

Workers and scientists in Germany demand “general strike” and “strict lockdown”

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2 April 2021

Millions of workers, medical professionals and scientists in Germany have reacted with horror, bewilderment and anger to the decision to keep businesses and schools open despite skyrocketing new coronavirus infections. In the past two weeks alone, the nationwide weekly incidence had risen from 83 to 130 (weekly infections per 100,000 Germans), twice the increase of the previous four weeks combined.

If the “activity level” remains constant, a recent model calculation by Professor Kai Nagel of the Technical University of Berlin predicts a weekly incidence of up to 2,000 for May, a scenario that would result in about 50,000 deaths in Germany each week.

Professor Lothar Wieler, president of the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), reported on Friday increasing infection figures in day care centers and at the workplace and warned of 100,000 new infections per day if current resolutions go unchanged.

According to the report, the working population, as well as children and adolescents, are particularly strongly affected. It is to be expected that “more people become seriously ill, that hospitals are overloaded and that many people may die.” The day before, Wieler had said that a “third wave” could not be stopped without a “lockdown worthy of the name.” The last time this occurred was “last spring,” when schools, day care centers and businesses were also closed.

The demand for a “hard lockdown” has been raised for weeks now by Germany’s leading intensive care physicians. Gernot Marx (DIVI) and Christian Karagiannidis (DGIIN) reiterated the demand over the weekend.

“The decision to pursue benchmark reopening projects after Easter is completely inappropriate and must be immediately withdrawn by the federal and state governments,” Karagiannidis told the *Rheinische Post* newspaper. DIVI President Marx declared, “We are running into doom with eyes wide open.” A “hard lockdown for two or three weeks” would “save very many lives and save many more from the lifelong consequences of a Covid infection.” Intensive care unit patients are “scarred for life,” he stressed.

In light of this clear set of facts and the refusal of the federal and state governments to impose the necessary lockdown, the hashtag #Generalstreik (“general strike”) was the No. 1 most-discussed trending term on Twitter for more than three hours Wednesday night. In addition to single parents, medical professionals and schoolchildren, academic staff from leading German universities and representatives of the youth movement “Fridays For Future” also joined the discussion about a general strike. The hashtag #HarterLockdownJetzt (“strict lockdown now”) was among the top five trends, with around 42,000 tweets over the weekend.

Typical is a comment made on Sunday by Adrian, an

anesthesiologist and emergency medicine specialist from Schleswig-Holstein: “If there was agreement among us, we could just go on a kind of general strike,” he wrote on Twitter. By closing businesses, schools and day care centers in this way, “we would have our own strict lockdown’.” Another user writes: “A proper #generalstrike for 14 days and the current pandemic would be largely taken care of, all without the intervention of those in power at all levels and their organized irresponsibility.”

The call for a strict lockdown and a general strike has broad support. “I think people are realizing that they have to fight the pandemic themselves,” infectiologist Dirk Brockmann, for example, told the weekly paper *Die Zeit* in an interview Thursday. Speaking to the YouTube channel Jung&Naiv, the government adviser described pandemic policy as “Russian roulette with a revolver in which all chambers are full.”

The mood among scientists and physicians is also summed up by a viral Twitter post by general practitioner Dr. Werner. “It was always clear to me that there would be a pandemic one day,” she writes. “That a certain part of society could not be convinced of the facts, I could somewhat imagine. But that that part would include the government? I would never have thought that it would be on the ‘other side.’ But this is the current situation.”

Instead, she said, “fringe opinions are being hyped” and “the majority of scientists are not being heard”: “The government is partly playing dead, making dirty deals with masks and positions, and letting us hit the wall.”

According to the latest representative figures from the ZDF political barometer, 36 percent of respondents describe the “current COVID measures” as “not tough enough”—an increase of 18 percentage points compared to the previous month. The opposite view increased by only 3 percentage points to 26 percent during this period. “We’ve never had a majority in favor of easing [restrictions],” opinion researcher Matthias Jung told ZDF on Friday.

Amid this mass opposition to federal and state “herd immunity” policies, articles published by the *World Socialist Web Site* last week found strong resonance. An assessment of decisions made of the recent summit of the heads of the German federal and state governments, published Tuesday, and a commentary on Chancellor Angela Merkel’s lifting of the so-called “Easter Pause” each received hundreds of comments on social media. Teachers, educators and workers spoke to the WSWS about the prospect of a European-wide general strike in the fight for a real shutdown of schools, day care centres and businesses.

“We in the chemical industry had to go to work like usual on Maundy Thursday, even nonessential areas such as canteens, IT and

offices,” said Jana*, a lab technician at BASF, for example. The corporate works council had already announced this before the decision to close non-essential industry on that day was also formally withdrawn by Merkel. “As if the world’s largest chemical company would bow to German politics!” comments Jana bitterly.

