Politicians and big business in Germany ignore danger of new Delta coronavirus variant

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The requirement to wear a mask has been largely suspended, shops and restaurants are mostly open, almost all foreign travel is allowed again. Stations, trains, and buses are filling up, and in Bavaria, even loud singing in churches is allowed again. Anyone who gains the impression that the pandemic is over needs to know: This impression is expressly what the establishment parties want.

Yet the new, highly contagious Sars-CoV2 Delta variant, first seen in India, is currently spreading throughout Europe. The first cases have also been detected in Germany. “A mutant just made for the fourth wave,” is what *Die Zeit* calls the highly contagious virus.

What is worrying about it is that people who have already had their first vaccination dose are also falling ill with the Delta virus. Having both vaccination doses provides significantly better protection, but only 25 percent of the German population has been fully vaccinated. Just under half have only received their first vaccination. In addition, Health Minister Jens Spahn (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) lifted the prioritisation on June 8. Yet there is still a lack of vaccine, and very many people from the risk groups are still not immunised.

Virologist Melanie Brinkmann from the Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research also expects a fourth wave before the end of the summer. “I fear the numbers will rise again sooner or later,” Brinkmann comments on the current rapid move to reopen businesses. “Many people don’t realise the force with which exponential growth can skyrocket if you don’t counteract it in time.” If people had not been so careless last year, the virologist says, Germany could have spared itself the third wave in autumn and winter, and with it many sick and dead people.

Having only one quarter of the population fully vaccinated is not enough to end the pandemic measures, Charité virologist Christian Drosten also warned. “We have to pay attention, we are talking about the future here,” said Drosten. “At the moment, we are in a transitional phase. The next target we need to have in mind is that 80 percent of the adult population needs to have both vaccine doses.”

The Delta variant has just caused another spike in coronavirus infections in the UK. For the first time since mid-May, more COVID-19 patients have been admitted to hospitals there, and the seven-day incidence rate has risen to just under 50, up from 20 for several weeks. In India and other countries, Delta had previously caused a near-vertical rebound in the infection curve.

The European Football Championship could dangerously contribute to the spread of the Delta virus. Newsweekly *Der Spiegel* raises the anxious question: “Will the big event become a continental super-spreader?” The question is justified. What no amateur club would be allowed to do is possible in the European Championship: individual stadiums will be filled to 50 percent (St Petersburg) and 100 percent (Budapest). Among the venues filled on Sunday was Wembley Stadium in London, where the new virus is spreading. Some fans can tour all over Europe.

Several teams, including Spain, are already recording absences due to players suffering from coronavirus.

Nevertheless, for politicians like Markus Söder (Christian Social Union, CSU), the Bavarian Minister-President, the European Championship means “a signal for more normality with common sense.” Söder’s promise seems like a threat: “We are pushing the envelope.” The intended new “summer fairy tale” is being forced on viewers. According to a *Spiegel* survey, 40 percent of those questioned were clearly of the opinion that the European Championship should have been cancelled because of the pandemic, as it was last year.

Söder speaks from the heart of practically all establishment politicians. In Brandenburg, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) has officially applied for the pandemic to be declared over, and the AfD sets the policy of all parties up to and including the Left Party. Thuringia’s state Premier Bodo Ramelow (Left Party) declared in the *Rheinische Post*, “I think we can take the risk of a complete reopening in the autumn.” In the interest of the profits of a narrow upper class, they are all ready to lift every protective measure to let nurseries, schools, businesses, and the whole economy run at full speed again.

Yet even now, around one hundred coronavirus patients are dying every day in Germany. The gruesome figure of 90,000 COVID-19 deaths in Germany alone, which has just been reached, is hardly worth a headline in the newspapers. Worldwide, there will soon be an incredible four million coronavirus deaths. Thousands continue to struggle for their lives in intensive care units, and even 20- and 30-year-olds are fighting the pain associated with long haul COVID, concentration problems and chronic fatigue.

