

Coronavirus death toll in Germany reaches 50,000

Marianne Arens
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More than 50,000 people have died from COVID-19 in Germany since the pandemic began. Exactly one year ago, on January 25, an employee of the Webasto company in Bavaria was the first to test positive for the coronavirus in Germany.

At the time, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote: “The potential spread of the virus mere weeks after it was identified [in Wuhan] speaks both to the virulent nature of the virus and the highly integrated nature of modern economic and social life.” Such a catastrophe is avoidable, we added: “Medical science has advanced to the point where it is capable of identifying new viruses within weeks and developing vaccines within months.”

However, the WSWS also warned: “[N]o capitalist government has adequately prepared. ... The defence of human civilization against the threat of global pandemics, just like climate change and the growing threat of ecological disasters, requires a level of planning and global cooperation of which capitalism is incapable.”

This warning has been confirmed cruelly and beyond a doubt in the first year of the epidemic. The pandemic is assuming ever more threatening dimensions. New virus mutants such as the coronavirus B.1.1.7 detected in Britain are spreading across Europe at breakneck speed. But both federal and state governments, as well as the European Union, refuse to consistently implement the necessary strict lockdown and a global, comprehensive vaccination programme.

An EU Coronavirus Summit ended January 21 without tangible results. Before that, on January 19, Chancellor Angela Merkel and German state leaders extended the current measures until February 14 but did not agree on remote working or mandatory production and factory closures. “I don’t want us to have to shut down our entire economy,” Federal Labour Minister Hubertus Heil (Social Democratic Party, SPD) had categorically declared shortly before.

The next morning, Baden-Wuerttemberg’s Minister-President Winfried Kretschmann (Greens) announced that his state would reopen schools on February 1. Similarly, the state premiers of Rhineland-Palatinate (Malu Dreyer, SPD), Lower Saxony (Stephan Weil, SPD), North Rhine-Westphalia (Armin Laschet, Christian Democratic Union, CDU) and several other premiers announced different variants of face-to-face teaching at primary schools, undermining the recent decisions.

The Berlin Senate (state executive, a coalition of the SPD, Left Party and Greens) informed all day-care centres about the planned implementation of resolutions in Berlin. Within the framework of “emergency care,” an average weekly utilisation of the day-care centres of 50 percent is planned. Then the letter says, “If a 50 percent occupancy rate is not reached, children of parents who do not work in an essential area can also be admitted.” In practice, this will undoubtedly lead to facilities having at least 50 percent capacity utilisation and having to care for even more children than they already do!

At the same time, the new virus strain is spreading particularly rapidly among children. For example, experts in Britain have shown that the new virus was more rampant among 11- to 16-year-olds in November and December than in any other age group. Another large-scale study by Oxford scientists has proven beyond doubt the effectiveness of school closures in combating the pandemic. In the meantime, according to the Coronavirus Crisis Staff, two children in Hanover have also fallen so seriously ill that they have to be ventilated.

The warning voices of serious virologists and physicians are becoming increasingly clear. In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, Charité virologist Christian Drosten warns of a third wave with tens of thousands of new infections daily and stresses that restrictions must not be relaxed under any circumstances because of the B.1.1.7 virus mutation. Otherwise, “within a short time, many

more people will become infected than we can even imagine now. Then we will no longer have case numbers of 20,000 or 30,000 but in the worst case 100,000 per day.”

Drosten says he would welcome a strict lockdown, as called for by the #ZeroCovid movement, to drastically reduce the spread of the pandemic. He says, “I do believe that would be possible, with great effort. Of course, the virus would flare up again and again, as it does in China and Australia. But it would be desirable to aim for zero now at least. Especially because I have dire fears about what might happen otherwise in the spring and summer.”

Finally, his clear statements about children being just as contagious as all other people are damning. When it comes to pandemic measures, Drosten therefore recommends in particular restricting the opening of schools and day-care centres.

Even before his study on the viral load in children, he “did not think it possible that children would be spared from SARS-CoV-2,” he says. “From a purely biological point of view, the mucous membrane in the nasopharynx doesn’t change that much as they grow up. So, children must also become infected—and are infectious. That such fundamental doubts could arise about this was a mystery to me and remains so to this day.”

What the virologist does not understand, however, is a fundamental fact: bourgeois politicians are not primarily committed to “reason” or the lives of working people, but to the capitalist economy and the profits of the banks and corporations. The opening up of schools is an eloquent example of this. It is necessary in order to force parents back into manufacturing and other businesses. To push them through, politicians of all parties have been denying for many months that children could also infect themselves and others.

In July 2020, the Saxony state government had justified the reopening of all schools after the summer holidays with a pseudo-scientific study supposedly proving that children were “not the drivers of infection, but rather brake blocks” (as Saxony Education Minister Christian Piwarz, CDU, repeated at the time). At the end of November, Ties Rabe (SPD), Hamburg’s school senator (state minister), still claimed: “[S]chools are somewhat overestimated in terms of the dangers.” It was “remarkable,” the senator said, that “by far the most pupils were not infected in school, but outside.”

To keep the profits flowing, only a few days ago, Jörg Hofmann, the first chairman of the IG Metall trade union, spread the fairy tale that workers were infected mainly in

the family sphere and in their free time. When asked what would happen if industry had to “shut down completely,” Hofmann replied, “Then our economic power would collapse.”

Then the IGM leader claimed, without presenting any evidence, “We can see that where the hygiene measures developed in cooperation with politicians are strictly implemented in the companies, the infection figures are lower than in the private environment.”

Yet it is precisely the trade unions that contribute significantly to covering up coronavirus outbreaks in workplaces. This was recently shown by the figures that only came to light in connection with the tragic death of Berlin tram driver Sven B. According to these figures, 245 employees of the BVG (Berlin Rapid Transit Company) alone have been infected with COVID-19.

With 50,000 coronavirus deaths passed last week, this makes one thing clear: the official coronavirus policy has failed. For a year, governments have pursued a de facto contagion policy in the interests of business and trade unions have supported them. Two results can be noted: On the one hand, the Dax stock index has recovered, and on the other hand, the epidemic has recently become even more dangerous with aggressively rising death tolls.

The coronavirus pandemic is thus not a purely medical issue, but a social and political one. A political struggle is needed to solve it. Such a struggle must start from the premise that the pandemic is a global problem that requires an international solution. It must not be left to the banks and corporations and their politicians, who profit from the decimation of the old and weak and use the pandemic to blackmail workers.

The working class is international; it is being forced to bear the brunt of the epidemic. As the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) have long stated, only the working class can successfully lead the struggle against the pandemic. Workers must take action themselves and collaborate internationally to implement socialist policies that end the capitalist policy that puts “profits before lives.” Concretely, it is necessary to build independent action committees to prepare a European-wide general strike and to carry out the necessary pandemic measures.



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