

Students in Germany go on strike against herd immunity policies

Marianne Arens, Gregor Link
13 February 2022

On Friday, some 150 students in Frankfurt am Main took a clear stand against the profits-before-lives policy of the federal and state governments in the coronavirus pandemic.

Several local groups of the youth organisation “Fridays for the Future” called a demonstration under the slogan #WirWerdenLaut (#We’reGettingLoud). Students from across the region took part in the strike, marching from the Alte Oper through the city centre to City Hall.

On Twitter, the organisers declared: “We demand that the deliberate mass infection in schools be stopped! Coronavirus policy in schools can’t go on like this!”

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to participants about a statement from the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) supporting the protests and school strikes for safe education. In it, the IYSSE calls for the formation of independent rank-and-file committees of students and educators to take the struggle into their own hands and demand the immediate implementation of necessary safety measures. This includes an immediate end to the government’s “herd immunity plan,” combined with comprehensive measures to protect students from COVID, and investments in education.

Elli, a student at Frankfurt’s Musterschule secondary school, warmly welcomed the IYSSE statement:

The measures at schools are not enough to fight the pandemic. It would be best to send everyone home for a few weeks until the situation calms down. I myself contracted COVID-19 just over a fortnight ago—and at school, despite strictly following all measures and keeping my distance.

Although 40 students and three teachers were recently sick or quarantined at the same time, the school was leaving testing to the students’ own initiative, she said.

There is no compulsory testing and not even half get tested regularly. This is no way to prevent infections and outbreaks at school. There are no distancing rules. In principle, they tell us: “If you open the window every 15 minutes, the pandemic will soon pass.” But that’s just not how it works.

Regarding the IYSSE’s call for nationwide school closures, Elli said, “I think it’s very reasonable, definitely. If there’s going to be face-to-face teaching, then there has to be at least smaller groups and compulsory testing for everyone.”

The previous evening, the Standing Conference of State Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) announced the staggering figure of

275,000 pupils currently suffering from the coronavirus, almost 50,000 more than the previous week. In addition, virtually the same number of pupils are in quarantine.

“We are taking to the streets because schools are simply not safe in the pandemic,” said Rike, who is involved with “Fridays for the Future” and helped organise the demonstration.

The numbers are higher than ever. In the 5-14 age group, the incidence rates are between 5,000 and 6,000 [per 100,000], but they just keep going up. Seatmates of coronavirus-positive pupils are no longer sent home, despite the reduced reliability of rapid tests. Like the climate crisis, the pandemic is an international problem, but it is not treated as such by governments. It is necessary to abolish fossil capitalism and release vaccine patents so that the whole world can produce vaccines.

Niklas and Dennis came to Frankfurt from a neighbouring town, where they attend the same high school. “The situation in the schools is no longer controllable,” said Niklas.

At our school, there are only three air filter systems for 250 rooms! We see little or nothing of these air filters. We feel ignored by the government. What happens to us pupils and students—nobody cares. We are left alone by the politicians.

“In the last school year, a lot of topics didn’t really get covered,” Dennis said. “For a long time there were online classes, and that results in a clear disadvantage for the final year exams. Especially those who had to participate online very often missed a lot.”

In a situation where “we sometimes have to go into quarantine every other day,” final exam preparation was even more difficult, said Niklas. He continued:

That is also one reason why we are here today. [Federal Health Minister] Lauterbach tells us: Soon we can relax. But there is no question of that. We now have an incidence rate of 2,100 in Maintal-Bischofsheim. In schools you have to constantly test, change masks—and many don’t even comply. We can’t go on like this.

Like Rike, Niklas sees the cause of the coronavirus disaster in capitalism:

The economy has to keep running—that's why students are kept in schools, so that the working class can work. I think you must inform workers! Learning and knowledge is a privilege that mainly the upper classes can afford. If you can't afford a mobile phone, you don't have access to the internet. So much is being shifted onto the working class right now. And what are we being educated for? Also to work. But if we are already confronted with such situations, I don't know if many will even be ready for that.

The protests were shadowed by the threat of a third world war, as openly voiced by US President Joe Biden. "It's terrible," one student said. "Why can't people agree that Ukraine should remain a neutral place? The subject of war gives me sleepless nights. The fears for the future are very big because of the threat of war and because of the climate crisis."

Simultaneous with the protests in Frankfurt, student representatives Tobias Westphal and Anjo Genow from Berlin presented the #WirWerdenLaut petition, with 133,979 signatures, to Federal Education Minister Bettina Stark-Watzinger (Liberal Democratic Party-FDP). Before taking office, the minister was a board member of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, which is notorious for collaborating with climate change deniers and supporting far-right forces in South America.

Stark-Watzinger, like her colleagues at the state level, has made it clear that she wants to remove the last quarantine and protective measures so as to get schools and businesses running normally. Accordingly, politicians and sections of the media are reacting to the growing resistance among students with a nasty smear campaign.

In *Die Welt*, published by the right-wing Springer group, the "independent philosopher" and software entrepreneur Jörg Friedrich calls the students' initiative a "panic campaign" based on the "propaganda of fear." He brands the students' call for "FFP2 masks and the abolition of compulsory attendance" an "irrational appeal," which shows that young people are "now themselves gripped by an irrational unfounded fear."

In the style of radical right-wing conspiracy theorists, the author mutters that it would be "telling" to investigate who is behind the "publicity-seeking action." He points to scientists like Michael Meyer-Herrmann, Dirk Brockmann, Jana Schröder and Melanie Brinkmann, who "have become known to the public for lockdown demands, No-Covid and Zero-Covid strategies."

Since the beginning of the pandemic, such scientists have been among the bogeymen of the extreme right and have often received threats of violence and even murder.

"The fact that children and young people could then infect older people in their families or elsewhere outside school, for whom the virus could then become life-threatening" is "a weak argument," Friedrich writes. Politics must usher pupils "back on the path that leads them to a good life," he advises, to a "normal school without daily tests, without masks and certainly without the constant danger of remote learning."

Referring to "the Long COVID problem" and the "likelihood of a serious health hazard," the *Die Welt* writer declares: "No one wants a school operation that would protect students from all these dangers."

Against the backdrop of the 17 young people who, according to the Robert Koch Institute's conservative figures, have died from COVID-19 in the last month alone, these words are tantamount to a call for more death and illness.

The previous night, on broadcaster ZDF's "Markus Lanz" talk show, KMK President Karin Prien (Christian Democratic Union-CDU) and Eva Hummers (a member of the RKI Standing Vaccine Commission) denied the dangers of the herd immunity policy.

While Prien claimed, distorting the facts, that Omicron "does not go into the lungs," Hummers suggested that "Long COVID does not exist in children." Supported by moderator Lanz, both claimed that regular tests

would "breed fear" among pupils and bring "very little benefit."

The demands of the #WirWerdenLaut petition, put forward by student representative Johanna Börgermann, were arrogantly brushed aside.

In contrast to the nervous and arrogant hostility the young people confront from the political establishment, there is overwhelming support for the students' concerns among parents, educators and other workers.

Tanja R. from Burtscheid in North Rhine-Westphalia, speaking to the WSWs, said:

What is happening in the schools is, in my eyes, a crime against children. I can hardly stand it that schools are kept open by force so that the economy can continue running. In the beginning, I still thought that one could reach the politicians with arguments. When I realised that they don't care about us up there, I resigned a bit. Of course, I see a connection to capitalism. The individual citizen seems to have no value except to function as a worker. Keeping schools open, in my eyes, serves only to have a child care option for working people. I could easily look after my daughter at home, but I'm not allowed to.

Tatjana, a nurse from North Hesse, sent the following message of solidarity to the WSWs:

I am in favour of immediate school closures because I have witnessed what the herd immunity policy does to people. Because of an Omicron outbreak, I had to cut short my recuperation break after 37 families had a positive rapid test and there was almost no staff left where I was staying. We were lucky to come home healthy.

My little one is not going to day care at the moment because there has been absolute contagion going on since Monday. There is still no approved vaccine for the youngest children. There were billions of euros to save Lufthansa, but hardly any money to make schools and day care centres safe. Children have been deprived of any chance of a safe education. It is frightening that they are already thinking about a "D-Day" at the end of March—and only for the economy, regardless. We are led to believe that the virus is no longer so dangerous. No-COVID would make the most sense, but it is also difficult to implement. The whole world would have to join in to eradicate the virus. For me, it has a lot to do with capitalism. I hope the students will continue.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact