

Germany's right-wing *Bild* tabloid agitates against leading virologist Christian Drosten

By Marianne Arens
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In a targeted campaign of gutter journalism, Germany's right-wing *Bild* tabloid is seeking to discredit the world-renowned virologist Christian Drosten. Despite knowing better, *Bild* denounced his academic work so as to justify the political race to lift lockdown measures and create the greatest possible confusion among the population.

On May 25, *Bild* published the following headline online, "Dubious methods. Drosten study about infectious children totally wrong. How long did the star virologist know about this?" This was the introduction to a video that allegedly presented the criticisms of various academics before stating, "In his most important study, Drosten got it wrong."

The *Bild* sought specifically to ridicule a study in which Drosten found that children may be just as infectious when they have coronavirus as adults. Drosten's study is backed up by further international research and confirms what has been tragically visible in Wuhan and other parts of the world: children carry large quantities of virus. As a result, they can easily transmit the virus and become severely ill themselves. But according to *Bild*, "the Charité researcher worked dishonestly." The study was "erroneous" and reached "false conclusions."

In addition, *Bild* reporter Philipp Piatov points out that Drosten is a "well respected virologist who is listened to closely by politicians, including the chancellor herself, i.e., he has considerable political influence." Politicians must now "answer the question of if and to what degree they listened to this study from the Charité, if they have investigated the doubts ... and if the school's policy over recent months needs to be revised."

In an attempt to hold the proverbial gun to Drosten's head, Piatov sent him an email at 3 p.m. on Monday in which he confronted him with four citations from various academics torn out of context. The virologist should state his position on the citations and defend his study within

an hour, "by 4 p.m.," the email stated.

Entirely appropriately, Drosten refused to assume the role crafted for him in this disgraceful spectacle. He published the email from *Bild*'s politics desk on Twitter with the remark, "Interesting: the #Bild is planning a tendentious report on our pre-print on virus loads and is using chunks of citations torn out of context. I'm supposed to state my position within an hour. I have better things to do."

The academics upon which the *Bild* based its report were the statistics professors Dominik Liebl (University of Bonn) and Christoph Rothe (University of Mannheim), Professor Leonhard Held (Institute of Epidemiology, Zurich), and Jörg Stoye, an economics professor from Cornell University in New York.

Within a short period of time on Monday evening, all four academics distanced themselves from the *Bild* report. Christoph Rothe wrote, "Nobody from #Bild spoke to me, and I explicitly reject this type of reportage."

Jörg Stoye added, "I don't want to be part of an anti-Drosten campaign. I did not and do not have any contact with Bild. I of course have great respect for Christian Drosten. Germany can count itself lucky to have him and his team."

Dominik Liebl tweeted, "I knew nothing about the request from Bild and reject putting people under pressure in this way in the strongest terms. We can consider ourselves much more fortunate to have Christian Drosten and his research team in the German scientific community. They saved lives!"

These objections did not stop the *Bild* newspaper from emblazoning its Tuesday edition with the bold headline, "Schools and kindergartens closed due to false coronavirus study." This alone shows that what is involved is a deliberate campaign of defamation. The *Bild* tabloid has no interest in clarifying right from wrong, but pursues a definite political agenda.

By attacking Drosten, the newspaper wants to intimidate anyone who tries to oppose the ever more far-reaching lifting of restrictions with scientific facts and reason. The enrichment of the super-rich is not to be interrupted with warnings about mass fatalities and the risk of death.

Bild is the newspaper with the largest circulation in Germany and is owned by Axel Springer Publishing, which has close ties to the top echelons of the corporate and political elites. The Deutsche Bank holds a large portion of Springer's shares, and the publishing house's heiress, Friede Springer, is close friends with Chancellor Angela Merkel. Axel Springer Publishing regularly brings together the creme de la creme from the government, political parties, big business, show business, and sport at its gatherings.

Springer has used the *Bild* tabloid as a useful propaganda tool with a multi-million readership to popularise the politics of the far-right Alternative for Germany, Pegida and others. Even in the post-war era, *Bild* slandered engaged democratic intellectuals as "the left-wing mob," an "abscess," "academic layabouts," "rabble" and "neurotics." Its aggressive agitation against the student movement led to an assassination attempt on German student activist Rudi Dutschke in 1968.

More recent examples of how the tabloid constantly seeks to promote backwardness and poison the political climate in the interests of the ruling elite include propaganda about a "sex mob" on New Year's Eve in Cologne in 2017 and agitation for war against Syria. Under editor-in-chief Julian Reichelt, this despicable approach has become even more pronounced. He recently led the anti-China campaign with the *Bild* newspaper, as the WSWS reported.

With its targeted campaign against Drosten, the tabloid is contributing to agitation against science in general and mobilising a dangerous mob against one of its most well-known representatives.

On Tuesday, Drosten wrote on Twitter that he and the Social Democrats' health expert, Karl Lauterbach, received packages with bottles labelled "CoV-positive" and containing the anonymous message, "Drink this and you'll be immune." Already in April, Drosten said in a *Guardian* interview that he has received death threats due to his role in the coronavirus crisis.

By contrast, he enjoys broad support on social media. Typical comments read, "Bild is beyond the pale," and "that's not journalism, but just a squad of character assassins." Polls show that most people oppose the

premature lifting of the lockdown measures.

Drosten and other academics are increasingly valued and respected by the population. They have provided the public since the beginning of the pandemic with scientifically grounded information. Under conditions where big business and the political establishment are prepared to walk over corpses, this is increasingly viewed as a necessity of life.

As the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei and the *World Socialist Web Site* note in their latest statement on the pandemic, "The maintenance of a safe working environment is an immensely complex task that can only be achieved through a scientific and rational plan, in active consultation with health care experts in every workplace." It added, "The costs necessary to ensure safe working conditions, as well as to provide health care and full income for all workers, must be borne by the corporations and the capitalist ruling elite."

For his part, Drosten explained once again on Tuesday in the podcast Coronavirus Update that teachers and childcare workers must be tested regularly and all measures to combat the pandemic must be followed.

The virologist remarked on the main point of his study that *Bild* criticised, "The statement is quite clear: children have high loads of virus. That is all that we wanted to say. In principle, it could have been published without any statistical analysis." From his entire research, the "very clear" conclusion is that "children have the same concentration of virus as other age groups." There is "nothing to criticise about that."

It is precisely this clarity that is a thorn in the side of the ruling elite. The capitalist economy must soon boom again, regardless of what it costs. To enforce the interests of the super-rich, banks, and big business, lockdown measures are being lifted so that autoworkers, teachers, childcare workers, retail workers, meatpackers, and others have to return to unsafe workplaces with inadequate personal protection.

Accelerating this process still further is the goal pursued by the *Bild* tabloid's latest campaign against Christian Drosten.

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