

“A tendency to a general societal crisis ...”

There is much need for clarification in the current situation, a need to know background and connections and make accurate assessments.

At the Monday demonstration on 25 May 2020 in Gelsenkirchen, Stefan Engel gave a speech that attracted keen interest. He wrote this article based on his speech.



All photos: RF

Stefan Engel, head of the theoretical organ of the MLPD, *Revolutionärer Weg*

Dear Monday demonstrators,
Dear people of Gelsenkirchen,
Dear comrades,

Today I want to focus on the government’s crisis management and also on the various protests. What problem do we actually have in Germany at present? The problem is that a new world economic and financial crisis began in mid-2018. It developed relatively slowly at the beginning because the central banks systematically flooded the markets with cheap money. In contrast to Germany, some countries experienced galloping inflation and acute payment difficulties – for example Turkey or Argentina – which developed into an acute danger of national bankruptcy. Since 2018, industrial production has been falling month by month, including in Germany. Investment activity and exports have been affected.

This world economic and financial crisis already existed before the corona crisis began. Already in January, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned of a pandemic. In this situation, the German government deliberately decided to take no further action. At that time, Federal Health Minister Spahn played down the incipient pandemic, as did Prime Minister Johnson in the United Kingdom, President Trump in the USA or Bolsonaro in Brazil. As a result, thousands were quickly infected in these countries; the coronavirus was able to spread almost unhindered. Only with radical measures at a later stage could it be prevented from spreading even further.

But how do you win the population over for such radical measures? Interestingly enough, it was the Federal Ministry of the Interior rather than the Ministry of Health that was in charge of the German crisis management that then began. Minister of the Interior Seehofer indicated in a paper – this became known in April – that in this situation the population would first have to be “shocked”. They would have to be scared in order to create a basis for the acceptance of the drastic measures. Thus, the first actions of the German crisis management consisted of daily news broadcasts and specials, talk shows, press conferences broadcast live on radio and television: with drastic horror forecasts. In this situation the media toed the government line, relatively speaking. In the beginning, the government claimed over 90 percent approval for its measures.

Why was it done this way? Because under the flag of containing the coronavirus the government carried through a program that was aimed above all at systematically manipulating public opinion. The first claim was that the economic crisis was caused by the coronavirus. But this is not true. The economic crisis already existed before; it was suddenly aggravated by the coincidence with the corona crisis. The government and the bourgeois media wanted to put across to people that it was not at all due to the capitalist economic system, which regularly gets into cri-

sis, but to the coronavirus. Nobody could do anything about it, so everyone must now stick together and take joint action.

In order to interrupt chains of infection, people were not only restricted in their freedom of movement, but also – without any benefit for health protection – rigorously restricted in their democratic rights and freedoms. All forms of protest in the streets were banned. You remember that the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) leadership, in anticipatory obedience, even canceled the May Day demonstrations and rallies. The MLPD and also the Monday demonstrations led the way in ensuring that militant actions still took place in more than 100 cities.

However, the government has failed to take the most important measures that would have been necessary for mass health protection. In the first place, these would have been mass and regular testing of the population; secondly, strict social distancing; and thirdly, decent face masks for every person. And not just a mouth and nose mask, which provides only limited protection, but FFP2 and FFP3 masks, which provide real protection. But the government was not in a position to do this. And why? Because it had ignored all WHO pandemic preparedness warnings. As early as 2012, the WHO had predicted that such pandemics could occur and had made it clear what crisis



The Monday demos now take place again regularly, here in Gelsenkirchen - of course, with corona protection

Development of industrial production in Germany (index values referenced to 2015 and rates of increase in year-on-year comparison)

	Jan 18	Feb 18	Mar 18	Apr 18	May 18	Jun 18	Jul 18	Aug 18	Sep 18	Oct 18	Nov 18	Dec 18
Index ind. prod. 2015=100	107.4	105.7	107.3	106.3	108.3	107.4	105.4	105.8	105.7	105.0	103.8	104.5
Change in %	5.6	2.7	4.4	2.7	3.5	3.2	1.0	-0.9	-0.3	0.6	-4.0	-2.9
Index high before crisis 2008-2014=100	106.2	104.5	106.1	105.2	107.1	106.2	104.3	104.7	104.6	103.9	102.7	103.4

	Jan 19	Feb 19	Mar 19	Apr 19	May 19	Jun 19	Jul 19	Aug 19	Sep 19	Oct 19	Nov 19	Dec 19
Index ind. prod. 2015=100	103.2	103.5	104.2	101.7	102.5	101.1	100.8	101.5	100.7	99.5	100.2	104.5
Change in %	-3.9	-3.6	-2.9	-4.3	-5.4	-5.9	-4.4	-4.1	-4.7	-5.2	-3.5	-5.6
Index high before crisis 2008-2014=100	102.1	102.4	103.1	100.6	101.4	100.0	99.7	100.4	99.6	98.4	99.1	97.5

	Jan 20	Feb 20	Mar 20
Index ind. prod. 2015=100	100.6	101.0	89.3
Change in %	-2.5	-2.4	-14.3
Index high before crisis 2008-2014=100	99.5	99.9	88.3

Source: OECD, Main Economic Indicators

prevention should look like. But the government did not have any face masks for people, not even enough for hospital and nursing staff. They couldn't get these things delivered from Asia so quickly either, because now the whole world was ordering such masks. So without further ado, the lie was spread that you don't need a face mask. Mrs. Merkel called it a "virus spreader" at that time.

The second scandal is that until recently you couldn't get a test, and even now you can only get it with restrictions if you don't show any symptoms or have had no contact with infected people. But those who do have symptoms are already highly contagious for at least five days. This means that people go around for five days infecting their family or colleagues at work without knowing it. It is now possible to test over a million people per week in Germany! Only just under a third of that number are tested. And why are not more tests being done? Because for three months now the federal government has been unable to reach an agreement with the health insurance companies on who should pay for these tests. It took less than a week to put together a trillion-euro package to subsidize big business in particular. VW's dividend payout alone would be enough to pay for all the tests at once. In short, far too few effective measures were taken for active health protection.

At the same time it was prophesied: in April the economy will rebound because we will have corona under control. Nothing of the sort happened! The economy continued to decline in April and May. In April, for ten million people short-time work had already been applied for, and over 500,000 had lost their jobs. In the meantime, every fifth company in Germany has announced job cuts.

Today we have the deepest world economic and financial crisis since 1929! In the USA alone, Germany's second most important economic partner, unemployment is expected to reach 30 percent. China, too, was caught up in the maelstrom of the world economic crisis. For the first time in 40 years, there was a negative economic development in the first quarter. 70 million people are said to be unemployed in China. In addition, mainly wages and salaries were reduced.

In order to stabilize the economy and at least prevent a free fall, massive economic stimulus programs were implemented in all countries of the world to boost investment and consumption. This may temporarily dampen the negative consequences and contradictions – but it will not help them get out of the world economic and financial crisis as easily as claimed. In wise foresight, Wolfgang Schäuble predicted: "Europe is experiencing an economic slump



The more people made jobless or put on short-time, the bigger will be the discontent (photo of a steelworkers' demonstration)

unlike anything we have ever experienced in our lifetime, and only a rudimentary estimate can be made of the disruptions this will cause for our societies.”

The longer the negative economic development lasts, the more people become unemployed and work short-time, the greater will be the discontent. Approval for the government’s measures has been declining for several weeks. Especially because the government is constantly contradicting itself and more and more people are experiencing first-hand that the crisis is only just beginning.

In the meantime, crisis management has to some extent become a crisis in itself. Why? Because it turns out that the economic situation is not simply reviving. It is now being conceded that the crisis will last even longer – some say all summer, some even say until the end of 2023. In short, no one really knows exactly.

