More than 7 million people in Germany in precarious employment

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More than 7 million people in Germany work in "atypical" or precarious jobs, that is, just under 21 percent of the country's 33.4 million workforce. These figures are the result of a special analysis by the Federal Statistical Office (Microcensus 2020) carried out at the request of the Left Party parliamentary group in the Bundestag.

The Federal Statistical Office counts temporary and contract work, marginal employment such as mini-jobs, part-time work with contracts of less than 20 hours per week, and fixed-term employment as "atypical" employment. These jobs are invariably low paid, with incomes barely sufficient for a person to live on. In addition, such workers face the constant uncertainty as to whether or not their fixed-term employment contracts will be extended. Medium- and long-term planning for their lives is impossible.

When one adds the 4.5 million part-time workers with more than 20 hours per week, whom the Federal Statistical Office does not count as "atypical" employees, a total of 11.5 million male and female workers do not work in so-called normal jobs. This means that one-third of the workforce is engaged in part-time and/or precarious work, far more than previously suspected.

The growth of the precarious labour sector in Germany to one of the largest in Europe is primarily the product of the anti-welfare Hartz laws introduced by the former Social Democratic Party/Green Party coalition (1999–2005) led by Gerhard Schröder (SPD). The legislation passed by the Schröder government has led to a massive increase in social inequality.

Other studies show a strong concentration of the low-wage sector in different regions. A recent publication by the German Trade Union Federation (DGB) in Berlin-Brandenburg illustrates the extent of the low-wage sector in the capital city and its surroundings. The DGB study is based on an evaluation by the socio-economic panel (SOEP) and covers the years from 2017 to 2019.

During this period, an average of 375,000 people in Berlin worked in the low-wage sector, 24.3 percent of the working population. In Brandenburg, the figure was around 280,000, a share of 27.7 percent. The hourly wage in this sector was below €11.13, less than two-thirds of the average gross hourly wage and little more than the statutory minimum wage of €9.60.

The study also shows that foreign-born workers are disproportionately affected by low-wage work. In Berlin, the percentage of low paid immigrant workers is 30.5 percent, in Brandenburg 65.4 percent. More than half of semi-skilled and unskilled workers are making low wages in Berlin and 73.2 percent in Brandenburg. In Berlin, 85.2 percent of so-called "mini-jobbers" are low wage, while 90.9 percent are low wage in Brandenburg. Similar conditions prevail in other regions with equivalent levels of high social inequality.

The country's trade unions and the DGB bear a significant share of responsibility for the development of this huge low-wage sector. They have sat, and continue to sit, on all the commissions that produce this type of insecure employment and the low minimum wage. Large corporations and businesses use outsourcing to subcontractors or temporary work agencies to lower wages and worsen working conditions for thousands who used to be employed on a regular basis.

Industries with the most low-wage workers include retail, with a 16.1 percent share in 2019; food services, 9.2 percent; building services, 9.1 percent; health care, 8.5 percent; and education, 4.8 percent. The figures are based on a study by the Institute for Work and

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Qualification (IAQ Report 2021-06), as reported in the *Tagesspiegel* newspaper in early September.

Workers in the low-wage sector are also particularly at risk of contracting COVID-19 due in part to job insecurity and cramped living conditions. At the same time, these workers also suffer disproportionately from pandemic-related job and income loss. The high number of workers in atypical jobs is also a major reason for the rise in poverty among retirees.

At the same time, wealth is increasingly concentrated at the top of society. The richest 1 percent of the population owns as much as the poorest 75 percent. While wealth at the top has grown enormously via the multi-billion coronavirus programs of the European Central Bank and the federal government, there is supposedly no money for the working class and the poor. On the contrary, the money that has been poured down the throats of the rich is to be squeezed out of workers through increased exploitation.

One indicator of the obscene wealth at the top is the recent Wealth-X report, which says that the global pandemic has led to an unprecedented accumulation of wealth among the most privileged strata of society. The global number of dollar billionaires rose above 3,000 for the first time in 2020. Their average wealth is $1.9 billion, and their total wealth is $10 trillion, an increase of 5.7 percent since 2019.

"Taken as a whole, the global pandemic has delivered an unexpected windfall to billionaire wealth, amplified by the flood of financial incentives and swelling profits in key sectors of the economy that has spawned a new wave of younger, self-made billionaires," the report says.

First place in the country chart for billionaires is the US, followed by China in second place and Germany in third. In Germany the number of billionaires increased by 13.7 percent to 174 during the 2020 pandemic year, and their total wealth grew to $515 billion.

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