“Here at the main plant in Ludwigshafen, we have 33,000 regular employees and production operates continuously,” she continued. “Quite a few areas are part of the essential supply chain and are ‘relevant for the system.’ You can’t close the entire plant anyway. Apparently, there’s a loophole that entitles the corporation to stay open completely.”

Jana views the explosive rise in case numbers among children, adolescents and their parents with great concern. “When I follow up on the positive tests of the last few weeks, it’s almost consistently day care centres, schools, on the job. Here in Rhineland-Palatinate, just about everyone has been sending their children to these facilities since June/July. There’s no need to prove that you are in need of an ‘emergency care’ offer; similar reports are coming in from other states from day care workers and teachers.”

“Schools have never been completely closed since the first wave, except for vacations,” she noted. “Some cohort was always there—first just the transfer students, then the elementary schools, then the graduating classes. Exams were written on site, there were staggered classes and so on. Since tracking started working again, you’re finding ever more infection chains in those areas.”

“I think similarly to you,” Elke G. from North Rhine-Westphalia told us. “I am now so afraid when I’m standing unvaccinated in front of my classes. There are students who are certified exempt from wearing a mask. If possible, I keep the window open, but I’m still afraid. While others work in a home office, I consistently supervise high school graduating classes three times a week, and for the past two weeks, everyone has been back on a rotating class schedule. Civil servants don’t go on strike but we put our lives at risk every day because of it. I am afraid! And with vacation warnings to Mallorca lifted, we’ll soon get the Brazilian virus as well.”

In view of WSWs reporting, the teacher calls on “all colleagues” to “show solidarity against these abuses.”

The danger posed by the mutated virus strains to school children and staff is confirmed by Elke’s colleague Holger* from Berlin. “At our elementary school, several of the staff and the after-school care center have been infected with B.1.1.7. Among the students and their families, there are apparently chains of infection that no one has yet been able to trace,” he said. “The virus has appeared incredibly fast in many places. Within a few days, there have been more than a dozen cases. Yet the school remains open and only those ‘affected’ have been quarantined. Our lives are deliberately being put at tremendous risk.”

“Only if all classes were tested thoroughly would you be able to see the full extent of the spread,” Holger noted. “But that is not being done. What has been provided by the Senate is like a bad joke and has no structure. Even if some things sound good on paper, I can really only shake my head when it comes to implementation. Nothing works at all! I can’t interpret this any other way than that the politicians obviously don’t care what happens to us.”

“In the last days before Easter, the children, their families and the school staff were once again put in danger completely unnecessarily,” Holger continues. “My colleagues are angry, and the anger is spreading. Those who are working now have to absorb everything, while those who are in quarantine go through difficult days. Some

have been badly infected by the virus. The decisions of the Conference of Ministers of Education show that it was never about the children. Our lives are seen as sacrifices that state governments and the federal government are willing to make. Capitalism puts profits before lives.”

“I also see it that way, that profits have been put before lives the whole time now,” said Ursula B., who works as an alternative practitioner in Lower Saxony. “The so-called ‘Easter pause’ would not have brought much anyway, especially since it was also to be interrupted. Immediate reaction would be the order of the day, but unfortunately that’s not going to happen. So we can honestly say that many more serious illnesses and deaths are being deliberately accepted here.” Motivating this are capitalist profit interests, she is sure: “The opening of schools and day care centres at any price already suggested that.”

Ursula declared herself “absolutely” in favour of a general strike to bring the economy down to absolutely necessary levels: “If politics can’t manage to wind us down so that we can get a grip on the pandemic, then we should do it as a society. We could be at incidences of less than 10 or 15 (per 100,000) across Europe within eight weeks and then find a way to quickly and consistently control outbreaks locally even at minimal numbers. We can’t get around a hard lockdown.”

The WSWs article “absolutely hits the mark,” said Silke Aretz of North Rhine-Westphalia, who has launched a parents’ initiative against the dangerous pandemic policy of the government. “The mood has never been so heated as in the last few days,” she noted. “Everything is going to the dogs except for the wealth of the shareholders. ICUs are already maxed out—especially staff. The old parties are all essentially the same. They make politics for 3 percent of the population and to fill their own pockets; that hasn’t had much in common with democracy for a long time.”

In the fight against this “irrationality,” Silke says, a joint European-wide general strike is “the only option.” “Those who can, should strike. Teachers should resort to collective sickouts. The whole system has to be changed, and not just since COVID. After all that happened, I am beginning to call myself a socialist: I want to fight for a humane world where everyone has equal opportunities. The crisis could be an opportunity for a radical change.”

** Names changed to protect anonymity*



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