

German politicians and media laud right-wing demonstrations against coronavirus restrictions

By Christoph Vandreier
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A clear majority opposes the current lifting, in the interests of big business, of measures aimed at containing the coronavirus, which will result in the accelerated spread of the disease. The ruling elite is now mobilising the right-wing dregs of society in the so-called corona, or hygiene, demonstrations so as to intimidate the population and enforce their back-to-work campaign.

The protests against measures designed to contain the pandemic were initiated in several cities over recent weeks by right-wing and far-right groups or individuals. Thanks to disproportionate media coverage and supportive commentary, the protests managed to reach a high-point last weekend, with several thousand people taking part.

Even so, the number of participants remained small. Most cities only saw a few hundred people take to the streets. Placards and slogans called into question the threat posed by the coronavirus, opposed lockdown measures, and declared support for US President Donald Trump. Most participants displayed their ignorance by refusing to wear a face mask or take any notice of social distancing guidelines.

All demonstrations included participants from the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and well-known local neo-Nazis, without this causing any complaints from other demonstrators. Alongside the black, red and gold flag of the Federal Republic, several black, white, and red flags of the German Reich were waved.

The character of the elements attracted to the demonstrations was underscored by the wild applause for the main speaker at the Stuttgart rally: the YouTuber Ken Jebsen, who is well-connected with the

far-right milieu. Shortly before the demonstration, he stated in a video that the German government is controlled by the American billionaires Bill and Melinda Gates, who are trying to sell vaccines.

Then, at the demonstration, Jebsen proclaimed that 30 years after unification, Germany finally has to be grown-up and independent. In a reactionary brew of Nazi trivialisation, nationalism and retrograde ideas, he compared the struggle against the pandemic with the Nürnberg Race Laws adopted by the Nazis and claimed that viruses are part of creation that the human mind cannot come close to understanding.

Violent attacks took place in several cities. Reports from Munich stated that passers-by were verbally harassed and threatened because they were wearing masks. Right-wing extremist participants in an unregistered demonstration in Dortmund attacked a film crew from public broadcaster WDR. A sound technician for the public broadcaster ARD in Berlin was attacked on the sidelines of a demonstration in front of the Reichstag building, and his equipment was damaged.

In Aachen, participants in an unregistered coronavirus protest attacked protesters who were demonstrating for a more humane treatment of refugees. After the right-wing demonstrators shouted at them from close range while wearing no masks, the supporters of the Sea Bridge initiative felt compelled to end their protest prematurely.

These right-wing mobilisations in no way represent the concerns among working people. On the contrary, anger is growing among autoworkers, teachers and retail cashiers that they are being forced to return to unsafe working conditions. Nurses, bus drivers and

rubbish collectors have complained about a lack of protective equipment and safety measures. Millions of workers face the threat of being laid off, and small and mid-sized businesses have been left out in the cold by the €600 billion handout to the major corporations and big banks.

To extract these vast sums from the working class, the ruling elite is pressing ahead aggressively with its policy of reopening the economy. Following the wide-ranging announcements on the easing of restrictions by the federal government over recent weeks, many states have allowed restaurants, sports facilities, museums and even massage and beauty parlours to reopen. Schools and kindergartens are on their way to resuming “normal service” and many factories are running at full capacity.

The restart of industry and lifting of restrictions has led to an increase in the reproduction rate of the virus. According to the Robert Koch Institute, it stood at 1.13 on Monday. Serious scientists have warned about the risks involved. Estimates suggest that a reproduction rate of 1.1 would mean Germany's health care system would be overwhelmed by October, whereas a rate of 1.2 would move the date forward to July.

The opposition among the population to these developments is strong. Every poll shows that a clear majority opposes the unrestrained policies pursued by the federal and state governments to ease restrictions. An overwhelming majority of 93 percent called for greater attention to be paid to scientific knowledge in policymaking. This is precisely why leading politicians and media outlets are embracing the so-called coronavirus demonstrations.

In Thuringia, where the demonstration was registered by a member of the Christian Democrats' economic council with close ties to the far-right, the AfD was joined by the Free Democrats' state leader Thomas Kemmerich, who earlier this year became the first Minister President to be elected with the backing of the AfD. Kemmerich made a show of wearing no mask and ignored social distancing guidelines.

Already on May 2, federal parliament president Wolfgang Schäuble applauded a demonstration in Offenburg, telling the *Mittelbadische Presse* that it was part of a process that would help the country look to the future. According to the police, the demonstration consisted of 200 people who were packed closely

together and wearing no masks. This included a number of AfD politicians and figures from the far-right. Prior to that, Schäuble called into question the concept of human dignity contained in Germany's Basic Law, effectively calling for human lives to be sacrificed for private profit.

The former editor of the financial daily *Handelsblatt*, Gabor Steingard, enthused on his daily Morning Briefing podcast that the period of “shocked silence” is over. “Civil society is waking up.” In Stuttgart, Berlin, Frankfurt, and Munich alone, he went on, “tens of thousands” participated in the demonstrations. This goes even further than the grossly inflated numbers of the organisers.

He then cited slogans like “Don't give Gates a chance” and “Get rid of the muzzle” to show that the demonstrators were in their majority neither right-wing extremists nor crazy. Instead, it was an “allergic reaction” to the restricting by the stroke of a pen of basic rights like “freedom to do business” and “the right to property.”

The daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung* also wants to use the demonstrations to push the policy of easing restrictions. “It isn't just conspiracy theorists who are formulating their doubts about the measures adopted,” commented Jan Heidtmann on May 10. Some of the questions that need to be clarified include why “when it comes to childcare” we are listening to virologists and why it is always necessary to wear a mask on public transport.

The systematic promotion and embrace of the right-wing mobilisations by politicians and the media show that the ruling elite is prepared to do whatever it takes to intensify their brutal class policy.

However, this merely underscores that capitalism is incompatible with the needs of the vast majority. To combat the pandemic on a scientific basis and defend the health and social interests of the working class, a socialist offensive is required. The banks and major corporations must be expropriated and placed under the democratic control of the workers.

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