

Christian Democratic candidate for German chancellor demands people learn to ‘live with the virus’

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The highly infectious Delta variant is spreading rapidly across Europe, threatening Germany with a fourth wave of the coronavirus pandemic. Despite this, the ruling elite is hell-bent on intensifying its murderous “profits before lives” policy. This was made clear in the North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) state parliament last Friday by NRW minister president and Christian Democratic candidate for German chancellor, Armin Laschet.

In an angry speech, he declared that there would be no more lockdown measures in Germany, even if infection rates sharply increased. “It’s obvious that the figures will increase in the autumn,” he said. “But the question is how do we deal with that? We will not follow (the approach of) closing everything again. We will do everything necessary to live with the virus.”

With this statement, the potential incoming chancellor lined up squarely behind the right-wing extremist Alternative for Germany (AfD), which has been demanding the abandonment of all public health measures to contain the pandemic.

He would “hardly ever, in fact, never agree with the AfD,” Laschet declared, but then added, “Today, they made a correct statement. Whenever someone comes along and says, ‘Scientists say,’ one is well advised to call into question what this person is up to...”

Because, he continued, in science there are always minority or individual opinions.

What Laschet dismisses as “individual opinions” are the warnings of renowned virologists and health organisations of a disastrous fourth wave. The spread of the virus—as it did last autumn—will lead to an explosive increase in infections and deaths if the necessary measures are not taken. The situation in Europe is already dire, and it is only a matter of time before infection rates begin rising rapidly in Germany.

At the end of last week, the World Health Organisation’s European director, Dr Hans Henri Kluge, warned of the dangerous situation in Europe. “By August,” he said, “the Delta variant will be dominant in the WHO’s European region, but our region won’t be fully vaccinated by then, and the European region will be largely free of restrictions by August, so that citizens will travel more often and meet in larger groups.

“The three preconditions for a new wave with increased hospitalisations and deaths are thereby fulfilled: new variants, inadequate vaccination rates, and increased social contacts.”

He added that after 10 weeks of declining infections throughout Europe, infections rose by 10 percent over the previous week.

The situation is starkest in Britain. On Sunday, the seven-day rolling average of infections stood at 24,429, compared to 14,623 one week earlier and less than 4,000 one month ago. According to figures from the British Medical Association, hospitalisations due to COVID-19 in Britain rose by 55 percent last week.

The spread of the Delta variant in Britain is a warning of the threat faced by the European Union, which has a lower vaccination rate than Britain. According to the European Centres for Disease Control (ECDC), only 40.1 percent of the population aged over 18 has received the two doses necessary for full protection against infection. In the greater European area, which includes Russia and other non-EU states, only a quarter of all adults are fully vaccinated, according to the WHO.

Nonetheless, the European governments are ending all remaining restrictions. Despite the explosive rise in infections, Britain plans on 19 July to end all social distancing measures and even the requirement to wear masks. Spain and France, where cases are also on the rise,

are pursuing similar plans. All of them are employing rhetoric similar to that of Laschet. British Health Minister Sajid Javid declared at the weekend that the British population must “learn to live with the virus.”

The British medical journal BMJ has described this deliberate and antiscientific policy of mass infection as “social murder.” It posed the legitimate question: “When politicians wilfully neglect scientific advice, international and historical experience, and their own alarming statistics and modelling, because to act goes against their political strategy, is that lawful?”

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the criminal policies of the ruling class have caused the deaths of over 4 million people worldwide. In Europe, there have officially been more than 1.1 million coronavirus deaths, including over 152,000 in Britain, 127,000 in Italy, 111,000 in France and 91,000 in Germany. These horrendous death tolls, which can be compared only to wartime, are apparently not enough for the ruling elite.

Following Laschet’s provocative comments, representatives of the Social Democrats, the Left Party and the Greens, which are in the opposition in NRW, postured as outraged. Laschet had “broken an absolute taboo” and made himself “a chief spokesman for the AfD,” stated Social Democratic Party (SPD) state party and parliamentary group leader Thomas Kutschaty.

“That is playing into the hands of the AfD; it is bad for our democracy, Mr. Laschet,” the SPD politician continued. The AfD largely denies the danger of COVID-19 and is “the parliamentary arm of the Lateral Thinkers and coronavirus deniers.”

This is utter hypocrisy. In reality, all of the establishment parties are pursuing Laschet’s coronavirus course, which is shared by the AfD. Last year, for example, representatives of all parties in the federal parliament backed the right-wing extremist anti-coronavirus protests, which, in contrast to the vast majority of the population, demanded an end to all social distancing and other restrictions.

The SPD candidate for chancellor and current finance minister, Olaf Scholz, already at the end of April called for an end to all COVID-19 restrictions. He was “fed up with the pandemic and its restrictions,” he told the *Bild am Sonntag* newspaper. One must “as a government ... decide on clear and courageous steps to open up for the summer,” and develop “a plan for a return to normal life, but one that won’t be overturned after a few days,” he added.

In every state where the Left Party and Greens are

represented in government, they are pursuing the same policy. In Baden-Württemberg, the state government led by Green Minister President Winfried Kretschmann is pushing ahead with reopening measures in alliance with Laschet’s Christian Democrats. And in Thuringia, the Left Party Minister President Bodo Ramelow, a man who praised the “Swedish model” and its policy of herd immunity last autumn, is in power.

With its murderous policy of mass infection, the ruling class intends to squeeze the vast sums out of the working class that were handed over to the big banks, corporations and super-rich as part of the so-called coronavirus emergency bailouts.

This comes together with the geostrategic and economic interests of German imperialism. Significantly, both debates held between the three candidates for chancellor—Laschet, Scholz and the Greens’ Annalena Baerbock—have revolved exclusively around questions of foreign and security policy. Germany’s return to an aggressive imperialist and great-power policy must be accompanied domestically by a policy of dictatorship and repression, which rejects any humane policies.

Within the context of this dangerous development, which is being followed with concern by the vast majority of the population, the election campaign of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party—SGP) assumes tremendous significance. The SGP is the only party opposing the policies of social spending cuts, military rearmament, the strengthening of the domestic repressive state apparatus, and “social murder” in relation to the pandemic. It is mobilising the growing resistance of the working class on the basis of a socialist and internationalist programme.



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