class is setting its course on dictatorship and war.

Far-reaching political and historical conclusions must be drawn from this at the end of the first year of the pandemic, which has so far claimed half a million lives in Europe alone. The carnage of World War I was ended by the October Revolution in Russia in 1917 and a wave of revolutionary struggles throughout Europe and the world. Today, too, the struggle against mass death, social inequality, war and dictatorship requires a revolutionary struggle against the social system that has brought about the catastrophe. Capitalism, which has discredited itself in the eyes of millions, must be replaced by socialism.



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