One politician who would prefer to declare the pandemic over is

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the President of the Standing Conference of State Education Ministers (KMK), Britta Ernst (Social Democratic Party SPD). On 10 June, she pushed through a KMK declaration that there will be no more school closures or other restrictions in the coming school year, even if incidence levels rise again. Schools are explicitly no longer to be guided by the incidence values. School trips are also to be possible again without restrictions.

Britta Ernst is also the Education Minister of Brandenburg and wife of the SPD candidate for Chancellor, Olaf Scholz. Her KMK resolution contains the long-refuted claim: “Children and young people [are] not a driving force in the current situation.”

The new chairperson of the GEW teachers’ union, Maike Finnern, also agreed with Britta Ernst on the reopenings, and stressed that she, too, considers coronavirus-related school closures in the new school year to be most likely dispensable. “This is not imaginable again,” Finnern said.

In several federal states, schools will be reopened without restrictions, masks will no longer be required in classrooms, and sports will once again be played indoors.

Politicians justify this highly negligent reopening policy by saying that the seven-day incidence rate has dropped to a national average of 20 infected persons per 100,000 inhabitants. However, the seven-day incidence level in schools, in particular, is still much higher and sometimes twice as high as in the rest of the population. On 8 June, it was 41 infected per 100,000 for 5- to 9-year-olds, 42 for 10- to 14-year-olds and 37 for 15- to 19-year-olds.

No fewer than 35 teachers and educators have died so far, according to the sad figure officially announced by the Robert Koch Institute, but which undoubtedly does not include all educators who have died of coronavirus. And the danger is not over! The website news4teachers.de points out that most children and young people will not be vaccinated in the foreseeable future either. Air filtration is still missing in almost all classrooms. In a few days, on 30 June, the government will suspend the federal “emergency brake,” which has so far made school closures mandatory above an incidence level of 165.

The bourgeois politicians from the AfD to the Left Party have learned nothing from the pandemic, and they do not want to learn anything either. What would be needed was to learn the lessons of the last few months, to consistently bring the infection numbers down and keep them low. In any case, to avoid major outbreaks and new exponential rises, there must be serious testing and systematic tracking and isolation of contacts.

To enforce this, the working class must be in charge! The pandemic has proved this beyond doubt. That is why the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and all parties affiliated to the International Committee of the Fourth International are fighting to build independent rank-and-file committees in all workplaces and establishments. These committees will network across Europe and the world and prepare a European-wide general strike to impose safe conditions.

The pandemic has shown that the political class that runs the capitalist governments practically lives on a different planet than the vast majority of working people. It has made the class divide openly visible. Bankers, shareholders and the super-rich, who have every opportunity to protect themselves and their families, were able to massively increase their wealth in the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Germany, private financial assets consisting of cash, bank account balances, shares, pensions, and life insurance rose to nine trillion dollars and real assets to 13 trillion dollars. Germany has 2,900 super-rich who possess more than 100 million dollars, putting it in third place in the global rankings behind the USA and China.

Working people pay for this in two ways. They cannot escape the daily health threats in factories, production halls, hospitals, schools, and other establishments. Nor can they hope for protection from the trade unions, which refuse to effectively protect workers from the threat of infection.

At the same time, hundreds of thousands of workers are acutely threatened with job loss and poverty. One example is the Continental Corporation. As a prelude to massive job cuts in the auto and supplier sector, which are expected to destroy 180,000 jobs, Continental management, with the help of the IG Metall union, is pushing through 13,000 job cuts in Germany and 30,000 worldwide. At the same time, Continental has never shut down production in its plants in time, even when incidence figures are high.

An outbreak at the Conti tyre plant in Aachen in mid-May shows how irresponsibly the profits-before-lives policy is being pursued. The Conti workers are also under double pressure in Aachen because the closure of the tyre plant is already a done deal. Even when incidence levels in Aachen rose threateningly, operations were never halted until a major outbreak had already spread. It was only when the number of sick people reached 33 that operations were interrupted for a few days on 19 May.

The pandemic exposed the true role of the trade unions. IG Metall, Verdi and Co. have ensured that production has continued during the lockdown, even if this endangered workers’ health and lives. To this day, they help to keep the number of coronavirus cases in factories secret.

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