

As infections skyrocket, German government declares pandemic over

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30 October 2021

Despite exploding case numbers in Germany and across Europe, the German government is effectively declaring the pandemic over. Earlier this week, Health Minister Jens Spahn (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) repeated his call for the currently declared “epidemic situation of national scope” to expire on November 25. This would eliminate most remaining protective measures.

Since the first wave of the pandemic in March 2020, the Bundestag had regularly extended this “epidemic situation.” Under the terms of the Infection Protection Act, this forms the legal basis for nationwide regulations such as mask requirements and distance and contact restrictions.

Spahn’s call, which essentially follows the line of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, is supported by all the parties in the Bundestag (German parliament). Representatives of the Left Party welcomed it just as much as the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and the Greens, who are currently forming the next federal government. A paper these three parties published on Wednesday on “ending the epidemic situation” makes clear that they plan to continue the “profits before lives” policy unabated when they take office.

“The epidemic situation of national scope... ends at the end of November 24, 2021. It will not be extended. Because its preconditions no longer exist,” it says, adding, “The intervention-intensive catalog of measures... will no longer be applicable after the epidemic situation in the federal territory has ended. We will also remove the possibility, currently still provided for in the law... of state parliaments declaring this catalog applicable at the state level in accordance with the epidemic situation in individual states.”

That is black on white. Although the pandemic is

once again rampant, the SPD, FDP and Greens have agreed in their coalition talks, which are taking place in secret, that there will be virtually no measures to contain the virus in future. In doing so, they are provoking a situation like that of last winter, when the health care system almost collapsed due to rapidly rising case numbers, and tens of thousands died under terrible conditions in Germany alone.

Already, the situation is catastrophic. The nationwide seven-day incidence of new COVID-19 infections is rising steeply every day. According to the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), this figure increased on Friday to 139.2 per 100,000 inhabitants. The previous day it had been at 130.2, a week ago at 95.1. The death toll is also shooting up again. In the past four days, 489 people have died. That brought the official COVID-19 death toll in Germany to 95,606.

Hospitals are on the verge of overload. “We are in a critical pandemic situation,” the chief executive of the German Hospital Association, Gerald Gass, told Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland. He said the number of patients hospitalized with COVID-19 infections has risen sharply within a week. “If this trend continues, we will have 3,000 patients in intensive care again in just two weeks,” he warned. Currently, more than 1,800 people are in intensive care, and nearly 4,300 COVID-19 patients are in normal care, according to the DIVI intensive care registry.

The official justification given for ending the measures is the vaccination rate. In fact, only about two-thirds of the German population are fully vaccinated. Almost 30 million people, including all children under the age of 12, are completely defenceless against the virus. In addition, there is the danger of coronavirus infections breaking through the vaccine. From February until the end of last week, the RKI registered 117,763

probable vaccination breakthroughs. Nevertheless, according to the RKI, only 1.9 million people have received a third booster vaccination in Germany.

Despite vaccinations, the situation in Europe is worse than it was the same time last year as a result of the reckless reopening policy. Last week, 1.4 million COVID-19 cases were registered across Europe, 18 percent more than the previous week. Over the same period, 20,503 deaths were recorded, a 17 percent increase. This means that almost 1.3 million people have officially died from COVID-19 in Europe. And, as in the US and India, the actual death toll is almost certainly far higher.

The situation is currently most dramatic in Eastern Europe. Russia and Ukraine are setting new record levels of infection and death almost daily. In Russia, 1,163 people died of COVID-19 on Friday, and 648 in Ukraine. The three Baltic states are among the countries with the highest incidences worldwide. In Latvia, the number of new infections per 100,000 inhabitants in a week stood at 934.5 yesterday (Friday), in Estonia at 847.8 and in Lithuania at 747.

The situation is also out of control in Romania and Bulgaria, with incidences of around 500. In Romania, which has a population of around 19 million, more than 15,000 new infections were recorded on Saturday. Some 30 patients had to be transferred to neighbouring Hungary because of the overload of the health care system. The situation is so dramatic that the government in Bucharest has had to take some limited measures. As of Monday, masks will be compulsory throughout Romania, and larger events such as weddings and conferences will be banned in November.

The fact that the SPD-FDP-Green coalition is preparing to end all COVID-19 protections in such a situation exposes the class character of the incoming federal government. It is moving to implement the “profits before lives” policy even more aggressively than the SPD-CDU grand coalition it is replacing. Already, in their exploratory paper, the SPD, FDP and Greens pledged to respect the constitutional balanced-budget amendment and to increase the “competitiveness of Germany as a business location.”

The message is clear: The new government sees it as its job to squeeze the gigantic sums that flowed to the big banks and corporations under last spring’s COVID-19 emergency bailouts out of the working

class. Scientifically necessary measures to contain the pandemic—first and foremost, the closure of schools and nonessential businesses—are incompatible with this agenda.

Behind this ruthless policy of mass infection stand the geostrategic and economic interests of German imperialism, which is positioning itself against its international rivals and massively rearming. The exploratory paper states that the aim is to “ensure that Europe emerges economically strong from the pandemic on the basis of sound and sustainable public finances.” To this end, “increased cooperation between the national European armies” is declared essential, as is improving the German army’s equipment.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International (IFCI) have stressed from the outset that the struggle against the pandemic is not merely a medical question. Like the struggle against social inequality, war and dictatorship, it requires the independent political intervention of the working class on the basis of a socialist program.

In its election appeal for the federal elections, the *Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei* (Socialist Equality Party of Germany) stated: “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:

“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!”

The murderous policies of the ruling class in Germany and around the world, which threaten tens of millions more lives, underscore the urgency of a struggle based on this program.



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