The homicidal irresponsibility of the German government's coronavirus policies

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Every day, 200 to 300 people die of COVID-19 in Germany. The number of new infections registered daily is 300,000. According to Health Minister Karl Lauterbach, the real number is twice as high. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) has recorded 20 million infections. This sad record was reached on Saturday.

Two-thirds of these infections have occurred under the "traffic light" coalition. Since the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Greens and Liberal Democrats (FDP) took over the government on December 8, 2021, 13 million people have been infected, twice as many as since the pandemic began. The new government is also responsible for one-fifth of the 128,000 deaths in Germany.

And what is it doing to contain the disaster? It is abolishing all protective measures. Like a fireman dousing a fire with petrol instead of water, it is fuelling the pandemic.

Last week, the government passed the new Infection Protection Act, which should rather be called the Deliberate Mass Infection Act. It abolishes almost all previous protective measures and delegates responsibility to the Länder (federal states). Although these can introduce mandatory mask wearing, social distancing rules and similar measures in "hotspots," the threshold for doing so far exceeds the previous ones. The fragmentation of responsibility to the federal states is further heightened by the fragmentation into districts.

Public appearances by Health Minister Lauterbach (SPD) are increasingly taking on a schizophrenic character. On Friday, he appeared at the Government Press Conference flanked by the head of the RKI, Lothar Wieler, and the chairperson of the doctors' Marburger Bund, Susanne Johna, and sounded the alarm.

Unfortunately, the situation was not good, Lauterbach complained. Three hundred deaths a day was intolerable and there had to be immediate and swift reactions. Since the federal government's hands were tied, he said, he directed his appeal to the federal states to do something. It was not enough to hope that the incidence level would fall with the improvement in the weather, he declared. But Lauterbach himself is responsible for the law that ties the hands of the federal government and takes away all effective instruments from the states.

RKI head Wieler also emphasised the desperate nature of the situation. Within a week, 3 percent of the population had tested positive, he said. More than 4 million people were currently infected, which increased the risk of infection. The pandemic was far from over. "This wave will not be the last wave," he warned.

Doctors' representative Johna described the catastrophic situation in hospitals, three-quarters of which had had to restrict their services. The reason was the costly care of coronavirus patients and the high absence of doctors and nurses who have contracted COVID-19 or resigned because of the unbearable workloads.

All three agreed on the need to increase vaccination coverage. But there is nothing left of the vaccination campaign that the coalition loudly announced when it took office. Of the particularly vulnerable over-60s alone, 2.2 million are still not vaccinated. The planned vaccine mandate is talked to death in endless parliamentary committees and will probably never come into force.

There is a method behind the irresponsibility of the federal government. It is not limited to Germany but characterises the coronavirus policies of almost all governments in the world, with the exception of China. They have abandoned all responsibility for the health and lives of their own populations, even though the social and health consequences of the pandemic are devastating.

In the first two years, taking into consideration excess mortality, 18 million people worldwide have died because of the pandemic. This is roughly equivalent to the number of soldiers and civilians who died due to combat during the four years of the First World War. Most of these deaths could have been avoided with a consistent COVID elimination strategy. Behind each death remain those who lost a relative, a friend, a breadwinner, or a child.

There are still no reliable statistics on the health and social consequences of Long COVID. But numerous studies show it is being completely underestimated. The WSWS has repeatedly warned of this danger and interviewed renowned scientists about it.

An article that appeared in the science section of the FAZ on March 8, providing an overview of the current state of scientific research, concludes: "It is now clear that Long Covid, or—as it

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is often called in medical terms—'post-covid,' is, for all the difficulty of defining the disease precisely and narrowing down the dozens of possible symptoms as well as the heterogeneity of the duration of suffering, virtually a mass inheritance of the coronavirus infection waves."

According to a Danish study based on 150,000 respondents, "more than a third of those infected still complained of at least one Covid problem six months to a year after infection, half of them reporting exhaustion, persistent memory problems and/or great difficulty in concentrating. Brain fog, anxiety and other mental health problems also seem to be particularly persistent."

Medical studies found that even mild coronavirus infections can lead to a reduction in the density of grey matter in the brain, severe cardiovascular disease, and a weakening of the immune system. Children are also affected. Cardiovascular conditions such as heart attacks, heart inflammation, strokes, pulmonary embolisms, and leg vein thrombosis often occurred months after infection.

A social system whose governing layers are neither willing nor able to protect the lives and health of their populations has lost any reason to exist. There is a direct link between the deep, global crisis of capitalism and the irresponsible coronavirus policies being pursued.

Social inequality, which has been increasing for decades, has rapidly worsened in the pandemic. While—in the words of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson—"the bodies are piled high," stock market prices are reaching new highs. Wall Street banks made record profits of $45 billion in the first three months of last year. The 180,000 workers in the industry received an average annual bonus of $257,500, while a large section of the American working class is sinking into poverty.

The situation is no different in Germany and other capitalist countries. The orgy of enrichment of a tiny minority is maintained by the central banks, which pump huge sums into the economy in the form of bond purchases and interest-free loans. This speculative bubble is in danger of bursting if the exploitation of the working class is not constantly intensified. This is the main reason for the removal of all coronavirus protections. Profits take precedence over human lives.

The Ukraine war has further aggravated the crisis of capitalism. Russia's reactionary attack on Ukraine was systematically prepared and deliberately provoked by NATO's expansion to the east.

NATO's goal is not only the integration of Ukraine into its sphere of influence, but regime change in Moscow and the subjugation of Russia and China, as well as control over their rich mineral resources. The weekend edition of *Handelsblatt* appeared with a picture of Putin and Chinese leader Xi in the crosshairs. Underneath, the headline runs, "The great battle for raw materials." It goes on to say, "The war shows the dependence on a few producing countries. This is only the beginning: China is establishing monopolies on all important materials—at the expense of the German economy."

The war is serving as a pretext for a huge rearmament offensive. The German military budget is being tripled this year from €50 billion to €150 billion, whose costs are to be imposed on the working class.

The war course, like the reckless coronavirus policy, is supported by all parties—from the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) to the Left Party. The demands of the ultra-right coronavirus deniers and anti-vaxxers who rioted in the streets last year now form the basis of government action.

The offensive against Russia is characterised by the same contempt for human life as coronavirus policy. Politicians and the media now openly discuss the pros and cons of a nuclear war that would mean the end of humanity.

Typical is a comment by FAZ editor Berthold Kohler, who writes that the concerns "Putin could use biological, chemical or even nuclear warheads" were "not unjustified." Nevertheless, he rejects considering any concession or brokering a diplomatic solution. "Even if Russia withdrew from Ukraine immediately, there would be no return to the pre-war relationship for the West, either politically or economically."

The danger of a nuclear world war must be taken seriously. Confronted with a global crisis of the capitalist system and fierce class tensions—a "turning point in history," as Chancellor Olaf Scholz puts it—Germany's ruling class is again resorting to war and authoritarian forms of rule. It already proved 80 years ago, under Hitler, what desperate acts and crimes it is capable of in doing so.

It is completely useless to appeal to the ruling class and its parties under these conditions. The struggle against COVID, against war and against cuts in social programmes and wages necessarily coincide. This requires the building of an independent movement of the international working class fighting for socialism.

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