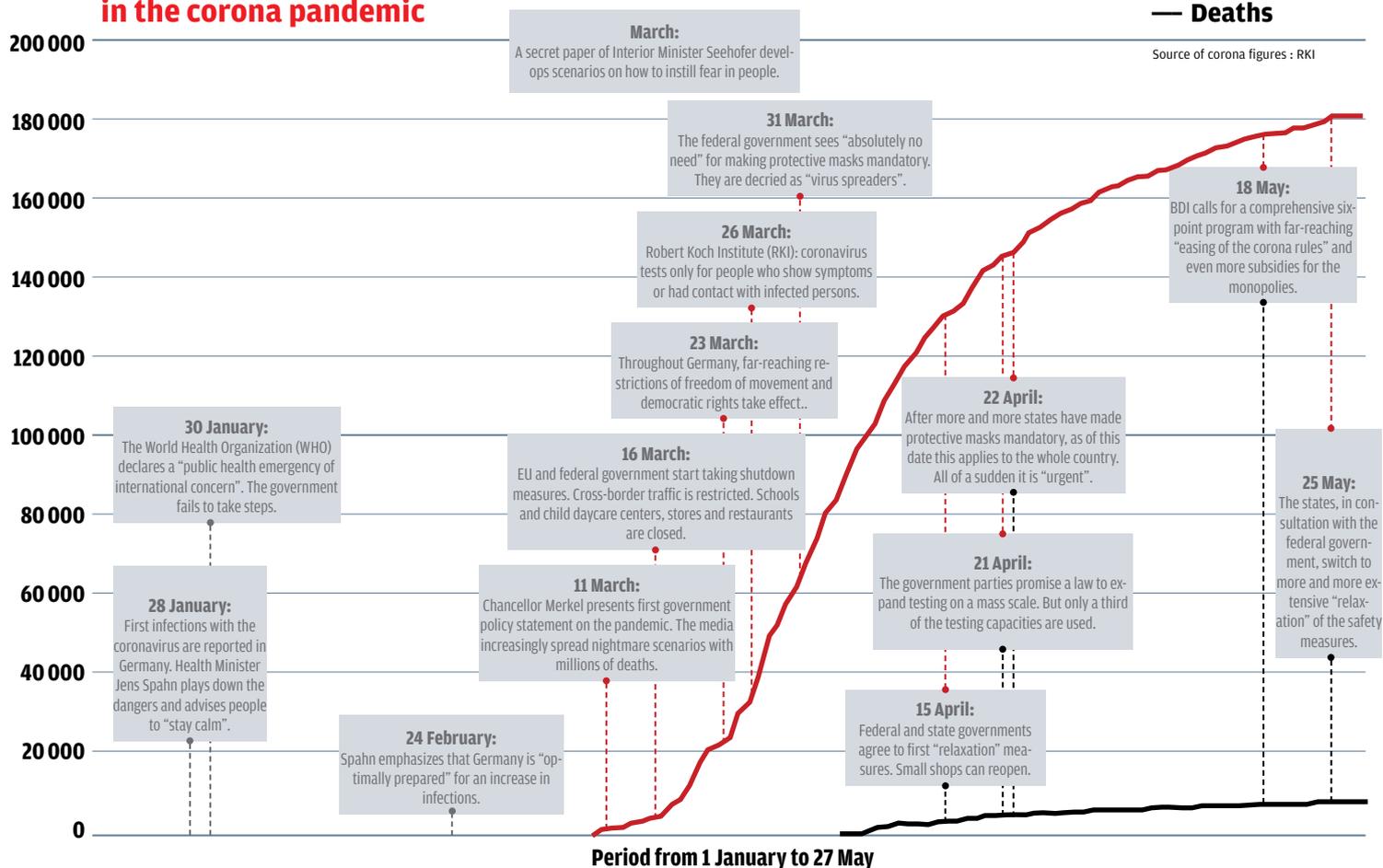
In early May, people rubbed their eyes in amazement: the government suddenly switched its crisis management from caution to hasty relaxation of the corona rules. The background was that at the

same time the Federation of German Industries (BDI) demanded in the form of an ultimatum that all restrictions be lifted by the end of May. And this despite the fact that at that time there were officially still 12,000 infected persons, and this number was considerably higher than in March when the drastic measures were introduced. The BDI’s instructions, which were followed straight-away, show who the real government in Germany is. The government is spending billions of euros for the monopolies, but also a lot of money to keep people calm. What kind of basis for scientific crisis management is this?!

But the government must also step on the subsidy brake, and at some point the question will come to the fore who actually is going to pay for all these benefits.

The German government has changed the regulations for short-time work benefits. It did so to reassure the workers, because they were the ones who protested most against the crisis management. They called for decisive health protection in the companies as well. They made it clear: if it is not possible to keep a distance at work, the companies may also have to shut down, in

Chronology of official government situation appraisals and measures in the corona pandemic



order to protect the health of the workers and their families.

At the same time there are already many people who are really becoming impoverished. Because neither the recipients of long-term unemployment benefit (Hartz IV) nor the pensioners received more money when the foodbanks were first closed. Some smaller enterprises or self-employed persons received immediate aid. But this is not enough for long! And why do Hartz IV recipients, pensioners, single parents, especially women with children, and others who really need it, not receive sufficient help? Even those who have short-time work for a few months can hardly make ends meet! Within the government party CDU there were even voices calling for a reduction of the minimum wage and the suspension of the increase in the Hartz IV rate for this year, so that the state's debt would not grow immeasurably.

For months, children and young people lack peers and all the social contacts. Especially women who work from home and who have to help their children to learn at home are put to an extreme test of endurance. Many companies very rapidly cut the number of training places. The number of people not getting a job after their training will reach a new record level this year. Young people who have completed their training are not employed and often no trainees are recruited at all. This seems to be the cheapest and "most elegant" way to lay people off or to cut jobs and apprenticeships. In view of the increasing easing of the corona restrictions and the alleged "return to normality", the population is supposed to forget all these social crises.

