“Profits before lives” policy leads to 80,000 coronavirus deaths in Germany

Johannes Stern
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The official number of coronavirus deaths in Germany surpassed the dramatic toll of 80,000 yesterday. In its daily update, the Robert Koch Institute, the country’s infectious disease agency, reported a total of 80,006 deaths.

It is already clear that many more will follow in the days and weeks ahead. Despite warnings from scientists and virologists, governments at the federal and state levels are refusing to impose a lockdown to close schools and workplaces, which are the main vectors for transmission. As a result, between 20,000 and 30,000 people are getting infected on a daily basis. Hospitals are on the verge of collapse.

Only during wartime has a comparable situation been witnessed. Around the world, more than 3 million people have died from COVID-19, including over 1 million in Europe and almost 600,000 in the United States. On a daily basis, over 10,000 people fall victim to the virus. By comparison, during the First World War, the greatest mass slaughter of humanity at the time in history, an average of 6,000 soldiers died every day.

After a year of the pandemic, the official propaganda can no longer conceal the fact that the governments bear full responsibility for mass death. This was underscored by the response to the official commemoration on Sunday in Berlin for those who have died during the pandemic. The sanctimonious speeches and crocodile tears from German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democrats, SPD), Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democrats, CDU), and Parliament President Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU) triggered anger and contempt among wide layers of workers and young people.

In response to the suggestion by leading representatives of the state that people place lit candles in their windows to commemorate the dead, a storm of rage erupted on social media. Under the slogan “#Einkerzen statt #Lichtfenster” (a candle instead of lit-up windows) workers and young people called on government representatives to light the candles themselves, since they have the dead on their consciences. “Light your own lamps, they are your dead, at least most of them. Perhaps one of your lights will turn on,” wrote one user on Twitter.

The protests were not confined to social media. Across the country, people placed candles in front of state chancelleries and government buildings to denounce the federal and state governments for their policy of “profits before lives.” “We won’t get used to the numerous deaths. Every candle represents a person who is no longer alive due to your dithering and your policies,” read one placard. Another stated, “You do everything to protect profits, dividends, and surpluses. Shame on you!”

The mass death on the one hand and the profit-making on the other are the direct products of a conscious policy in the interests of the banks and big business that the ruling class as a whole has pursued since the start of the pandemic.

When governments felt compelled during the first wave of the pandemic to implement lockdowns, and temporarily close schools and factories due to the pressure from the population and spontaneous strikes in countries like Italy, Spain and the United States, the stock markets plunged around the world. The ruling class’ response was murderous and brutal. They did not protect lives, but rather profits, and organised the greatest distribution of wealth from the bottom to the top in history.

When the federal government adopted the multibillion-euro coronavirus emergency bailout last spring, with the support of all political parties from the far-right Alternative for Germany to the Left Party and the trade unions, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote, “the class character of the measures adopted is obvious. Their main goal is to protect and increase the wealth and profits of the major corporations and financial oligarchy.”

The funds had hardly reached the bank accounts of the major corporations and super-rich when the stock markets began to rise rapidly. This enrichment was accompanied by an essentially fascist campaign to open schools and workplaces as soon as possible in spite of the raging pandemic so that the funds used for the bailout could be squeezed out of the working class.

This campaign was led by the same Schäuble, who stood in the Kaiser Wilhelm Church on Sunday and claimed to be affected by the deaths. In an interview with the *Tagesspiegel*, he declared in April 2020 that it was not correct for everything else to take second place to the protection of life. The right to life is not protected “absolutely” by Germany’s Basic Law, he added.

One year later, 80,000 people are dead and the profits of a tiny layer at the top of society are growing immeasurably. With a peak of 15,500, Germany’s DAX stock exchange reached a

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record high yesterday. The financial oligarchy is doing better than ever. According to the latest list of billionaires published by the US magazine *Forbes*, the number of billionaires increased in Germany during the first year of the pandemic by 29 from 107 to 136.

While millions of workers suffered severe wage cuts and lost their jobs, the super-rich increased their wealth over the past 12 months by $178 billion and now possesses over $625 billion. This amount is much more than the 2021 federal budget (€498 billion).

The *World Socialist Web Site* described the pandemic from the outset as a "trigger event" that not only laid bare the economic, social and political crisis of the capitalist system, but enormously accelerated it. Over the past 12 months, the ruling elite has intensified its social spending cuts and exploited the situation to stuff their pockets full at the expense of the workers, and carry out long-planned restructuring.

The war drive and the vast expansion of the domestic apparatus of police-state repression have also been massively accelerated. The US government, first under Trump and now Joe Biden, is accusing China of being responsible for the pandemic and preparing ever more directly for a military conflict with the nuclear-armed power. The European powers, with Germany in the lead, are exploiting the crisis to rearm massively in order to enforce their own imperialist interests against Russia and China, and, ever more openly, against the United States.

In his opening address to the digital congress held by the right-wing daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), Steinmeier said on March 12 that the pandemic is a "geopolitical moment—a moment that other powers are using in a cool, calculated manner for themselves. It should be clear to us that our actions towards our neighbours today will influence the world that the new federal government will find when it takes power in the autumn. As a power at the heart of Europe, we should not forget to look at ourselves through the eyes of our neighbours."

What is in fact concealed behind Steinmeier's altruism is the old great power ambition of the German elites, who after two lost world wars are once again setting themselves the goal of dominating the world. "Germany's destiny: Lead Europe in order to lead the world" was the title of an essay posted on the website of Review 2014 run by the Foreign Ministry in 2014. These plans are now set to be put into practice.

Just a few weeks ago, the federal government increased the military budget by another 5 percent, bringing it close to €50 billion. At the same time, hardly a day passes without CDU Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer agitating against Russia.

This course is supported by all political parties in parliament. In its election programme for the vote in September, the Greens called for the major rearmament of the German armed forces and NATO, and issued threats against Russia and China. The officially crowned chancellor candidate for the Greens, Analena Baerbock, is more closely associated perhaps than anyone else with the Greens' aggressive militarist policy. "We have to be honest. Yes, in some areas, more has to be invested. So that rifles shoot," she told the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

The new leadership of the Left Party has also made clear in recent weeks that as a member of an SPD/Left Party/Green coalition government, the Left Party would fully support its militarist agenda. At the state level, the Left Party is already implementing the "profits before lives" policy in partnership with the SPD and Greens, most aggressively in Thuringia where the Left Party's Bodo Ramelow is minister president.

In opposition to the entire ruling class' reactionary policies, opposition is growing. Workers and young people are being radicalised around the world, and are organising strikes and protests against the spread of the pandemic, police violence, and the attacks on jobs and wages.

The decisive question is one of political perspective. To save lives and prevent a relapse into war and barbarism, the working class must intervene independently into political events, and abolish the system that is responsible for the current catastrophe and has no scientific and rational solution. Just like the struggles against social inequality, war and dictatorship, the struggle against the pandemic needs a socialist programme.

The Sozial istische Gleichheitspartei's election statement, titled, "Life instead profits: socialism instead of capitalist barbarism," states:

> The fight to contain the pandemic is developing into a class struggle, which is showing ever more clearly that the two major classes in society, the capitalist class and the working class, have irreconcilable interests. The official pandemic policy puts profits before human lives. We demand:
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> The immediate shutdown of all nonessential businesses until the pandemic is under control! Full payments of wages for all workers affected as well as real assistance for the self-employed and comprehensive support for poor households! A globally coordinated vaccine campaign instead of vaccine nationalism and profiteering!

After 80,000 deaths in Germany and more than 3 million worldwide, this programme is now more urgent than ever. Apply to join the SGP today and support its election campaign.

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