

Germany's DAX stock index feasts upon mass death

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After the holidays, mass deaths continue in Germany and around the world. On Tuesday, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) reported 852 coronavirus deaths, and on Wednesday morning a new record number of 1,129. This makes December by far the deadliest month since the beginning of the pandemic. In Germany alone, more than 15,500 people are officially recorded as having died of coronavirus between 1 and 28 December, more than twice as many as in November (6,231 deaths) and April (5,708 deaths). By the end of the year, the death toll will have risen to about 35,000.

Such a scale of death is usually only encountered in times of war. Worldwide, almost 1.8 million people have now died from COVID-19, including more than half a million in Europe and about 350,000 in the USA. Since mid-March, an average of more than 6,000 people each day have succumbed to the virus. In the course of World War I, the average number of fallen soldiers per day was about 6,060. Even though the ruling class is at pains to play down the dramatic scale of the situation, reports of overcrowded morgues and crematoria can hardly be suppressed.

The medical situation is dramatic. In hospitals working at full capacity, doctors, nurses and orderlies are desperately trying to keep thousands of patients from dying due to suffocation. Due to the brutal austerity policies of the last decades, there is not only a lack of staff but often also of necessary medical equipment. The social situation can also only be compared to the great crises in the first half of the 20th century. In the US, 50 million people are food insecure, and since March, 73 million people have registered as unemployed. In Germany, the poverty rate reached an all-time high of 15.9 percent (13.2 million people) last year. The pandemic has further exacerbated social inequality.

On the other hand, there is a thin layer at the top of society that has become unbelievably wealthier and are feasting on death and social misery.

After peaking on Monday, the German share index (DAX) reached another record high on Tuesday, temporarily exceeding 13,900 points. The closing level of 13,761 points was only about 30 points below Monday's all-time high (13,790 points). Other German stock indices also set new records on Tuesday: the MDAX reached a new high of 30,912 points, the SDAX 14,766 points.

The German stock market has thus not only fully recovered from the interim price slump at the beginning of the pandemic but ended the year with a significant uptick. At the end of 2019, the DAX stood at 13,249 points, meaning an overall increase of almost four percent for 2020. The MDAX rose by more than nine percent and the SDAX by over 18 percent.

The stock market bonanza amid the pandemic means the super-rich have further increased their already astronomical fortunes. According to calculations by the consulting firm PwC and the Swiss bank UBS, the total assets of the more than 2,000 dollar-billionaires worldwide had risen to the record value of about €8.7 trillion by the end of July. The sum is more than twice as high as the total annual economic output of Germany (about €3.5 trillion).

In Germany, the net wealth of the ultra-rich rose by almost €80 billion, to €486 billion, between March and July. This is roughly equivalent to the entire federal budget for the coming year and almost 14 times the 2021 health budget (€35.3 billion). The number of super-rich has also continued to explode. Between January and June, the number of US dollar millionaires in Germany rose by another 58,000, while the number of billionaires increased from 114 to 119.

There is a direct link between the record profits and the record deaths; both are the result of the “profits before lives” policy pursued by the ruling class since the outbreak of the pandemic.

In March, stock markets around the world collapsed after governments, under popular pressure and spontaneous strikes, were forced to order lockdowns and partially close schools and businesses. However, the measures were then mainly used to organise the biggest financial redistribution in history, from the bottom of society to the top. Within a few weeks, trillions were transferred to the accounts of the banks, big corporations and the super-rich.

When the grand coalition of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD)—with the support of all the parties in the Bundestag (parliament) and the trade unions—whipped the so-called Coronavirus Emergency Package, worth billions, through parliament on 25 March, the *World Socialist Web Site* commented: “The class character of the measures adopted is obvious. Their main purpose is to safeguard and increase the wealth and profits of the big corporations and financial oligarchs.”

No sooner had the money been transferred than stock market prices rose again. At the same time, an aggressive campaign began to reopen schools and factories as quickly as possible to squeeze these gigantic sums back out of the working class. Politicians and the media launched a fascist debate about how many lives should be sacrificed to the interests of business and profit. Bundestag President Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU) provocatively declared that human dignity did not necessarily include the right to life and was thus not “absolutely” protected by the Constitution.

Now, of all times, the stock market rally is continuing during the two deadliest months of the pandemic. Between 29 October and 29 December, the DAX rose by more than 2,000 points to its current record level. The reason is as simple as it is brutal: the focus of the current pandemic measures is once again not protecting lives, but corporate profits. Despite the skyrocketing death toll, workplaces remain open and the cost of the pandemic is to be passed on to the working class again in the New Year.

“Public debt means ... of course, burdening future budgets” and “the need to pay it back,” emphasised

Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) in her last government statement. At the same time, she categorically ruled out any participation in such repayments by particularly wealthy layers through a wealth levy. Next year’s budget is entirely tailored to the interests of the financial oligarchy and German imperialism. While there are massive cuts in health and education, the budgets for defence and domestic security are increasing.

The WSWS has defined the pandemic from the beginning as a trigger event, an “accelerant” that quickens the already far advanced economic, social and political crisis of the capitalist world system. By the end of the year, this process is well advanced. As in the first half of the 20th century, the experience of millions of workers and youth is that capitalism means, above all, profiteering and death. A socialist programme against mass death and the politics of the pandemic racketeers is a matter of life and death under these conditions!

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) demands the immediate closure of all non-essential factories and schools. All workers must receive sufficient income to ensure a decent standard of living until it is possible to return to work. Small businesses facing economic collapse must be given real support.

The billions hoarded by the pandemic profiteers, accumulated by looting the state coffers, must be retrieved to be used to meet social needs. The giant corporations and financial institutions must be transformed into democratically controlled public utilities.



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