

# Students, parents and educators in Germany condemn the reckless policy of deliberate infection with coronavirus

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13 January 2022

The decision by the federal and state governments to expose children and young people in unsafe nurseries and schools to the highly contagious and dangerous Omicron variant and to massively curtail quarantine rules is being met with anger, incomprehension and growing combativeness among workers and young people on social media.

A nursery worker who has already survived a COVID-19 illness writes on Twitter: “My booster vaccination is being used to keep my mouth shut and just keep me looking after unvaccinated kids—no matter if there’s Omicron in the family or cases in my group.” A prospective teacher responds, “As a mother, I feel the same way as you and many others do. The fact that our children are being sold out for the economy when one knows better disgusts me beyond measure.”

Berlin’s mayor, Franziska Giffey (Social Democratic Party, SPD), once again openly expressed the economic motives behind the herd immunity policy following the federal-state leaders conference on Friday. She said it had been decided to “do everything possible to keep schools open ... because people need good childcare so they can go about their work.” “Closing schools,” Giffey said, was therefore “no longer even up for debate.”

The fact that the government so unscrupulously sacrifices the welfare of the most vulnerable sections of society to the profit interests of big business reveals its right-wing character to millions of people. A lawyer, who is also the mother of a nursery-age and a primary school child, writes on Twitter: “I would never have thought that something like this could happen. ‘Looking after’ children is now just a means to an end so the parents can go to work.”

Regarding Giffey’s statement, “Chrisse” explains: “That I as a judge in this country have to experience that my children are not protected by this country and—even worse—that I am not allowed to protect my children myself (compulsory in-person teaching) does something to me.” A headmistress from Baden-Württemberg adds, “I feel the same way. School starts again and I can’t protect the children entrusted to me as I should. It puts a tremendous strain on me.”

In several cities—including Bremen and Berlin—rallies and protests against the deliberate infection of children and for safe education are taking place in the face of four-digit coronavirus incidence levels.

In Austria, young people and their relatives are already at particularly acute risk as the government openly advocates sending children and adolescents into unsafe face-to-face classes even when the highest incidence levels are being recorded.

“Infection is not inevitable,” says Mati Randow, a pupil representative at a Viennese high school, whose viral tweet expresses the widespread sentiment among students: “It is an active decision not to stop it [infection]. I don’t see how this is compatible with Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child—the right to the enjoyment of the

highest attainable standard of health.” He continues:

Nor do I see how anyone can seriously think that mental health will be protected by becoming infected. Sorry, but is that OK? There is probably nothing that stresses us more psychologically than the knowledge that we will be deliberately infected with this virus and then must be afraid of Long Covid for months. There is widespread public acceptance that we should all be infected now. Meanwhile, anger is growing, and incomprehension is growing among us.

Moreover, according to Mati, “We continue to have all the ‘usual’ problems in everyday school life: Enormously high pressure to perform due to constant schoolwork, social injustice and mental problems due to the school system.” The infection of all pupils accepted by the Austrian government is “very obviously the strategy of trying to lower the tolerance threshold in the population with an irresponsible crowbar,” he says.

As part of the Global Workers’ Inquiry into the COVID-19 pandemic, the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to parents and educators about the responsibility of the ruling class for the immeasurable suffering that the virus is causing millions of people. Tanja R. from near Aachen told us:

My daughter has now had her booster jab, but even that does not seem to offer any security. I find it impossible how children’s health is being played with. At the moment, I just feel powerless in the face of the political system, and I am afraid every day that she will bring coronavirus home from school. I am chronically ill, have a very weak immune system and am a single parent. My daughter’s father is already dead. I cannot understand why, as a minimum, compulsory attendance is not suspended so that parents who can look after their child at home are allowed to do so. It simply lacks any logic and seems to me like a pure demonstration of power on the part of the politicians.

“I think the deliberate mass infection with Omicron is absolutely irresponsible,” says Silke Aretz, an activist for safe education and support for vulnerable families. “Apart from the people who will die because of it, there will be an immense increase in Long Covid, and I think it’s disgusting that legally, you hardly have any possibility to protect yourself from it.” Silke adds:

Testing is done in our classrooms. Breakfast and sports take place indoors and without a mask. Our municipality has declared air filters unnecessary. My son, whom I don't send to school, is being denied a recommendation to transfer to secondary school.

The fact that the government allowed the declaration of a national pandemic emergency to expire and wrote into the Infection Protection Act that the pandemic will end on 19 March this year is, in my opinion, unparalleled in terms of irresponsibility. Just like the fact that [state education minister] Gebauer and consorts are not implementing the Robert Koch Institute's guideline for schools but ignoring it.

