

How Germany's Left Party promotes herd immunity

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By his own admission, the premier of the state of Thuringia, Bodo Ramelow (Left Party), is a professed Christian. As such, he is familiar with the figure of the repentant sinner, of whom it says in the Gospel of Luke that there is “more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people who don’t need repentance.” Ramelow knows how to use his Bible when it comes to politics. A confession of remorse costs nothing and commits him to nothing. It can, however, prove to be politically useful when you are in it up to your neck.

In a number of interviews on January 8, Ramelow confessed to the “mistakes” he had made regarding the coronavirus pandemic.

He had misjudged the threat posed by the virus, he told the regional television news MDR aktuell. When German Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) had predicted a sharp rise in infection rates as early as October, he said, “The chancellor was right, and I was wrong.” He admitted that for too long he thought there were easier ways of tackling the issue. Now, he said, he no longer sees an alternative to an economic lockdown in order to push down new infections. So far, he said, restaurant owners, retailers, cultural workers and children have borne the burden of the crisis. What was necessary, however, was a lockdown of the entire economy.

Ramelow told the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*: “Personally, I am annoyed today that in November I was not prepared to say: We will use December with its many holidays, to implement a broad lockdown. Everything that isn’t vital or can’t be shut down systemically should have been closed down for four weeks.”

On *ZDF-heute journal*, he said: “I realise that the house is burning in Thuringia right now. Today is a bad day for me because we have exceeded the 300 incidence rate [of weekly cases per 100,000 inhabitants] throughout Thuringia, with every region and city above 200. There is

no more room for easing measures or the whole debate about one relaxation after another.”

What a comic farce. Ramelow was not mistaken, he simply lied. Fully aware of scientific studies and international experience that had proved the virus was deadly, Ramelow played a leading role over the past year in downplaying the pandemic and undermining protective measures to combat it. As was the case with the federal government in Berlin and every other state government, profits took precedence over human lives for the Left Party’s only state premier. In fact, when it came to coronavirus policy, Ramelow led the pack.

At the end of May, Ramelow was the first to lift even the most minimal restrictions, such as keeping a distance and wearing masks. Prior to that, his government had ordered regions and cities to decide for themselves whether to open restaurants, spas, movie theatres, gyms, indoor sports facilities, bars, dance studios, amusement parks and brothels. He thus promoted a disastrous development that has now cost more than 40,000 lives throughout Germany.

At the end of October, when the infection curve was once again rising steeply, Ramelow praised the “Swedish model” on the TV talk show “Maybrit Illner.” Sweden has followed a policy of “herd immunity” that has been rejected by all serious scientists and has led to disaster. Of the country’s 10 million inhabitants, half a million have now been infected, nearly 10,000 have died, and the seven-day incidence of 515 is one of the highest in the world.

His policies have also had disastrous consequences for the state of Thuringia. Of its population of just over two million, more than 50,000 have been confirmed to be infected, and more than 1,350 have died from COVID-19. Over the course of last week, an average of 324 per 100,000 residents have become infected. This is the second highest incidence rate in Germany after Saxony, and more than six times the figure given by the Robert

Koch Institute, which enables the effective tracing of the chains of infection. In other words, the pandemic is completely out of control.

Ramelow's admission that he "misjudged" the danger is nothing more than a shabby attempt at damage control, an attempt to deflect growing outrage over a policy that sacrifices human lives for profits. This is precisely how the media has dealt with the issue. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, for example, commented that Ramelow's "highly unusual admission" helped patch over "cracks in society." It shows "a way out of confrontation, out of a competition between right wingers that no one needs and that has already caused quite some damage."

However, his admission will change absolutely nothing with regard to his politics. His coalition partners in Thuringia, the Social Democratic Party and the Greens plus the CDU (upon whose votes his minority government depends), together with the state's business associations, will see to that. They have all protested against a further lockdown, and Ramelow has invariably carried out their wishes. As for the Left Party itself, wherever it is or has been in government, it implements policies to the detriment of the broad population just as ruthlessly as any other party.

On January 5, the Thuringian cabinet, in common with all the other German states, decided to extend until January 31 the completely inadequate pandemic measures decided in December and to tighten them up slightly, especially with regard to private contacts. Businesses will remain open, however. The cabinet is merely "appealing" to them to limit production and, where possible, allow remote working. Schools and day care centres are scheduled to reopen February 1 and are already offering emergency care, so parents can go to work and be available to keep the economy going.

The recent remarks on the pandemic by former Left Party leader and media personality Sahra Wagenknecht demonstrates just how right wing the Left Party really is. In her regular column for *Focus* magazine, Wagenknecht argues, along the lines of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), against the protective measures already in place and advocates in barely veiled form a policy of herd immunity.

A lockdown is "simply the wrong medicine" against the pandemic, she claims. The restrictions in place since November and their tightening in December have "provided little relief in hospitals." The comment that "without these measures, things would certainly be much worse" is purely "speculative," she said. In the end, "only

one balance sheet remains: the lockdown, as it was decided, is proving largely ineffective against the infection, but does have devastating consequences for the economy and jobs, inner cities and cultural life."

Wagenknecht admits that "apart from the private sphere, the most important transmissions take place in the workplace and on the way to work." But she strongly rejects closing down businesses to prevent "millions of people from meeting one another every day on buses and trains and at their workplaces. ... Such a path would certainly reduce the infection figures, but for the economic and social situation in our country it would be even more problematic than the course we've taken so far."

Like all advocates of herd immunity, Wagenknecht suggests that instead of protecting the entire population, only the elderly in nursing homes should be protected from the virus—a measure that has long since proven unfeasible in practice—thereby allowing the rest of the population to be infected.

She even criticises the focus on vaccine development, saying, "Finally, a sensible alternative strategy includes no longer focusing one-sidedly on promoting vaccines when it remains unclear whether immunisation lasts longer than six months and whether there are as yet unknown, long-term side effects that are particularly harmful for young people."

Instead, Wagenknecht said, "much greater effort and much more public money should have been invested in the development of drugs that prevent severe cases of coronavirus and limit possible subsequent damage."

So her proposal is as follows: Let the population get sick, alleviate a few of the symptoms and take some symbolic measures to protect the elderly. This very same policy has cost the lives of tens of thousands in Sweden, Britain, the US and other countries. But Wagenknecht is convinced that the economy and profiteering must take precedence over people's lives. That is the core of the Left Party's coronavirus policy.



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