

Chancellor-designate Olaf Scholz and Germany's federal states reject necessary pandemic restrictions

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Despite the fact that infections are running out of control in Germany and the highly contagious Omicron variant is spreading, governments at the federal and state level refuse to take the necessary measures to contain COVID-19. They are aggressively pursuing the “profits before lives” policies that have already resulted in more than 100,000 deaths in Germany alone and are creating an ever-expanding catastrophe. Currently, about 60,000 people in Germany become infected every day with close to 500 dying on Monday.

Apparently, this is not yet going far enough for the ruling class. After the federal and state governments deliberated on the pandemic on Tuesday, not a single concrete measure against the mass deaths was announced. There was not even a press conference. Chancellor-designate Olaf Scholz (Social Democratic Party, SPD) and the federal states led by the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) merely proposed a general vaccination requirement, which the next Chancellor wants to implement by the end of February.

Speaking to Bild-TV, Scholz spoke out firmly against lockdowns and school closures, stressing, “It’s currently mainly about this measure with vaccination and boosters.”

The focus of the outgoing and incoming governments on vaccination as virtually the only response is criminal for several reasons. The vaccines are a powerful weapon against COVID-19, but only in conjunction with all other protective measures. As a result of Germany’s low vaccination rate of 68 percent, about 25 million people, including all children under 12, are virtually without any protection. Only just under 11 percent of the population have received the necessary booster inoculation.

Internationally, the situation is even more desperate. With a vaccination rate of 42.7 percent, the vast majority of the world’s population—around 4.5 billion people—are not fully vaccinated. What is more, a strategy that relies solely on vaccination is producing new, even more contagious viral mutations, potentially undermining any progress made through vaccination.

On Tuesday, head of US biotechnology company Moderna, Stéphane Bancel, warned of a “significant decline” in the protective efficacy of currently available vaccines against Omicron. “I don’t think the efficacy is in any case at the same level as against the Delta variant,” he told the *Financial Times*. The large number of mutations on the spike protein that the virus

uses to infect human cells, and the rapid spread of Omicron in South Africa, indicated that current vaccines would need to be modified. This could “take several months.”

There is no doubt that the Omicron variant is already rampant in Europe, spreading rapidly like the Delta variant before it. Dutch researchers on Tuesday discovered the variant in samples older than any previously known cases. After Belgium, the United Kingdom, Germany, Denmark and the Czech Republic, France also confirmed the first cases yesterday. In Germany, additional cases were reported in Baden-Württemberg (4), Bavaria (15) and Saxony (1).

Despite this dramatic development and demands by scientists and the vast majority of the population to finally act, the ruling class refuses to take the necessary measures. Even the decisions that may be taken at a conference of state premiers scheduled for Thursday are not remotely adequate. According to media reports, they merely involve some additional contact restrictions for the unvaccinated, expansion of the “2G” rule (vaccinated or recovered) in retail outlets, and restrictions on major events and food service.

Comprehensive lock-downs—especially for schools and non-essential businesses—that would be necessary to significantly contain and ultimately even eliminate the virus are vehemently opposed by all parties in the Bundestag (federal parliament) and the trade unions. “The fact that mass events are taking place while schools are being closed, that’s not on. Everything must be done to ensure that educational institutions remain open,” wrote the Education and Science Union (GEW) on Twitter on Tuesday.

At the same time, representatives of the incoming “traffic light” coalition (SPD, Greens and FDP) reacted angrily to the Supreme Court’s ruling that curfews and school closures are perfectly compatible with the constitution. “We would have liked a different result,” said Marco Buschmann, director of the FDP parliamentary group, who is slated to be the future justice minister. FDP vice chairman Wolfgang Kubicki called the ruling “disappointing.”

Only a few days ago, the traffic light parties ended the “epidemic situation of national scope” and thus eliminated the legal basis for uniform nationwide protective measures. To justify this, they had repeatedly invoked the narrative of the extreme right, denouncing protective measures as an attack on democratic rights allegedly incompatible with the constitution.

In reality, it has long been clear which reactionary interests are driving the homicidal pandemic policies. In their coalition agreement, the traffic light coalition partners pledge, among other things, to “increase Germany’s competitiveness as a business location [and] to reactivate the debt brake.” In other words, the SPD, Greens and FDP want to squeeze the hundreds of billions that have flowed to the big corporations and banks as part of the coronavirus bailout packages back out of the population as part of a general attack on workers.

A second factor is the geostrategic and economic interests of German imperialism. In this respect, too, the coalition agreement does not mince words. It includes an entire chapter entitled “Germany’s Responsibility for Europe and the World,” which advocates a greater role as a world power and the massive rearmament of the Bundeswehr (armed forces).

Germany was aware of “the global responsibility it bears as the world’s fourth-largest economy” and the coalition would “form a government that defines German interests in the light of European interests,” it states. The aim is to “establish its own ability to act in the global context and to be less dependent and vulnerable in important strategic areas, such as energy supply, health, raw material imports and digital technology.”

This is primarily a military issue for the ruling class. The coalition agreement envisions, among other things, the procurement of combat drones, massive increases in defence spending, and new war missions. At one point it says, “The Bundeswehr must be reliably equipped in the best possible way in terms of personnel, materiel and finance in accordance with its mission and tasks. The structures of the Bundeswehr must be made more effective and efficient with the aim of increasing operational readiness.”

This also applies to the deployment of the Bundeswehr within Germany. Major General Carsten Breuer, the commander of the Bundeswehr’s Territorial Tasks Command, reportedly also attended the meeting of the federal and state governments. The two-star general, who has been involved with numerous foreign deployments and was the lead author of the current white paper, will head the future federal government’s Coronavirus Crisis Staff directly from the Chancellor’s Office. The WSWS warned after Breuer’s appointment:

The decision to put an active Bundeswehr general in charge of the COVID-19 crisis team permits only one conclusion: the traffic light coalition does not regard the pandemic as a medical problem, but rather as a security issue.

The purpose of the crisis team is not to protect the population from the virus, but to protect the government from the population. The incoming German government is preparing to declare a state of emergency in order to suppress resistance to its policy based on sacrificing countless lives to ensure increased profits and share prices. It is a policy that plays Russian roulette with the health of an entire generation of children and adolescents.

To save lives and stop the ruling class’s course toward dictatorship and war, the working class must intervene. It must organize itself into independent rank-and-file committees and implement the necessary emergency measures. Only in this way can the pandemic be ended on the basis of a global strategy of elimination.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Parties are fighting for the following measures, whose implementation necessarily amounts to a confrontation with the ruling class and the capitalist system and requires a socialist perspective:

- All non-essential production must be immediately stopped until the disease is brought under control. All workers must receive 100 percent pay either for remote work or, when remote work is impossible, to fully compensate them for lost income.

- All self-employed tradesmen and tradeswomen, contractors and small business owners must receive full compensation for all lost earnings resulting from the halting of non-essential production.

- All in-person education must be immediately suspended and replaced with remote instruction. Billions of dollars must be made available to ensure that every child and adolescent is provided with his or her own modern laptop and high-speed internet service, along with a safe, spacious and comfortable learning environment at home.

- The public health system must be massively expanded, and tens of thousands of public health coordinators hired. Everyone infected with the disease, or exposed to it, must have immediate and timely access to public health staff, nurses and doctors who can monitor their symptoms and help them safely quarantine without infecting others.

- Trillions of dollars must be allocated for the creation of a global vaccination program. The distribution of vaccines must be administered by scientists and public health experts with a mandate to protect the whole world.



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