

# Germany: Federal and state governments give the pandemic free rein

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Despite record infection rates and the spread of the highly contagious Omicron mutation, federal and state governments in Germany continue unabated the policy of “profits before lives,” willingly sacrificing tens of thousands of people in the interest of the financial markets. This was reiterated by the conclusions of Thursday’s state-federal Conference of Minister Presidents.

The infection rate in Germany is now so high that it can hardly be calculated. By official figures more than 70,000 people are infected with the coronavirus every day. However, since every fifth PCR test is presently positive and laboratories are stretched to over 80 percent capacity, the true case numbers are bound to be far higher.

In its weekly report, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI, the German agency responsible for disease control and prevention) writes that “it is to be feared that there will be a further increase in severe illnesses and deaths and that the available intensive medical treatment capacities will be exceeded.” The situation at the clinics is already catastrophic.

There are currently 4,690 coronavirus patients receiving intensive care, a number that has more than doubled in a mere month. Over half of these patients are on artificial respiration. Many hospitals have reached their limit and ambulances must increasingly approach multiple clinics before finding intensive care capacity. Patients are being airlifted across the country to receive care. Three out of four German hospitals are postponing scheduled surgeries.

Daily deaths likewise remain dramatically high. At around 400 deaths a day, the number surpasses that of last February. And since the number of deaths lags new infection counts, even higher death tolls are anticipated in the coming days.

Concurrently, every political party present at the joint federal-state conference displayed its resolve to take no

action to stop mass death. The main focus of the resolution they adopted is on vaccination. Vaccination capacities are to be expanded, compulsory vaccination is to be discussed, and “2G” (vaccinated or recovered), and “2G Plus” (vaccinated or recovered plus current negative test result) regimens are to be introduced nationwide.

Vaccination is an important weapon in combatting the pandemic, but its effectiveness depends on being part of a global public health strategy aimed at containing and ultimately eliminating the virus. Without such a strategy, vaccinations cannot stop mass deaths in the near term, nor can they eliminate the risk of new mutations developing that undermine vaccination itself.

The new Omicron variant is a case in point. On Tuesday morning, the *Financial Times* published an interview with the head of vaccine maker Moderna, Stéphane Bancel, in which he warned, “There is no world, I think, where [the effectiveness] is the same level . . . we had with Delta.” He added, “I think it’s going to be a material drop. I just don’t know how much because we need to wait for the data. But all the scientists I’ve talked to . . . are like, ‘This is not going to be good.’”

Moreover, vaccine-conferred protection drops off sharply after five-six months, even with the Delta variant. According to the RKI, only just over 10 million Germans (12.5 percent) have received the necessary booster vaccination. The consequences are dire: even now, roughly 46 percent of all coronavirus deaths in Germany are vaccine breakthroughs.

Despite this obvious risk of contagion, even among the vaccinated, governments continue to condone mass gatherings. As long as only 50 percent of capacity is used, up to 5,000 spectators continue to be allowed at indoor events, and as many as 15,000 for events held outdoors. Clubs and discos do not have to close until the local incidence level reaches 350 cases per 100,000 people. Private parties are allowed at even higher incidence levels

if the number of participants is limited to 50 people indoors and 200 people outdoors.

The criminality of this policy is particularly evident in the context of schools. While schools have been drivers of the pandemic since the beginning, the only regulation passed Thursday is the “reinstatement” of mandatory masking for all grade levels. However, since the vast majority of schools are already implementing this, this regulation will have virtually no impact on the worsening incidence of infection among students. The incidence among 5- to 14-year-olds has been in the four-digit range for over a week.

Millions of unvaccinated students thus continue to be exposed to the virus with virtually no protection. The vast majority of classrooms are not equipped with air filters, so windows must be opened for ventilation even in winter, if they can be opened at all. Due to overfilled classes, it is impossible to maintain social distancing in the classroom. Those who have already been vaccinated often don’t even have the right to be tested at school, further assisting the spread of the virus.

Last week, the number of infected students increased by more than 20,000 to about 93,500, in addition to 7,300 coronavirus cases among teachers. In total, there have been officially more than 1,540 school outbreaks in the last four weeks. The real number is still significantly higher because, according to the RKI, the last two weeks cannot yet be evaluated due to delays in reporting. In the state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, the number of infections at schools doubled in the past week. The number of confirmed COVID-19 deaths in under-20s rose to 35.

Despite the dangers and incalculable consequences for an entire generation, the ruling class persists in its policy of mass contagion in the interest of capitalist profiteering.

Earlier this week, the incoming federal education minister, Bettina Stark-Watzinger (FDP), again spoke out against school closures and made it clear that this is the course of all Bundestag (federally represented) parties. “We have not provided for school closures in the Infection Protection Act, even for now, because there is a cross-party consensus that this is not the right way to go,” she said in the TV program “ntv Frühstart.” She rejected even minimal measures such as an early start to the Christmas vacation.

The unions are particularly vehement in their advocacy of open schools. “Now in the fourth wave, educational institutions must be unconditionally supported if we want to keep them open as long as possible,” said the

chairwoman of the Education and Science Workers’ Union (GEW), Maike Finnen, after the Minister Presidents’ Conference. By Tuesday the GEW had published a press release titled “Keeping schools open as long as possible.”

To save lives and end the pandemic, workers and youth must independently intervene in the political process and enforce the following emergency measures :

- All non-essential production 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 receive full compensation for all lost earnings resulting from the halting of non-essential production.

- All in-person education 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 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 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.

In fighting for these demands, workers and youth must unite in independent Rank-and-File Committees for Safe Workplaces and Education. This Wednesday at 8 p.m., the German Rank-and-File Committees Network will hold its next online meeting to discuss the political and organizational tasks needed to fight the pandemic. Register and invite interested colleagues, friends and acquaintances to this important event.



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