

Despite rising COVID infection rates, German state education ministers refuse to implement lockdown

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The decisions of the recent summit of the heads of the German federal and state governments make clear once again that the ruling class is willing to sacrifice hundreds of thousands of lives to secure the profits of the banks and corporations.

Although the number of cases—triggered by the decisions of the last federal-state conferences to reopen the economy and schools—is increasing exponentially and the pandemic in Germany continues to cost hundreds of lives every day, the latest meeting did not order the closure of any offices or factories. A passage on school closures, to be triggered “from an incidence [rate] of 200,” which was still included in a draft that became known yesterday, was also deleted without replacement. There were also no binding requirements made regarding testing and hygiene.

Given the explosive opposition in the population, the “talks” were marked by considerable nervousness. With the words “we cannot carry on in public like this,” Chancellor Angela Merkel is said to have interrupted the joint discussions for individual talks that lasted five hours. The result of the 12-hour haggling behind closed doors was unanimously described by the media as the “toughest lockdown since the beginning of the pandemic.”

In the end, the existing shutdown over the Easter period was only to be extended by one day and combined with holding online religious services and restrictions on private contacts. At the same time, even some of the hardest hit regions will be allowed to reopen retail businesses under “temporary model projects.”

This murderous policy is justified by the “increasing availability of rapid and self-tests,” the use of which, however, is left to the discretion of the regional authorities and individual companies. “At the beginning of April, the trade associations are to report how many companies are participating,” t-online.de reported this morning.

Meanwhile, the available data leaves no doubt that tens and hundreds of thousands of lives are at stake in Germany and Europe in the coming weeks. In the last 10 days alone, the weekly incidence rate across Germany rose from 72 to 107 per 100,000—more than twice as much as in the previous 20 days. In Thuringia, led by the Left Party, the incidence rate of 210 is still twice as high as the national average.

According to the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), the number of cases of the B.1.1.7 strain of the virus doubles every 12 days. The institute predicts a nationwide incidence rate of 300 at the

beginning of the week after next and 350 after Easter.

At a case fatality rate of three percent—as reported by Worldometers for the past two months—these infections would result in 7,500 to 8,700 weekly COVID deaths nationwide.

However, this death toll could multiply as intensive care units (ICU) become overcrowded. Already, many urban and rural districts have run out of ICU beds. In more than 90 urban or rural districts, less than 10 percent of beds are unoccupied, especially in Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Hesse and Thuringia.

Despite the threat of mass deaths, no consequences are being drawn in the federal states and municipalities from the exponential growth in the number of cases. The “emergency brake” option set up by the last ministerial summit, consisting of ineffective measures, is not even applied in many places, although the incidence rate exceeds 100 in almost every second district. At the beginning of the year, a rate of 35 was still considered the limit beyond which the tracking of B.1.1.7 infections becomes impossible.

The question of whether a renewed closure of retail outlets should be considered because of the development of the pandemic was already answered in the negative by Reiner Haseloff (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), president of the Bundesrat (upper chamber of the federal parliament) at a press conference on Thursday. The changes in numbers were not due to shops being open, he explained, but to “day-care centres and schools.” The prime minister of Saxony-Anhalt thus contradicted the ceaselessly propagated lie of the education ministers, according to which children in schools were “safe” from coronavirus.

Then Haseloff made it clear that the federal and state governments had consciously accepted allowing the current contagion to spread among children. “We clearly stated that we would open up an increase potential for contacts—in our case 250,000 people.” This had been “known to everyone nationwide, including the chancellor.” To justify this, Haseloff explained that one had to “include day-care centres and schools.” Otherwise, one could have “written off the school year completely.”

According to the RKI report, the consequence of this policy is that the seven-day incidence rate among children between 0 and 14 years of age had recently doubled within four weeks. The number of active infections among underage school and kindergarten children rose by 42 percent to 3,190 cases within one week.

The most devastating expression of this development at present is in the town of Schrozberg in Baden-Württemberg, where the incidence rate rose to over 1,200 last week following a mass outbreak in a kindergarten. The approximately 70 cases included all eight kindergarten teachers at the facility.

