Surplus in German retirement funds testifies to high excess mortality from pandemic

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German public retirement insurance issuers generated a 2.1 billion euro surplus last year. A major contributor was the fact that an above-average number of pensioners died of COVID-19. This once again confirms the warnings of the *World Socialist Web Site*, which has called the official mass infection policy "social murder."

"Contrary to many expectations, the statutory pension insurance will end this year of the crisis with a remarkable plus of 2.1 billion euro," the outgoing managing director of the Deutsche Rentenversicherung (the German public pension insurance society), Matthias Förster, said December 16 at an insurers' meeting.

The president of the Rentenversicherung, Gundula Roßbach, spoke similarly in an interview with *Deutsche Presse-Agentur* (*dpa*) in Berlin on December 27. Just a year ago, a deficit of several billion euros had been expected, Roßbach said. As one reason for the unexpected surplus, she explicitly named "the coronavirus pandemic, which has led to an increase in mortality, especially among older people."

These reports quickly disappeared from news feeds. The bourgeois media raised no outcry. Journalists who commented on the news were not alarmed but delighted that the pension fund was on a solid financial footing. What went unmentioned was the extent of the grief, pain and suffering this development dealt those affected and their families.

The alarming extent of excess mortality in recent months is documented by the Federal Statistical Office on its official press portal. According to the report, in October 2022, when coronavirus mortality was particularly high, the number of deaths was 19 percent, or nearly 15,000 people, above the mean value (median) of the years 2018 to 2021.

In November, when COVID-19 cases declined slightly, the number of deaths was still seven percent, or nearly 6,000, above the median of the previous years. In the first two weeks of December, excess mortality increased again, and deaths were about 12 percent above the previous means, exacerbated by an unusually strong flu epidemic and rampant respiratory illness.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has reported the strikingly high excess mortality in 2022. Death rates that year averaged nine percent higher than the median for the previous four years, 2018-2021.

Officially, 162,688 coronavirus patients have died in Germany as of January 8, but the number of unreported cases is undoubtedly higher since the data is unreliable. The WHO puts the number of coronavirus deaths worldwide at just under 6.7 million, while experts give informed estimates of more than three times that number. By those estimates, more than 21 million people worldwide have died directly or indirectly from COVID-19.

The *World Socialist Web Site*'s New Year's Statement declares:

> More than 10 million children worldwide have lost a parent or primary caregiver from COVID-19. (...) A recent study on excess deaths by the World Health Organization found that COVID-19 was the third-leading cause of death globally in 2020 and *the world's leading cause of death* in 2021. There were approximately 5.1 million excess deaths globally in 2022, making the "mild" Omicron variant the third-leading cause of death.

Life expectancy is falling for the first time since World War II as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. It had been rising steadily until 2019, at least in Germany, but SARS-CoV-2 has put an end to this trend. In 2020, life

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expectancy fell by an average of 0.2 years for men and 0.1 year for women, and in 2021 it fell another 0.4 years for men and another 0.3 years for women.

The figures vary greatly depending on the region. Accordingly, life expectancy for men in the German states of Thuringia, Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt fell by at least 1.5 years from 2019 to 2021! This is a completely unusual development for peacetime.

But it is deliberate. Even at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, when the government refused to protect the population with a sensible lockdown, then-Bundestag (Federal Parliament) President Wolfgang Schäuble (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) found an unmistakable formulation.

In his infamous commentary on German Basic Law, Schäuble declared, '[W]hen I hear that everything must take second place to the protection of life, then I must say: that is not correct in such an absolute sense.'

To justify opening up the economy and ruthless back-to-work policies, Schäuble argued pointedly, “Fundamental rights are mutually limiting. If there is one absolute value in our Basic Law, then it is human dignity. It is sacrosanct. But that does not exclude us from having to die.”

Shortly before, the same Schäuble had demanded in a keynote speech on foreign policy that, in the interests of “security,” Germany had to be prepared to intervene in Europe and around the world, and that this would include “ultimately, the willingness to use military force.” Since then, the German government has found a welcome pretext in the Ukraine war for massively rearming the state both domestically and for foreign conflicts.

There is a direct connection between the calls for war and violence and the demand to place alleged “dignity” above life, as the WSWS explained at the time, “To advance its foreign and domestic interests in the deepest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s, the ruling class is again literally willing to walk over corpses.”

It was precisely the time, at the end of April 2020, when the government, together with businessmen, bankers and shareholders, sent hundreds of thousands of workers back to the factories and workplaces unprotected, despite the risk of infection. Since then, the official line has been that we must all learn to “live with the virus.” More correct would be “die with the virus,” because to this day it means nothing other than allowing ever new waves of infections, reinfections, and deaths, which could have been avoided, to wash over the population, harming entire generations through long-COVID.

In the meantime, many leading politicians only speak about the pandemic in the past tense. At the turn of 2022-2023, state government after state government is repealing the last protective measures. In Schleswig-Holstein, Bavaria and Saxony-Anhalt, the mask requirement in public transport has been abolished and most of the other German states plan to follow suit in the coming weeks.

At the same time, the latest, extremely easily transmitted coronavirus variant, XBB.1.5, is spreading out from the northeastern United States to Europe and the entire world. On January 7, Bavarian broadcaster *BR24* quoted Bremen epidemiologist Hajo Zeeb as saying, “One can say with some prognostic certainty that the variant will also become the dominant variant in our country.”

With the start of the new year, vaccination requirements for employees in health care facilities and homes for the elderly will also be struck. This requirement was never consistently implemented. As the *Ärzte-Zeitung* reports, the nearly 270,000 reported violations of this rule were offset by only 1,275 activity bans, which is not even half a percent. Just under 7,000 other violations were punished with fines while the rest went without consequences. Seven federal states stated that they had not levied a single fine.

The mendacious half-heartedness in the way such measures—vital for old people’s and nursing homes—are handled is revealing. It confirms what was evident in the disgracefully positive reaction to the unexpected surplus in the pension funds: the politicians did not decide in favor of mass infection solely because they wanted to keep the economy open at all costs in the interests of short-term profits. They also see it as an effective means of reducing the “pensioner overhang” and relieving the government of pension subsidies long term.

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