Promptly the media also change their approach again. Now suddenly everything is fine. People are allowed to go out onto the streets again. Now shops

are being opened, tourism is being permitted, and gatherings should also be possible again to a certain extent. But the hotspots should not be forgotten: These are the dormitories where six to eight people, mostly temporary workers from different countries, are crammed into one room; these are the meat industry and the hospitals. These are the nursing homes and accommodations for asylum seekers. In these hotspots, people still get infected because they do not have face masks and cannot keep the recommended distance. In some cases they are not even educated about corona.

The main problem is that measures to contain the corona pandemic are directly opposed to economic recovery – and vice versa. So the corona crisis and the world economic and financial crisis are two different things. I assume that – seen globally – they could, in a few months' time, reinforce each other, escalating so that a general societal crisis of the imperialist world system emerges.

Firstly, national crisis programs only provide very limited help. With today's international production, it is no use trying to boost production in Germany again if, for example, two thirds of car parts are not supplied from other countries. Nor is it of any use to produce here come hell or high water when

the world market collapses in this way. Getting the current world economic and financial crisis under control with national crisis programs is an illusion. It is just as illusory to think that the COVID-19 pandemic could be overcome with national measures if it simultaneously continues to grow exponentially worldwide.

Secondly, many corporate bosses themselves are obviously under the illusion that the economic crisis was triggered by the corona crisis. But this is not the case. In the meantime, there are first economists who do not follow the unctuous speeches of the “wise men” of the German Council of Economic Experts, who themselves speak of a world economic and financial crisis and admit that the negative economic development had already begun before the corona crisis. But so far this is only sporadic. All in all, the basis for a functioning crisis management is lacking!

It is possible that a deep global political crisis such as has not been the case since the Second World War is imminent. In such a crisis, mass struggles and strikes will break out; there will be street battles and brutal police operations against the masses. In Latin America or Africa such a development is already in the making today. There, millions are starving; there is no



May Day was a signal internationally – carrying fighting spirit onto the streets in corona times – here in Greece

functioning health or social system for the broad masses. Testing is not being done. The coronavirus is spreading more and more worldwide. There are now officially over five million infected people in the world. From a global perspective, we are at the beginning of the pandemic, not at the end!

The mixture of economic, political, ecological, social, ideological and hunger crises is the soil on which a revolutionary ferment can develop.

In the face of this crisis development, the struggles of the workers and the broad masses will increase decisively. During the last months, the workers have already taken the lead in the protests. So in Germany, when all public life was shut down, but the industrial workers were supposed to continue producing, unprotected. For example, workers who were previously at the International Automotive Workers' Conference in South Africa played a leading role in ensuring a militant May Day: in the Philippines, in Brazil, in South Africa, also in Germany and Italy. There, 900,000 workers