This guideline, "for the prevention and control of SARS-CoV-2 transmission in schools," recommends coordinated protective measures such as mask-wearing and testing rules, the general installation of filtering systems, as well as small learning groups, consistent cohort formation and contact tracing—recommendations that are ignored by the responsible politicians.

Twitter user Klara points to the shameless double standards of government politicians, who throughout the pandemic have always been careful to take privileged protective measures for themselves: "On the same day that his government justifies compulsory attendance in classes by saying that Omicron poses no danger to most children, [Schleswig-Holstein's] Prime Minister Daniel Günther goes into quarantine in a hotel room. Reason: He wants to protect his children from precisely this virus.

Karina N. from North Rhine-Westphalia also spoke to the WSWS about this two-faced policy in the pandemic:

The hypocrisy of the politicians who prefer to meet online or in several halls because of the contagious Omicron variant is quite bad. They are all adults who can get boosters, wear masks and are allowed to be tested. The same people say that children—some unvaccinated and only wearing flimsy surgical masks because nothing fits properly—should get just two rapid tests a week, and only if they are not vaccinated. They stand in the [well-ventilated] plenary hall and in the Bundestag [federal parliament] and say that children must sit in overcrowded buses every day and in classrooms with 30 people without air filters.

In their eyes, children probably don't enjoy equal rights. And even if children die less often: Long Covid is not a nice prospect. Even worse, is that they can bring it home—where normal people sit, just like politicians. It's just that non-politicians seem to be worth much less, and previously ill people are even less worthy individuals.

What is happening here is, for me, against every human right: the right to self-determination, the right to personal integrity, even against human dignity—to be crammed into a classroom like sheep and even to have to put relatives at risk because even vaccination does not protect against Long Covid. It's so mendacious and double standards.

Those who seriously wanted to protect themselves and their families, Karina concludes, are downright treated "as criminals" by politicians and the authorities. Many parents, on the other hand, believe it is the politicians of all parties who are committing a social crime against children, young people and their relatives. Jana B. from Bremen, for example, writes:

I am simply appalled and despairing. Our children have no lobby, that shows once again. Politics is being carried out over dead bodies, everything for profit. One only feels abandoned and deceived—or to put it more bluntly, I wish Ms. Gebauer and consorts receive their comeuppance for this outrage against our children as soon as possible!

Nadine from Lower Saxony asks: "What more can be said about the forced infection by politicians? We parents have been deprived of any rights to keep our children healthy. Since the beginning of the pandemic, it has been clear that the economy takes precedence over human life—but to drag children into it now is simply disgusting. When you no longer feel safe in your own country—our politicians are simply negligent and absolutely out of place in their posts.

Heike L. from Bavaria, who suffers from auto-immune disease, writes:

I find it unbelievably cruel that the ministers of education of this country are sending our children into a disaster with their eyes wide open. There are still too few empirical data regarding Omicron and our children are now to be used to gain them. Severe illnesses and Long Covid complications are being accepted.

Before the Christmas holidays, there would have been the opportunity and necessity to make children fit for distance learning—which will come anyway due to the expected shortfalls in teachers. Immediate lockdown—schools should not have been open at all after Christmas.

Referring to the Bavarian state government's decision to no longer test nursery children, Heike says: "Educators are being totally burnt out."

WSWS also spoke to Johanna, a nursery educator from the Rhine-Main area. Referring to the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) "Open Letter" to the working class, she says, "I have no problems with your socialist perspective—I'm the granddaughter of a resistance fighter in the Third Reich."

Johanna has already witnessed several coronavirus deaths in her immediate circle. Regarding the WSWS's call to end the pandemic in 2022 and save lives, she says: "In the last few months, I have unfortunately had to realise that our concerns are not well received, especially among the management [of the institutions]. Their attitude, unfortunately, does not match my views on the pandemic, especially on open nurseries operating normally." As Johanna further reports, a colleague with severe pre-existing conditions was forced to be on duty with the children on site:

This woman contracted a severe illness from the virus despite being vaccinated and wearing a mask. She has not recovered to date and suffers from severe lung problems—the whole gamut. And now Omicron is sweeping through nurseries, for God's sake. It is well known that many nursery educators belong to the vulnerable groups. Nobody thinks about them. Yet it has been scientifically proven that chronically ill people who work with 20 or more children every day fall ill very easily. Besides, what are we doing to the children themselves? They can get Long Covid, their whole lives might be ruined. And all this just to keep the economy going!

The reports and statements from students, parents and educators make clear that the responsibility for the safety and well-being of children—and

society as a whole—can no longer be left in the hands of capitalist politicians. Ending the pandemic is a question of power that can only be decided by a relentless political struggle. The Network of Rank-and-File Committees for Safe Education has therefore called an emergency meeting for 7 p.m. on Tuesday, January 18, to fight for the closure of schools and nurseries as part of a global strategy to eliminate coronavirus.



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