In neighbouring Belgium, 50 percent of all hospitalised COVID patients are under 48 years old. On Saturday, Belgium's education minister reported the results of a follow-up study that identifies "school and workplace" as the main source of infections, against the backdrop of likewise rising case numbers.

At the same time, intensive care specialists in Germany are also warning of the increasing threat of a Kawasaki-like syndrome that affects children and adolescents infected with the virus and can be life-threatening. Paediatric inflammatory multisystem syndrome (PIMS) produces a "distinct clinical picture" and has already been diagnosed in 238 children in Germany and Austria, according to *Business Insider*.

Triggered by a misdirected immune reaction, inflammatory processes occur in various organs or blood vessels. This is accompanied by a high fever and an unstable circulation. According to the Dresden PIMS Register of the German Society for Paediatric Infectious Diseases (DGPI), the syndrome currently occurs in one in every 1,000 infected children. Children between the ages of seven and 10 are particularly at risk. In 59 percent of the documented cases, the child had to be admitted to an intensive care unit, and almost one in 10 patients suffered consequential damage.

In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, intensive care physician Dr. Christian Dohna-Schwake expressed concern about the "rising third wave" and that he expected more PIMS patients "soon." The US has already recorded 33 deaths, and 15 children in Germany have so far suffered permanent heart damage from the disease, also known as MIS-C (Multi-Inflammatory Syndrome, Children).

Against the background of these clear facts and the general development of the pandemic, the resolution of the last Conference of Education Ministers (KMK) on Thursday can only be described as a political crime. The document written by the representatives of the federal states ignores the several hundred cluster infections at day-care centres and schools that have been independently registered by parents and teachers in recent weeks, as well as all the recommendations of leading medical experts and scientists.

While the education ministers view the effects of school closures on children and young people "with great concern," the document does not have a single word to say about the dangers of infection and illness, including the consequential damage and potential infection of family members.

This is due to prioritising the profit interests of the ruling class. KMK President Britta Ernst (Social Democratic Party, SPD), for example, told the press on Thursday that face-to-face teaching was "of crucial importance" for children's "further educational biography" and "school career"—i.e., their smooth transition to the labour market. This applied "especially to the little ones."

Instead of allocating the billions needed for safe education, children and young people are to be increasingly herded into classrooms regardless of the incidence rate. "When making decisions about operating schools," this should be "examined in

perspective, whether the criterion of incidence [rates] should be supplemented by other criteria." In general, day-care centres and schools should "remain open the longest in comparison to all other areas of life."

To ensure this, the state governments have relied on cover-ups, long disproven lies and a concerted disinformation campaign, as they have since the beginning of the pandemic. For example, the ministerial resolution explicitly demands not to "stigmatise ... children and adolescents" as a "danger" in the face of increasing mass outbreaks.

Such statements serve to deny the central role of schools and day-care centres in the general infection process. Schools, the document says, "operate under a very high level of infection control," a lie that flies in the face of the government's own statistics and all the field reports from teachers and parents.

Finally, in the style of far-right coronavirus deniers and the Alternative for Germany (AfD), the education ministers claim "the expanded testing of children and adolescents" could lead to "a higher number of detected infections" and drive up the "incidence [rates] in the federal states." There is no question of systematically recording mass testing at the vast majority of schools in Germany.

Opposition to this policy, which was already evident in North Rhine-Westphalia last week, is growing strongly, especially on social media. "People, parents—please leave your children at home from Monday," wrote paediatric nurse Brigitte W., for example, in a viral post on Twitter. "I can't imagine teachers reporting you to the ministry. Teachers have common sense too. Report the children sick, take a stand and take action. It's about the health of your families!"

Sandro, a young father from North Rhine-Westphalia, sums up federal and state policies in an accusatory video on YouTube. "For a year, serious science has been largely ignored." While the pandemic was developing as predicted by science, the government continued to "play down, ignore and disinform." The population was being "demoralised and divided" and "children and families exposed to incalculable risks." "Reasonable parents" were "incapacitated, criminalised and terrorised" by the authorities—their endangerment was "consciously accepted," he said.



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