Profit instead of science: The German government's COVID-19 policy

Peter Schwarz
16 November 2021

"The fourth wave of the coronavirus pandemic is building before our very eyes at full power. The daily rate of new cases has reached the highest level since the beginning of the pandemic, with a continuing rising trend. Seven hundred people die every week in our country, with a continuing rising trend. Every day of waiting costs human lives," warns a letter signed by 35 well-known professors and scientists addressed to Germany's federal and state governments.

Initiated by the Braunschweig virologist Melanie Brinkmann and the Cologne internist Michael Hallek, the letter was signed by the well-known intensive care physicians Christian Karagiannidis and Uwe Janssens, among others. Dozens of other scientists have since joined them.

The scientists leave no doubt that the disaster in Germany could have been prevented and that the government is responsible for thousands of COVID-19 deaths. "Once again, the time for early action has passed despite all warnings," they write, and express their "deep disappointment" about "the repeated negligent treatment of the well-being of the people who depend on the protection by the state."

For them it is "incomprehensible that decision-makers in this country have allowed such a situation, despite the existence of effective tools to stop the Sars-CoV-2 virus." Although scientists have clearly communicated "various relevant recommendations for action," these were "unfortunately only hesitantly, incompletely or not sustainably implemented." The letter added, "Urgently necessary infrastructure for pandemic control, such as contact tracing, testing and vaccination centres" have been dismantled.

In the fourth wave, "pandemic management is not succeeding in the ways that should be expected in light of Germany's prosperity and its technological and administrative capabilities." Instead, politicians "shift responsibility for crushing the fourth wave to the individual. Such an attitude is totally inappropriate during a national health crisis of this magnitude."

Scientists are not politicians. Their letter does not address the question of why the established parties ignored all the findings and warnings of science and instead accepted 5 million infected people and 100,000 COVID-19 deaths, the number of which threatens to double this winter. Instead, they appeal to the same politicians, whose irresponsibility they denounce in harsh words, to "fully meet their responsibilities" and to base their "decisions much more strongly than before on scientific findings."

But this will not happen. The systematic disregard for scientific knowledge by those responsible in the federal and state governments is neither a mistake nor a misunderstanding. It is the result of a policy that systematically subordinates the health and life of people to the profit interests of capital.

The principle of "profits before life" has determined the coronavirus policy of the governments from the beginning. Not only in Germany, but with very few exceptions—in particular China, and initially also New Zealand, Singapore and Australia, where the number of infected and dead remained very low—all governments have followed this brutal policy.

Lockdowns were only imposed when the intensive care units overflowed and working class opposition threatened to spiral out of control. As soon as bailouts were handed to the banks and big business, and the pandemic situation relented slightly, restrictions were lifted again despite urgent warnings from scientists. In Germany, there was never a lockdown at all for workplaces—one of the most important sources of infection. Schools were kept open after the first lockdown, despite the lack of protective measures, so that parents were available to return to the labour force. Young people were and are being deliberately infected, in spite of the devastating health consequences.

Combined with the billions in COVID-19 aid from the federal government, the government's pandemic policy led to an unprecedented orgy of enrichment. Many companies are posting record profits despite a drop in sales, the DAX has climbed from one record high to the next after two years of the pandemic, and the wealth of the 100 richest Germans rose by 19 percent to €722 billion. The working class is bearing the costs in the form of death, contamination, welfare cuts, real wage cuts and job losses.

The consequence of this policy is a fourth wave of the pandemic, which dwarfs all previous ones. The seven-day incidence, the average of the daily infections per 100,000 inhabitants, which was in the single-digit range at times in the summer, has reached a new record of 303 and continues to rise

© World Socialist Web Site

steeply. Sixteen districts now have an incidence of over 900. The front-runner is the district of Saxon Switzerland-Eastern Ore Mountains with 1,303. This means that 1.3 percent of the population was infected within a week.

The seven-day incidence rate is similarly high in Europe at 264 infections per 100,000 inhabitants. Slovenia is the front-runner with 1,058, followed by Croatia with 918 and Austria with 851.

The number of deaths is also rising exponentially again. In the past week, 1,159 people died of COVID-19 in Germany, 10 times as many as in the summer. The intensive care units in the east and south of the country are already overflowing.

Nevertheless, the Social Democrats, Greens and Free Democrats—the parties set to compose the incoming federal government—are stepping up the "profits before life" policy of the grand coalition before they have even formed a new government. On Thursday they intend to use their majority in the federal parliament, despite urgent warnings from doctors and scientists, to let the "epidemic situation of national scope" expire. This means that the containment of the pandemic will be left to the federal states, which are deprived of the ability to take necessary measures such as curfews, contact restrictions, school closings and vaccination mandates.

The chairman of the World Medical Association, Frank Ulrich Montgomery, called this decision "absurd" in view of the incidence rate of around 300. "The winter is going to be cold. It's up to us that it doesn't become bitter and deadly," he told the *Rheinische Post*. Anyone who said "no vaccination mandate and never again lockdown" did not understand the epidemiology of the virus, he added.

The situation in schools is particularly devastating. In some districts, the seven-day incidence among children and adolescents is now over 900 infections per 100,000 people. So far, only about half of those over 12 and none of those under 12 have been vaccinated. Seven million out of 11 million students have no protection against the virus. Hans-Peter Meidinger, President of the German Teachers' Association, recently warned of a "loss of control over the pandemic" in Germany's schools this winter.

Nevertheless, all politicians, led by Britta Ernst (SPD), the chairman of the Conference of Education Ministers and spouse of the designated Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz, insist that "schools remain open." In most schools, even in the second year of the pandemic, the most elementary safety measures are absent.

"I just can't understand why the schools are unprepared for the autumn and winter again," virologist Isabella Eckerle, who co-signed the scientists' letter, said in an interview with *Der Spiegel*. "There were so many warnings. And there are now many recommendations for protective measures in schools, the effectiveness of which has been proven in valid studies. The summer should have been used intensively for this." It "really hurts to watch how we slide back into a situation that is about to get out of control," she added.

The Socialist Equality Party (Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei, SGP) and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), of which the SGP is the German section, have explained from the start that the fight against the pandemic must not only take place on the medical front, but also and above all on the political and social front.

The virus can be defeated and eliminated. This requires a policy that is strictly based on scientific knowledge and deploys all available means—vaccinations, masks, lockdowns, school and factory closings, support for the affected children and families, etc.—as part of a coordinated strategy.

Such a policy faces fierce opposition from the global capitalist class and its henchmen in the mainstream parties, who oppose any measure that jeopardizes their profits and wealth. For this reason, the only way to fight the pandemic is to mobilize the working class. Overcoming the resistance of the ruling elite requires a socialist program that places the needs of society—especially the health and life of children—above the profit interests of capital.

The SGP and its international sister organizations have established the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to lead and coordinate the global fight against the pandemic. The *World Socialist Web Site* has also organized two webinars with leading scientific experts from around the world to forge an alliance between scientists and the working class. The last, of Oc tober 24, was seen by more than 10,000 people from over 100 countries.

Join the IWA-RFC today and take forward the global fight necessary to end the pandemic and save millions of lives around the world.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site