

Germany: What next in the fight against the herd immunity policy?

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (Germany)
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The struggle for safe education and against the government's herd immunity policy continues to come to a head. While students, parents and teachers are protesting in their tens of thousands against unsafe learning conditions, the federal and state governments have decided to lift the last safety measures and give the deadly coronavirus free rein in schools.

The numerous rallies by concerned parents in Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg, Bonn, Frankfurt, Stuttgart and Munich, the petition under the hashtag #WirWerdenLaut (We'reGettingLoud) that received almost 150,000 signatures in a very short time, and the strikes by students against mass infection are part of a growing international movement against the reckless policy of herd immunity.

Under these conditions, the movement is faced with fundamental questions. Does it make fruitless appeals to the respective governments that are aggressively enforcing the herd immunity policy, or does it unite internationally and fight against the government? Against attempts of some initiators of the #WirWerdenLaut petition to create illusions in the governments, the IYSSE wrote in a statement on February 8:

This appeal to those in power, like similar appeals in the past, will fall on deaf ears. The ruling parties have proven in the past two years that they put the profit interests of big business higher than the health and lives of the population. In Germany alone, more than 119,000 people have died from coronavirus and almost 11 million have been infected. The government's response to the spread of the highly contagious Omicron variant is not to strengthen protective measures, but to further dismantle them.

This warning has now come true in a dramatic way. In the midst of the worst coronavirus developments to date at schools and day-care centres, instead of responding to the students' demands, the federal coalition government and all state administrations have decided to eliminate the last remaining protective measures. Even demands for the nationwide installation of air filters and the abolition of compulsory in-

person teaching are met with open hostility by the governments.

Schleswig-Holstein's Education Minister Karin Prien (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), who is also president of the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK), is the most aggressive. She invited the Berlin student spokespersons Anjo Genow and Tobias Westphal, who are among the initiators of the #WirWerdenLaut petition, to a discussion on Tuesday which, contrary to an original announcement by Prien, took place behind closed doors and was intended to "bring each other closer."

"We didn't go into the discussion with high expectations," Westphal, student spokesperson of the Johann-Gottfried-Herder-Gymnasium in Lichtenberg, said on Twitter. "Ms. Prien asked us why so many young people did not get vaccinated, spoke of an endemic and spread the narrative of a completely harmless disease for pupils. At the same time, she kept questioning our statements and accusing us of lying."

Denying the dangers COVID-19 poses to children, Prien had called "the safety measures in schools" the "cause of a culture of fear," "laughed at our perceptions" and announced on the same day that she would lift the cohort regulations at the beginning of March. In the right-wing daily *Die Welt*, Prien—who had deactivated her Twitter account to no longer have to deal with critical students, parents and teachers—subsequently insulted her critics as "psychopaths."

Even before that, Prien was subjected to massive protests on Twitter after she served up the coronavirus deniers' argument that the dozens of children who died from COVID-19 had died "with and not from" the virus. In fact, all child deaths are reviewed individually by the Robert Koch Institute and only included in the statistics if COVID-19 is determined to be the cause of death.

In view of these open lies and the insulting behaviour towards the students, student spokesperson Westphal, like thousands of Twitter users, is demanding the resignation of the KMK president: "A woman who glosses over the deaths of children and uses Q-Anon-style arguments should not be allowed to decide on the well-being of hundreds of thousands of young people throughout Germany."

This is undoubtedly true, but it does not just concern Prien.

The student spokespersons have already had similar experiences in talks with Federal Education Minister Bettina Stark-Watzinger (Liberal Democratic Party, FDP) and Green Party leader Ricarda Lang. The herd immunity policy is enforced by all the establishment parties at federal and state level in order to secure the profits of banks and corporations.

That is why government politicians and the right-wing media are reacting so hostilely to the recent protests. Parents and teachers who criticise the herd immunity policy on social media and take a stand against it are slandered as “terrorists,” threatened by neo-Nazis, and subjected to lawsuits by the authorities. Those who call out the deliberate infection of young people and society as a whole are vilified as “conspiracy theorists.”

The deliberate infection of children is not a “conspiracy theory” but a political fact that is openly stated time and again by politicians and government advisers themselves.

Federal Health Minister Karl Lauterbach (Social Democratic Party, SPD) has repeatedly made clear that from his department’s point of view, the pandemic will continue for “10 years” or even “30, 40 years.” He thus expresses the fact that a serious fight against the pandemic is not profitable from a capitalist standpoint and that the ruling class has no intention whatsoever of ending the mass deaths through an internationally coordinated strategy. The ever-new emergence of further coronavirus variants and the deaths of millions of people are to be declared the normal state of society.

This phenomenon is not limited to Germany. The herd immunity policy is enforced by almost all capitalist governments without any consideration. In many countries, death tolls are once again almost as high as at the previous peak in the winter of death 2020/21, and yet they continue to open up the economy. In Britain, even the obligation for people who are ill to isolate has now been abolished.

This international lockstep of the herd immunity policy shows that it has its basis not in the parochialism of one politician or another, but in the capitalist system. To increase their profits and not to endanger production, those in power are prepared to walk over corpses. This is also shown in the aggressive warmongering against Russia, which is incessantly pushed forward by the NATO powers.

Under these conditions, the movement against the pandemic must link up with the growing struggles of the working class against wage theft and mass sackings, and take on international forms. Therefore, the IYSSE calls for the building of independent safe education rank-and-file committees to oppose the federal and state governments, to coordinate internationally and to link up with rank-and-file committees in workplaces.

In the February 8 statement we wrote:

Instead of making appeals to the established parties, who make it clear day after day that our lives are worth

nothing to them, students and teachers must organise independently in action committees for safe education, taking the fight into their own hands and immediately enforcing the safety measures mentioned in the petition. With school strikes and protests students must be the prelude to a full-scale rebellion of the entire working class against the infiltration.

The only way to stop the endless contagion is the international struggle for “Zero COVID,” based on a socialist perspective and a movement of the international working class against capitalism:

Instead of transferring billions to corporations and the super-rich, the number of teachers must be doubled and schools must become safe places of learning. In order to finance the necessary lockdowns—first and foremost for schools and nonessential businesses—including wage compensation, support for poor families, compensation for small businesses, etc., 100 percent of the pandemic profits must be taxed.

A social system that walks over corpses for profits and destroys the health and future of entire generations must be abolished and replaced by a system that gives priority to life over profits. The struggle against the pandemic, like the struggle against social inequality and war, is at its core a struggle against capitalism and for socialism.

We call on all students, teachers and parents to contact us to fight for this perspective.



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