

German government playing with fire by lifting restrictions and extending special rights to vaccinated citizens

Marianne Arens
6 May 2021

An incessant debate about special rights for those who have received a COVID-19 vaccine or recovered from an infection is being conducted in the German media. Federal Health Minister Jens Spahn announced on Tuesday that as soon as Saturday they will enjoy several exceptional freedoms. The considerable attention paid to this issue is aimed above all at facilitating the opening of the tourist sector and all areas of the economy. In the midst of the third wave of the pandemic, this amounts to playing with fire.

Over 3.5 million people in Germany have been infected by SARS-CoV-2, and more than 84,000 COVID-19 patients have lost their lives. Almost 20 million people around the world are currently infected with the coronavirus. In Germany, there are currently around 300,000 active infections, of which 4,800 patients are gasping for breath in intensive care units. Hundreds of patients lose this battle every day, dying an entirely unnecessary death.

Politicians prefer to ignore these horrifying figures and facts. Instead they claim, like Social Democratic chancellor candidate Olaf Scholz, that the fact that around 30 percent of the population has received their first vaccine gives “already a sense that things will be better during the summer.” The vice chancellor made these comments on Monday on the ZDF show “What next, Mr. Scholz?” “The vaccine pace is accelerating rapidly,” he said. “We’ve already come a long way.”

Scholz, like all other leading politicians, is conveying a completely false sense of security. Only 8 percent of the population has received two vaccine doses, which is far removed from any reliable protection from the virus across society as a whole.

On NDR’s coronavirus podcast, Sandra Ciesek, head of virology at Frankfurt’s University Hospital, warned that

any prediction about the coronavirus pandemic is “vulnerable to disruption.” The vaccine campaign must be continued for at least another four weeks before the rate of those vaccinated would approach 50 percent, and further openings could be even contemplated, she said.

In connection with the current incidence rates, the vaccination figures indicate an even greater danger for those not yet vaccinated, above all, workers and young people. For them, the risk of infection is much higher than in the first and second waves. This is because infections among those over 80 contributed considerably to the overall incidences. Today, amid the third wave, the situation is very different. A significant portion of the elderly is now vaccinated. While an incidence of 100 no longer represents a great threat to them, it poses an even greater threat to younger and middle-aged workers.

COVID-19 infections remain high. A glance at the coronavirus map reveals the staggering fact that in spite of vaccinations, only a handful of districts and cities across Germany have had incidences below 50 infections per 100,000 inhabitants within the past seven days, which was once the upper limit for openings. The upper limit before the so-called “federal emergency brake” takes effect, an incidence of 100, is surpassed in the vast majority of districts.

Opening up under these conditions is like allowing the first gust of wind to revive the embers of a fire.

This is what happened in India, a country of 1.3 billion people, where daily infections had declined to around 9,000. The government assumed that the pandemic was over; restrictions were lifted, and they resorted to a policy of “herd immunity.” But when a new, so-called double mutant emerged, new infections rose exponentially. Currently around 400,000 people are being infected every day, and people are dying in the street because hospitals

can no longer treat them and provide them with oxygen.

These parallels are of absolutely no concern to the politicians and journalists in Germany. They are much more concerned about the next round of openings, first in the tourist industry, and then for society as a whole, while businesses have been open throughout. People who have received two doses of the vaccine and those who have recovered from a COVID-19 infection will soon be able to visit a hairdresser, shop, restaurant or gym without a negative coronavirus test. They will also be allowed to travel without quarantine and with no negative test to other countries. The government agreed to these measures on Tuesday, and they will pass the lower and upper houses of parliament by the weekend.

Numerous people are warning against these new regulatory exceptions, not least because vaccine passes are extremely easy to falsify. Those who have to deal with the pandemic first hand on a daily basis, such as doctors and nurses in intensive care, ambulance drivers and workers in elderly care facilities, are extremely concerned. They have been working for over a year under incredibly difficult conditions. Now in the third wave, they are confronted with significantly younger patients and the new, more infectious virus variants.

ICUs are packed to capacity and threatened with collapse. This was revealed in a recent case in the Salle-Orla district in the state of Thuringia. A seriously ill patient could not be transferred in time to the ICU in Schliez because all beds were occupied. The 66-year-old cancer patient died in the ambulance while waiting to be admitted. The district in the southeast of Thuringia currently has an incidence of 530 new infections over the past seven days per 100,000 inhabitants.

The conditions in ICUs were also examined in an episode of the ARD programme “FAKT” on Tuesday evening from the Saale district in the state of Saxony-Anhalt. A doctor at the Carl-von-Basedow Hospital in Merseburg, Dr. Sven-Uwe Hake, confirmed that growing numbers of younger patients are being admitted. “Shockingly, it’s affecting people aged under 30. They are as old as my children,” he said. This has become routine and a “sad reality.”

Dr. Karsten zur Nieden, head of the ambulance service in Halle, commented on the government’s plans for lifting restrictions. “As a doctor who cares for extremely ill COVID-19 patients every day,” he doubts whether now is the right time. “There is no real recovery, and we must fear that if we open up too early, we will pay dearly for it later,” he said.

The virus has an ever clearer social profile. The more precarious jobs, the greater the risk faced by individuals. Cramped working and living conditions and a lack of restrictions help the virus to accelerate, and the pandemic has vastly increased social inequality. While the stock markets increase, and companies, banks and the superrich enrich themselves on multibillion-euro state “bailouts,” workers and the poor are bearing the brunt of the pandemic.

Repeated major outbreaks are occurring in workplaces, schools and child care facilities. One recent example is an outbreak on the Thiermann asparagus farm in Diepholz, Lower Saxony. Numerous infections were first identified in the district’s child care centres, before mass tests returned about 120 infections among the 1,000 employees. Mainly Romanian seasonal workers were infected by the British variant B.1.1.7 in Diepholz. So as not to interrupt the harvest, the notorious workplace quarantine was imposed on the asparagus farm.

The working class bears the main burden of the pandemic, while the rich are in a much better position to protect themselves. The most well-known example of this currently is the low-income neighbourhood of Chorweiler in Cologne. The incidence rate is over 500. Since the beginning of the pandemic, 963 people have been infected. In the villa district Hanhwald, not a single infection has recently been recorded.

Chorweiler also disproves the standard propaganda about alleged vaccine scepticism among workers. Since Monday, a mobile vaccine bus has been used to inoculate residents. The response surpassed all expectations. People have been waiting patiently every day in long queues that stretch around the entire square for an opportunity to get vaccinated.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact