

Berlin: SPD-Left Party-Greens coalition Senate pursues mass infection

Carola Kleinert, Markus Salzmann
3 February 2022

Coronavirus infection rates are exploding across Germany. On Tuesday, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI, the German agency responsible for disease control and prevention) reported 208,000 new cases. The incidence (cases per 100,000 inhabitants in the last seven days) is now 1,227 nationwide, with experts assuming massive under-reporting. In total, over ten million people have been infected with the coronavirus in Germany since the beginning of 2020. The number of fatalities exceeds 118,000.

The capital Berlin is a hotspot, where over half a million people have been infected with the virus since the start of the pandemic, of whom over 4,100 have died. With a seven-day incidence of around 1,700 per 100,000 people, Berlin, along with Bremen and Hamburg, is the city that has suffered the most from the government's ruthless mass infection policy.

In particular districts of Berlin the incidence is even higher. Tempelhof-Schöneberg had the highest incidence on Monday, with 2,912 per 100,000, followed by Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg (2,577), Neukölln (2,571), Berlin-Mitte (2,417), Spandau (2,129) and Pankow (2,049). Just in the last seven days, there have been over 66,700 new infections, and in the first four weeks of the year some 193,370 people have been infected in Berlin.

As is the case nationwide, the real infection rates are many times higher. Health offices and PCR test laboratories have been completely overloaded with the evaluation of the test results and daily reporting to the RKI. At the same time, the so-called first-contact persons of infected persons have been sent into quarantine ever more belatedly, if at all.

Berlin's health senator Ulrike Gote (Greens) openly formulated the Berlin state government's agenda: "Everyone will get infected!" She shamelessly declared that all measures countering this had no hope of success: "Contact tracing is done with the aim of mitigating the wave, of breaking chains of infection," Gote said. This is "simply no longer possible."

While Gote had already introduced a motion to alter the coronavirus testing strategy at the conference of health ministers last Monday because of "overload of laboratory capacities," the same day the Berlin Senate fueled the fire they are supposedly fighting. The Red-Green-Red coalition (Social Democrats, Greens, and Left Party) became the first state

government to officially discontinue contact tracing. This means that contact persons (including those in schools and kindergartens) will no longer be sent to quarantine. PCR tests are now only to be given to people who work in health professions or have a particular risk of contracting the disease.

The SPD, the Greens and the Left Party are mercilessly implementing the policy in Berlin that the federal coalition and Health Minister Karl Lauterbach (SPD) have proclaimed at the federal level. Lauterbach declared on Friday at a press conference with RKI head Lothar Wieler that the government has the pandemic "well under control," while at the same time noting that the number of infections will soon rise to at least 400,000 per day.

What he means by this is obvious: the contagion of the population in the interest of the economy is proceeding according to plan, and no matter how high the infection and death figures become, no mitigating actions will be taken.

In Berlin, the mass infection policy of the governing parties has pushed the pandemic through schools at a devastating rate. At the end of last week, the seven-day incidence among 10-to-14-year-olds, i.e., those in grades 5 to 8, was around 4,231 per 100,000. Among elementary school students in grades 1 to 4 (ages five to nine), the figure was around 3,950, and among 15-to-19-year-olds, 2,905. Currently, according to official figures, five percent of students as well as teachers in Berlin schools are infected.

At the beginning of last week, the Berlin Senate grudgingly suspended compulsory school attendance until the end of February, deciding this course of action virtually overnight and without any concept for its implementation. In doing so, however, the state government is merely trying to take the edge off the growing resistance of teachers, parents and students in the face of the extreme infection rates in classrooms. The suspension of compulsory attendance does not in any way signify a departure from mass infection policies, since schools will remain open.

When governing Mayor Franziska Giffey (SPD), a right-wing Social Democrat, sells her measures as responding to the "concern" of a "number of parents" who "would like to make their own decision about whether to send their children to school," it is the height of cynicism. The overwhelming

majority of the working population is forced to attend work. Education Senator Astrid-Sabine Busse (SPD) smugly remarked, “Most children will come. And working parents are happy that school is open.”

Mass infection is worsening the situation in hospitals in particular. Because of the huge increase in the number of cases, combined with an extreme staff shortage, care can only be provided through additional work, overtime and shortened quarantine.

The situation in clinics nationwide is catastrophic because of the explosive infection rates in schools, workplaces and hospitals. In Berlin hospitals, about 1,280 COVID patients were hospitalized last week, of whom almost 200 required intensive medical care, 131 of them needing artificial respiration to remain alive.

The Berlin government’s “warning signal” for incident rates is set to red, as is the hospitalization warning. The latter warning turns red at a hospitalization rate of eight per 100,000 inhabitants; the latest reported value of this indicator was 19.9. The utilization of intensive care beds by coronavirus patients stands at 16.2 percent; the warning indicator turns red at 20 percent for this metric.

According to a report in the *taz* newspaper, Giffey was asked at a press conference last week whether the “filling up of hospitals” in combination with increasing absences of medical and nursing staff was not problematic. In her own contemptuous and arrogant manner, she lackadaisically stated that it was “short of the mark to speak of normal wards being full.”

Last week, doctors from eight Berlin clinics, including the state-owned clinics Charité and Vivantes as well as the Helios clinics and the Immanuel Clinic in Bernau-Barnim, issued an urgent letter to the Berlin health senator and federal health minister Lauterbach.

“Due to the current misfortunes,” there is an “acute danger for children and adolescents in the state of Berlin,” they warn, demanding “immediate measures to end the emergency, restore security of care and relieve staff.”

The state of emergency in Berlin’s clinics, which threaten to collapse under the Omicron wave, is a direct consequence of the policies of the SPD and the Left Party since 2001. The entire health care system has been “pruned to the bone,” as emergency room pediatricians at the Virchow Clinic denounced last fall.

While for two years now doctors and nurses have made continual sacrifices in dealing with the consequences of the government’s coronavirus policy, the Senate parties, with the help of the Verdi union, strangled strikes for better working conditions and wages at the state-owned clinics of Charité and Vivantes last year, perpetuating the catastrophic conditions.

In metropolitan Berlin, the connection between the pandemic and social conditions is particularly stark. Infection rates are particularly high in working-class and migrant neighborhoods.

Poor housing conditions, language barriers, and a lack of a coordinated vaccination campaign are causing even more rampant spread and greater consequences for countless families.

One in four children in Berlin exposed to contagion in opened schools and kindergartens comes from a household affected by or at risk of poverty. Overall, the poverty rate in Berlin is 16.4 percent, and 583,000 people (not including children) have to live on meager “Hartz IV” social security benefits.

While the ten richest Berliners have assets of almost 22 billion euros—equivalent to about two-thirds of the capital’s entire annual budget—hundreds of thousands of families are struggling ever more desperately with insufficient income and rising prices.

Under pandemic conditions, some 3,000 people in Berlin continue to lose their homes every year, as David Schuster of the alliance “Preventing Eviction” (Zwangsräumung verhindern) explained in an interview with the *taz*. State-owned housing companies mercilessly implement forced evictions.

Last September, a large majority of the population voted for the expropriation of large real estate corporations because of crushingly high rents. However, Giffey made it clear even before she took office that she would not accept the citizens’ petition under any circumstances. On the contrary, she is now planning a round table with predatory real estate investors (“sharks”) to further facilitate their access to the housing market.

The Left Party plays a particularly poisonous role in these affairs. Katja Kipping, the former chairwoman of the Left Party, was named a social senator in order to push through policies in the interests of the banks and the super-rich against growing resistance. She is a strong advocate of a coalition with the Hartz IV parties SPD and Greens. In 2020, she called for a “strategy to stop the virus” in a guest article in the *Tagesspiegel*; now she is a government minister and forerunner of the brutal policy of mass infection.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact