

Germany's incoming government vows to let COVID-19 run rampant

Peter Schwarz
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Germany's incoming government led by the Social Democrat Olaf Scholz, who is replacing the Christian Democrat Angela Merkel after 16 years as Federal Chancellor, has declared war on the working population before it is even in office.

When the so-called "traffic light coalition," consisting of the Social Democrats (SPD), Greens and Free Democrats (FDP), presented their government program on Wednesday, the number of COVID-19 deaths surpassed 100,000, according to the official count by the Robert Koch Institute. This gruesome coincidence had great symbolic power.

Most of these deaths would have been preventable had the government followed the advice of science and pursued the elimination of COVID-19 using all available means—vaccination, mass testing, contact tracing, lockdowns, closing all factories and schools, quarantine.

But the Merkel government, in consultation with Germany's state governments, made a conscious decision to sacrifice the health and lives of millions for the profits of the corporations. It only took action against the virus when the situation was about to explode, and then lifted the public health measures far too soon. Nonessential businesses were never closed at all. Schools remain open to this day, even though the virus is rampant among children and causes incalculable long-term damage.

While millions became infected, lost jobs and incomes, and performed superhuman efforts in hospitals and nursing homes, the corporate elite and super-rich gorged themselves during the pandemic. The fortunes of the 100 richest Germans alone rose from €606 billion to €722 billion in the first year of the pandemic.

The result is the current catastrophe. The number of new infections every day is increasing exponentially and was 76,000 on Wednesday, more than twice as high as at the height of the second and third waves. Desperate parents and teachers do not know how to protect children. Every day, 350 people are dying from COVID-19. The intensive care units are overcrowded and preparing for triage. Without drastic countermeasures, the number of fatalities will double to 200,000 by spring, according to expert estimates.

But the new government is acting even more inhumanely and criminally than the old one. A week ago, the SPD, Greens and FDP used their majority in parliament to end the COVID-19

emergency, the legal basis for lockdowns and similar measures.

Scholz's appearance in front of the press on Wednesday was reminiscent of the notorious Emperor Nero, who fiddled while Rome was on fire. Scholz and his coalition partners praised and celebrated each other, but apart from a general appeal for vaccinations and the establishment of a crisis team in the Chancellery, they did not propose a single measure against the pandemic.

Even mainstream media outlets commented at the government's indifference to mass death. "The current decisions are like announcing in a flood disaster that more swimming instructors would be hired and a couple of armbands and bath ducks distributed," commented the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

Contempt for the life and health of the working class pervades the government program, which we analysed on the WSWs. Every topic and every question is approached from the standpoint of profit optimization, the geopolitical interests of German imperialism and the suppression of popular opposition.

The program strives for a German great power policy, advocates nuclear deterrence and joins the US war front against China and Russia. It provides for an accelerated rearmament of the armed forces, police and secret services. It retains the debt brake, which prevents governments from borrowing for public spending, and categorically rules out tax increases for the rich. It draws inspiration from the notorious Agenda 2010 imposed by the the red-green government of Gerhard Schröder and develops its attacks on wages, social rights and pensions even further.

After Schröder's resignation in 2005, the SPD continued this policy as a junior partner of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union. Scholz himself was Merkel's vice chancellor and finance minister for the past three and a half years. Now the Greens are also returning to the federal government.

The Greens were founded in the early 1980s by participants in the 1968 student protests. They gathered former Maoists, anarchists, young socialists, opponents of nuclear power and peace activists under the banner of environmental protection. What they all had in common was their rejection of Marxism and the working class based on the theories of the Frankfurt

School and postmodernism.

In the 1998 federal election campaign, the Greens presented themselves as pacifists and “leftists.” But no sooner were they in the federal government than they showed their true colors. The former squatter and street fighter Joschka Fischer, as Foreign Minister, organized the German army’s first postwar foreign military intervention in Yugoslavia. The social attacks on working people enforced under the Agenda 2010 also enjoyed the unreserved support of the Greens.

Now the Greens are returning to the federal government as an aggressive war and austerity party. They also subordinate climate protection, their trademark, to the interests of the corporations and banks. On closer inspection, their climate protection plans turn out to be a gigantic subsidy and enrichment program for the economy that falls far short of the urgently needed climate targets. The party is based on the wealthy, urban middle class, who have shifted sharply to the right under the impact of growing class tensions and are now allied with the open representatives of finance capital in the FDP.

This has created a situation where open class conflict becomes inevitable. The mood of the masses is far to the left of official politics. The anger over the murderous COVID-19 policy and the resistance to wage cuts, increasing workloads and layoffs are growing and will continue to increase in view of an inflation rate of almost 6 percent. Significant strikes and protests have already occurred on the railways, in hospitals, in the public sector and at numerous steel companies.

These moods no longer find any expression in the official parliamentary system. There is no established party that even remotely represents the interests of the workers. In the federal parliament, there are three right-wing opposition parties, the CDU, CSU and Alternative for Germany, but no party that is nominally to the left of the traffic light coalition—other than the rump that remains of the Left Party. The Left Party fully supports the federal government’s policies. It governs in four federal states in alliance with the SPD and the Greens.

This situation is not limited to Germany. All over the world, workers are learning that the nominally left parties and unions stand on the other side of the barricades and stab them in the back. In Greece, the pseudo-left Syriza implemented the Troika’s drastic austerity program. In Spain, the Socialist Party (PSOE) and Podemos are pursuing a murderous COVID-19 policy and attacking metal workers in Cadiz with riot police. In Britain, the Labor Party under Keir Starmer is trying to outdo the Tories from the right. In the US, the pseudo-left Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) supports President Biden, who in turn embraces the Republicans as they drift towards fascism.

As a result of this criminal policy, Europe has become the epicentre of the pandemic. The WHO warned on Tuesday that the number of reported deaths in Europe will rise from the current 1.5 million to 2.2 million by the spring of next year if current trends continue, which means that 700,000 additional

deaths will take place.

The eruption of social struggle by the working class is inevitable under these conditions. But these have to be prepared and require a political perspective. To this end, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) must be built as the new political leadership of the working class.

The SGP is the only party to oppose the cartel of mainstream parties and unions, insisting that the pandemic can only be overcome through the independent mobilization of the international working class on the basis of a socialist program.

The ruling elite knows and fears the power of a socialist perspective. That is the reason why Germany’s secret service, the Verfassungsschutz, is trying to silence the SGP by denouncing and monitoring the party as “a left-wing extremist” organisation, and why the Berlin Administrative Court gave its stamp of approval to this attack on freedom of expression.

On May 1, the ICFI called for the formation of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) in order to, as its founding statement declared, “initiate a global counteroffensive of the working class against the murderous policies of the capitalist ruling class and their governments” and to create a way “to coordinate their struggles in different workplaces, industries and countries in opposition to the ruling class and the corporatist unions.”

The ICFI has launched the Global Workers Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic to examine the disastrous response by governments, corporations and the media to the pandemic, and to uncover the political and economic forces and interests behind the policies that have claimed millions of lives around the world.

We call upon all WSWS readers to support the IWA-RFC and the Global Workers Inquest, and to join the SGP.



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