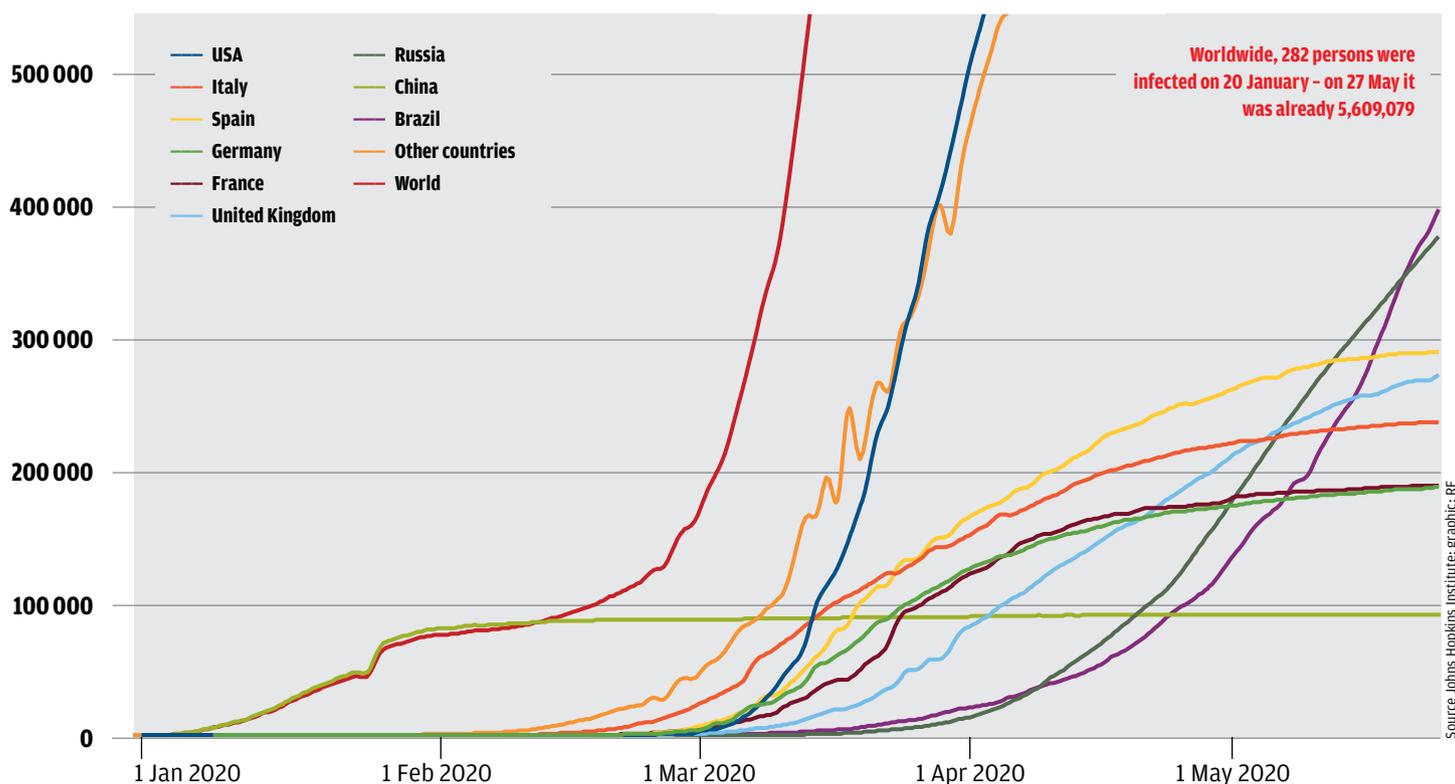
went on strike around 1 May – despite the curfew! Another highlight was the celebrations on 8 May on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the victory over Hitlerite fascism. Everywhere militant workers, women and youth – and Marxist-Leninists – were at the forefront of the struggle for democratic rights and freedoms.

And suddenly there were demonstrations of right-wing forces, Pegida people and AfD types in Germany, supporters of fascists like Trump in the USA or Bolsonaro in Brazil. They also take to the streets, but against the justified measures for health protection. They are not protesting against the restriction of democratic rights and freedoms, but against all the government's health measures. This is inhuman and anti-people. It risks the lives and health of millions of people in the world.

I call on everyone, protest, but do not fall for these right-wing agitators! They demand, for example, the dissolution of refugee centers – but only in order then to deport all the refugees. Apart from that, they also have nothing against old people fall-

Development of worldwide case numbers for coronavirus (COVID-19)

since January 2020 (status as of 27 May)



ing ill and dying from corona, as that would only be “natural selection”. This is a fascist worldview! We have nothing to do with such people. We are not misanthropists. The demonstrations of the right wing were – similar to Pegida in the past – blown up in media like ntv. But more than 80 percent of the population in Germany are clearly opposed to them, and so these reactionary demonstrations have now been massively reduced again.

If we protest against the government’s crisis management, it is not against reasonable health measures. We criticize, above all, the restrictions on democratic rights and freedoms, completely unnecessary in terms of health policy, and the way in which the burdens of the crisis are being shifted onto the masses of the population, the workers, the elderly in the nursing homes, the refugees in the homes for asylum seekers, etc.

We must be aware that there will be a lot more happening this year.

That is why we must also maintain and continue our form of protest, the social conscience of the Monday demonstration, and not allow media propaganda to cloud our minds. We must use our own heads and continue.

We have been on the streets regularly since 2004 and we have already uncovered and achieved a lot. We will continue to inform people. And when we see that a general societal crisis of the imperialist world system is developing, then it is high time to think about alternatives. What a rotten system this is!

Humanity today would be capable of quite different achievements: to defeat hunger and poverty, to prevent diseases, to actively protect health and to give the youth a future. But capitalism will never provide that! For that we need revolutionary changes and genuine socialism.

The Monday demonstration is a democratic, non-party-affiliated event. We are here because we are protesting for the social and democratic rights of the working-class movement, of ordinary people, of young people. And we are internationalists above all. We are firmly against any kind of racism, fascism and anti-Semitism. Our motto is: Don’t give anti-communism, racism, anti-Semitism and fascism a chance! Long live international solidarity!

Take heart, join this solidarity movement and the common struggle. Glückauf! Good luck!



Take heart – the future of children is also at stake!