



Compulsory vaccination against the Fourth Wave?

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In Germany, as in other European countries, the fourth wave of the covid pandemic is gaining momentum. The health system in the east and south of the country is on the verge of collapse, and in the rest of the country the numbers are rising steadily.

As in the winter of 2020, politicians emphasise how surprised they are and that nobody could have known any better. Now, we must stand together, pointing fingers at each other would get us nowhere. So, "Same procedure as last year!" Such statements are nothing more than excuses.

In Germany, it has been clear for weeks that the wave would pick up speed. Lifting measures such as the mask requirement for pupils in schools after half term could only add fuel to the fire. These opening steps were based on the one hand on the Bundestag election campaign, the economic interests of big and small capital, but also on the fear of a renewed growth of the "lateral thinking", that is antivax, movement.

In short: political and economic calculations took precedence over necessary measures for the health of the population and ultimately play into the hands of the right. A déjà vu experience! We are facing the shambles of a policy that put profit interests above health, speculated that vaccinating a majority and "gradually" infecting a minority of the unvaccinated would keep the spread of infection below the threshold of health system collapse. Now the virus is spreading like never before. Last week, 50 000 or more were infected and more than 200 people died every day in Germany.

Pandemic control strategies

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have been able to distinguish between different strategies for combating it. In addition to the "flattening of the curve" strategy used here in Germany, the debates also focus on "zero-covid" and "contamination".

The strategies of "infection control" and "flattening the curve" are based on the fundamental assumption that corona infections cannot be prevented and that we must learn to deal with them, that is, find measures that only allow as many corona infections as the health system can bear without unnecessarily burdening the economy. Everything above that - including thousands of people who need not have died - is factored into these calculations.

Schools and day-care centres also play an important role here. School closures, after all, not only affect teachers, children and young people, but also stop many parents from working. In the current pandemic response, this means that school and day-care centre closures are rejected by all political forces in the Bundestag. This is often justified by the fact that the psychological and physical stress caused by prolonged school closures and the widening gulf between rich and poor have increased.

What is not mentioned, however, is that this means a change in strategy with regard to schools: namely, to infect them. The current incidence figures speak a clear language here. The figures in the individual districts according to age groups, show that the age group 5 - 14 years now has the most infections. Although this has not (yet) led to a peak of severe disease in this age group, very little is known about the possible long-term consequences of covid-19 and "long covid".

Pupils and day-care children are thus deliberately exposed to corona infection in order to keep the economy running. In doing so, it is consciously accepted that the effects of "Long Covid" on currently young pupils and day-care children can have a considerable impact on our society in 20-30 years. The underlying interest is clear: the capitalists are currently more concerned with maintaining their economic survival in the harsh international competition than with the health of any potential employees in 20-30 years' time.

Pandemic or endemic virus?

Currently, there is still talk of a "pandemic" and the hope is maintained that there will be a time after Corona or that a way back to the "good old days" can be found. However, this is not just a word that everyone has become accustomed to and is therefore still widely used. The focus on the word "pandemic" also distracts from the question of whether the coronavirus is still a pandemic virus at all, or whether it has not already become endemic (indigenous). Depending on the assessment of this question, different measures and ways of dealing with the virus can be derived, such as vaccination.

A pandemic virus can be eliminated from society by a broad-based compulsory vaccination. With an endemic virus, this is no longer possible and recurrent vaccination at regular intervals with adapted vaccines becomes necessary. Whether we are already in an endemic or still in a pandemic with the coronavirus is still debatable. However, it is certain what way we are heading. Even the WHO is already saying we can no longer get rid of the coronavirus, that it is, or will become, endemic.

Such endemic, recurring viruses are not alien to mankind: e.g. the annual flu virus. Each year, this virus changes across the globe so it can trigger a new wave of influenza in a new form every year. Through year-round observations, these changes are monitored by specially established research centres so that appropriate vaccines can be produced for the coming virulent mutants. A classification of the coronavirus as endemic would mean such a year-round observation and coordinated adjustment of the required vaccine variants as well as their production. Setting up such a system requires above all money, but decision-makers are currently ducking the issue and pushing it aside by continuing to talk about a pandemic.

Compulsory vaccination? Shadow boxing or a possible way out of the corona crisis?

The above distinction between pandemic and endemic situations also bears on a debate that is currently going strong - that of compulsory vaccination. It is currently being conducted either in the form of a general compulsory vaccination or in connection with specific occupational groups such as nurses, day-care workers or teachers. However, does such a discussion represent shadow boxing or is it really a possible way out of the corona crisis?

Austria was the first country in the EU to take the step and announce a general vaccination obligation from February 2022. This was coupled with the imposition of a lockdown for all from 22 November and no differentiation between vaccinated, recovered and unvaccinated until 12 December 2021. But anyone who declares compulsory vaccination must also be able to enforce it. Here, the question must be asked whether such a decision can be implemented at all: Are there enough vaccine doses available? How quickly should vaccination be enforced and does the vaccination obligation apply only now or also to necessary boosters in the foreseeable future?

The example of Cuba shows how a well-organised mass vaccination campaign can cover almost the entire population in a very short time. Despite economic embargoes and international pressure, this country has managed to produce its own vaccine and use it among its own population with the help of a large-scale mass vaccination campaign. Since the start of vaccination on September 16, around 89 percent have been vaccinated at least once and 76.6 percent have been fully vaccinated as of November 18 (source: <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1203308/umfrage/impfstoff...> [1]). With a vaccine with an effectiveness of around 90 percent, the figures for the Cuban vaccination campaign speak for themselves. While 56,165 people had been infected in Cuba in the first week of the campaign, this number fell continuously to 2,064 this week (source: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html> [2]). Even though these figures may not represent the complete course of infection in Cuba, their decline is nevertheless quite impressive.

This vaccination success in only three months was made possible by the planned vaccination system that has been practised in Cuba for a long time: vaccination is coordinated centrally by the health authorities, but in the barrios implementation is transferred to the mass organisations, especially the neighbourhood committees (CDR). These ensure that really everyone from the neighbourhood comes to the collective clinics on the assigned dates. This is clear proof of the superiority of a collective, planned health system over capitalist planlessness!

Here we need to distinguish between different situations in which compulsory vaccination is established and also carried out. It makes a big difference whether a big vaccination campaign is carried out at a peak of the infection situation or not. If the infection figures in a country are already high, this means a high viral load in society and thus an increased risk of vaccinating a currently symptom-free, but infected, person.

In such cases, there is an increased probability of mutation of the virus in these infected and now vaccinated persons, which could subsequently spread and make the vaccine less effective. Therefore, it makes sense to implement a large-scale, compulsory vaccination campaign when the viral load in a society is low and the infection numbers are at a minimum. However, this opportunity has been missed, so there is no alternative to pushing vaccination now, even if its effects will not become apparent for several months.

We need a solidarity lockdown!

So that we don't have to wait until next summer for a low viral load and suffer a winter like the last one, we need a clear lockdown now that not only affects leisure facilities and private consumption, but also suspends socially unnecessary production and activities for a few weeks.

This should be coupled with an internationally applied zero-covid strategy. This means: the closure of all non-essential businesses and full pay for all employees who have to stay at home. Such an economy-focused lockdown would also give more room to handle measures in day-care centres, schools and the social sector better than in the previous lockdowns. This is important to regain lost acceptance for the measures that are now necessary.

Finally, it would have to be combined with a massive social support, financed by a massive taxation of the large capitals and assets. As well as full pay, this means a ban on rent increases and evictions; expansion of the health system and an increase in income of at least 500 euros/month for all care workers; securing the care of children, young people and people with disabilities through additional staff.

If compulsory vaccination is put forward on its own, without further linked measures, it would be little more than shadow boxing to distract from the measures and discussions that are needed. Even if it were decided and implemented by the current or the new federal government and the respective state governments, the effect of this measure would only become visible in the medium term, in a few months. Thus, the announcement of the Austrian government to introduce compulsory vaccination as of February has no effect at all, it is meant to distract from the previous inactivity and to downplay the danger as well as the zigzag course so far. The lockdown in Austria is ultimately calculated to get the infection under control by mid-December so that Christmas and New Year's celebrations and, above all, winter tourism, can be "saved", that is people can continue to muddle along as before.

However, if compulsory vaccination were combined with a hard, solidarity-based economic lockdown and control of vaccine production and distribution by the working class on an international level, it would make perfect sense. Its implementation would have to be controlled by the wage-earners, so that it could be prevented from being misused by companies as a pretext for dismissals and layoffs.

The current increase in the obstinate opponents of vaccination, the spread of ultimately irrational rejection of health protection and vaccination, represents a social obstacle in this regard that cannot, of course, be overcome simply by bans. Moreover, the bourgeois, half-hearted and inherently contradictory corona politics and the crisis of capitalism itself prepare the breeding ground for such reactionary ideas. To break this trend, we must of course talk to and try to convince those people who are sceptical about vaccination not out of deep reactionary convictions but out of a lack of education and related fears. But it must also be made clear to them on the part of the workers' movement that the

refusal to protect oneself and others with the available means is an act that endangers others.

A central responsibility lies with the trade unions and the social democratic and left parties, that is, in Germany, above all the SPD, but also the Left Party, which claim to represent the workers. This is not only, or even primarily, about people like Wagenknecht, who play down the danger and spread reactionary rubbish. What is decisive is that, since the outbreak of the pandemic, the SPD and the Left Party, as well as the DGB trade unions, have effectively supported government policy. The policies of a Bodo Ramelow and other state governments in which the Left Party is involved are no different.

The leaderships of the big industrial unions (IG Metall, IG BCE) and the group works councils also practised social partnership. Although education and public service unions repeatedly voiced criticism of the federal government and the states, they were far too timid and without a perspective for mobilisation. If we want to change something in the working class, we must therefore fight for a change of course, especially in the trade unions and in the workplaces, as difficult as it may seem.

The immediate issue is to stop the spread of the virus, the deaths and the impending collapse of the health system. Therefore, we need a solidarity lockdown now! Otherwise, thousands more will die from Corona and hundreds of thousands more will be infected with the virus in the coming weeks and months.

- For a solidarity lockdown according to a zero-covid strategy!
- For a coordinated, international vaccination campaign, the lifting of patent restrictions and further research, the disclosure and control of vaccine research and production processes!
- Expropriation of vaccine producers under workers' control!
- For an education campaign on vaccines by the unions and working class organisations in the factories!
- For a broad-based vaccination campaign, controlled by the workers in the factories, schools and communities!

Source URL: <https://fifthinternational.org/content/compulsory-vaccination-against-fourth-wave>

Links:

[1] <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1203308/umfrage/impfstoffabdeckung-der-bevoelkerung-gegen-das-coronavirus-nach-laendern/>

[2] <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>