

# #ZeroCovid petition: The campaign for a European lockdown requires a socialist perspective

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The petition “#ZeroCovid: For a European Shutdown in Solidarity” received its original target of 75,000 signatures within a few days and is now moving towards 100,000. The large support is an expression of the growing opposition to official government policy that puts the profits of big business above saving human lives.

The petition is modelled on the call for the consistent containment of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe published in December by several hundred renowned scientists in the medical journal *The Lancet* and complements it with proposals to cushion the social consequences.

At the heart of the petition is the goal of “reducing infections to zero.” The strategy to control the pandemic (“flatten the curve”) has failed, it says in explanation. “It has restricted life permanently and has still brought about millions of infections and tens of thousands of deaths. We now need a radical change of strategy: not a controlled continuation of the pandemic but its end.”

To this end, “all European countries have to act fast and in parallel.” What is needed is a consistent shutdown of several weeks: “Measures cannot be effective if they are only focussed on leisure and exclude work,” the petition says. “We have to shut down those parts of the economy which are not urgently needed for society. Factories, offices, companies, construction sites, schools have to be closed and the duty to work must be put on hold.”

To provide financial security for people who stay at home, the petition calls for “a comprehensive aid package for all.” Particular support should be given to “people with a low income, people living in cramped conditions, in a violent environment, or people who are homeless.” Collective accommodation should be ended; refugees should be housed individually; people who have to undertake a lot of care work during the shutdown should

be relieved by communal organisation; and children should be taught online.

The petition also calls for an immediate and sustainable expansion of the entire health care sector and the reversal of previous privatisations and closures. Vaccines should be “withdrawn from private profit-making.” The measures are to be financed by “the introduction of a European Covid-solidarity tax on high wealth, company profits, financial transactions and the highest incomes.”

The petition was launched by around 400 initial signatories, including scientists, doctors, care workers, journalists and artists.

The petition does not contain any proposals on how to realise the demands made. It is addressed to the governments of Germany, Switzerland and Austria, as well as to “European decision-makers” and can be signed by anyone on the campaign platform *Campact*.

However, neither these governments nor the European Union are willing to even begin to meet the demands of the petition. Only on Tuesday, the meeting between state and federal leaders in Merkel’s chancellery decided to continue the previous, completely insufficient measures until mid-February. The meeting strictly rejected closing nonessential businesses, a binding obligation to home-working and a complete closure of schools, even though infection rates remain high and over 1,000 people are dying every day in Germany from COVID-19.

The reason for this adherence to a barely embellished policy of herd immunity is not lack of insight. The chancellor and the heads of the state governments know very well that the virus is spreading rapidly in workplaces, schools, day care centres and on public transport.

For example, the most comprehensive study of the spread of the virus to date, conducted by the US

universities of Princeton, Johns Hopkins and UC Berkeley of more than half a million people in India, concluded as early as the end of September “that children and young adults, who account for one-third of COVID cases, are particularly important for the transmission of the virus in the populations studied.”

The pandemic, as the *World Socialist Web Site* has long pointed out, is not a purely medical crisis. The reactionary nature of world capitalism—the pursuit of profit without regard for social cost, the accumulation of billions in wealth by a few and their inhuman indifference to the lives and well-being of the world’s population—has caused it to grow into a global social catastrophe.

The demands raised in the petition can only be realised based on a socialist programme directed against capitalist private property, something all the parties represented in the federal and state governments categorically reject. They all insist that the measures against the pandemic be subordinated to the interests of the “economy.”

That is why they shower the corporations and banks with billions, while schools and hospitals lack the simplest of resources. It is no coincidence that the DAX stock index has reached a new record high in the middle of the deepest crisis.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) and its sister organisations in the International Committee of the Fourth International call for the building of action committees in the factories and the schools, to take protective measures against the virus into their own hands and to prepare a general strike. Only through the independent mobilisation of the working class can the pandemic be stopped.

Such an offensive requires a political break with the elements in the #ZeroCovid campaign who are working specifically to divert the growing opposition to government policy to let it fizzle out ineffectively.

The Zero-Covid campaign was originally launched in Britain by pseudoleft supporters of former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn and senior trade union leaders. All are experts at stifling any social movement under the guise of left phrases. Corbyn, as opposition leader, was informed that Boris Johnson’s government was pursuing a deliberate policy of herd immunity but warned no one. And the Trades Union Congress (TUC) ensured that dangerous workplaces remain open. It used the pandemic to strengthen its collaboration with the employers associations.

Similar political operators can also be found among the authors of the German appeal—including Green Party

politician Luisa Neubauer, Left Party executive committee member Thies Gleiss, and several trade union secretaries. They call on the trade unions to “take a determined stand for the health of workers, to support the activism of workers for their health, and to organise the necessary large collective break together [lockdown].”

But the unions, like the establishment parties, have long since made clear where they stand. As corporate stooges, they pressure their members to go to work despite the coronavirus threat and categorically reject a lockdown. The head of Germany’s largest industrial union IG Metall, Jörg Hofmann, confirmed this only three days ago in an interview with the *Augsburger Allgemeine*. He rejected the demand for a hard lockdown, saying, “Then, our economic power would collapse.”

In March, the Left Party and the Greens supported the billion-dollar coronavirus packages of the grand coalition of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats, which mainly benefited large corporations and banks. Since then, they have been at the forefront of the policy of opening up the economy.

It is no accident that Thuringia, the only federal state governed by a Left Party premier, is the frontrunner when it comes to the incidence level. State Premier Bodo Ramelow has played a leading role throughout the year in downplaying the pandemic and undermining protective measures against it. The Green Party State Premier of Baden-Württemberg, Winfried Kretschmann, announced Thursday that schools and day care centres would be fully reopened as early as February 1.



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