Despite vaccination and testing debacle in Germany, federal states are reopening schools and retail

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Since February 15, the downward trend in the seven-day incidence of COVID-19 infections in Germany has abruptly reversed. The average number of new infections has risen steadily since then and already exceeds 8,000 per day. The number of daily deaths from coronavirus is currently 250 and will rise sharply in coming weeks as the number of infections increases. According to a recent report by the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), the more contagious B.1.1.7 variant, which accounted for 6 percent of all new infections at the beginning of last month, now accounts for 46 percent.

Under these conditions, the unsafe reopening of retail and "public life"—as pursued by the ruling class—is a political crime that puts the lives and health of hundreds of thousands of people at risk. With their decision to phase out the remaining protections against COVID-19, agreed to by the federal and state governments last Wednesday, a new murderous race for profits and public revenue began among state and local governments.

For example, in Schleswig-Holstein and Rhineland-Palatinate—the only states with an incidence rate below 50 per 100,000—all shops were immediately opened on Monday, without the announced rapid testing capacities having been set up. Most of the other federal states opened up retail on Monday based on a "shopping by appointment" rule.

Overall, the decision allows the states to implement reopenings in 340 districts, even though the incidence rate there is in the "red zone" between 50 and 100. In 66 other districts, the incidence rate currently remains above the devastating 100 mark.

Ten weeks since the start of the nationwide vaccination campaign, only 3.1 percent of the population have been fully immunised, although according to a representative survey by the RKI, the willingness to be vaccinated is 80 percent.

Ulrich Weigeldt, head of the General Practitioners' Association, explained on Tuesday that with a systematic involvement of the GPs who have been on standby for months, 2.5 million people could be vaccinated every week. Charité virologist Christian Drosten had also recently urged this approach. According to the National Vaccination Strategy, however, GP and specialist practices should not be "comprehensively involved in the vaccination campaign until the end of March/beginning of April."

Despite the significant increase in the incidence rate, school reopenings are also to be massively pushed forward with the opening of the retail sector. The chairperson of the Conference of State Education Ministers, Britta Ernst (Social Democratic Party, SPD)—who is also the Brandenburg State Education Minister—told *Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland* yesterday that there was "agreement" nationwide to send all pupils back to school "before the end of March." Schleswig-Holstein's Education Minister Karin Prien (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) announced that all pupils were to return to their classrooms in ten cities or districts as of next Monday.

Four weeks ago, the state governments had already reopened primary schools and day-care centres, often without the mandatory wearing of masks, thus exposing teachers and educators, as well as children and their families, to a deadly risk.

The criminal policies of the federal states in reopening schools and retail will intensify the

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pandemic. The state government of Brandenburg, for example, announced on Tuesday that it would unilaterally raise the nationwide incidence limit of 100—beyond which renewed closures would be due—to 200. Hesse, which currently has an incidence rate of 68, allowed gyms to open despite a summit decision to the contrary at the beginning of the week.

The district of Calw in Baden-Württemberg even manipulated the basis of the data to be able to reopen retail. According to a dpa report, the district authorities had factored out "locally well containable outbreaks," so that the incidence rate "adjusted in this way" was below 50 for five days. In doing so, the district authorities referred to the Coronavirus Ordinance of the federal state, according to which "the health office can take the diffusivity of the infection occurrence into account appropriately." This "diffuseness of the infection incidence" in Germany is, in turn, the result of the authorities' cover-up policy, which has led to the fact that in the statistics of the RKI no place of infection can be cited in four-fifths of all cases.

Meanwhile, Thuringia, which is the only federal state governed by the Left Party, has a seven-day incidence rate more than twice as high as most other federal states and, with 135 weekly infected persons per 100,000 inhabitants, is by far the leader nationwide. After the last conference of federal and national ministers, Minister-President Bodo Ramelow had expressed relief "that we are no longer chained to the number 35" (incidence rate) and had pleaded for "also using the word herd immunity."

In fact, since the beginning of the pandemic, the ruling class in Germany—as in countless other countries—has proceeded from the premise that profits must take absolute precedence over human lives. The result of this policy, which strictly rejects internationally coordinated shutdown measures, is over 800,000 COVID deaths in Europe alone. In Germany, the total number of deaths last year was nine percent higher than the average of the previous four years, according to a recent evaluation by the Federal Statistical Office. According to the RKI, 72,189 have died from the virus so far in Germany.

With this policy of death, the government is carrying out the interests of German finance capital and defending the profits of big business. After the conference of federal and national ministers, Sabine Hagmann, head of the Baden-Württemberg trade association, told the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* that she was "positively surprised" by the reopening plans. In the style of right-wing coronavirus deniers, she added that there were fears, however, "that more rapid tests could increase the incidence figures—and this could lead to a renewed lockdown."

There is no longer any serious discussion of systematic mass testing, which was supposed to have been a supporting "pillar" of the reopening decision. The "top-level talks with the business community" announced by Chancellor Angela Merkel—at which the regular operational testing of all employees was to be discussed—was called off at the last moment on Friday without setting an alternative date. The reason was open "legal and logistical questions," news broadcast Tagesschau quoted the Federation of German Industries. However, without regular twice-weekly testing of all employees and schoolchildren, cluster infections could not be reliably detected, experts warn.

Instead of expanding the production of reliable mass tests as planned and using them in a scientifically sound manner, the existing rapid test stocks are to be left to the "free market" and subordinated to private profit. Several discount and drug stores have announced that they will sell nasal swab tests for five euros each. On Saturday, the website of the discounter Lidl temporarily collapsed under the high demand for self-tests. *Manager M agazin* speaks of a state-organised "mega-business" that is likely to fabulously enrich leading biotech companies.

The ruthless intensification of the "profits before lives" policy met with goodwill on the German financial markets. The German DAX stock index closed at an all-time high of over 14,400 points on Tuesday.

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