

# German government pushes the militarisation of schools and conscription of young people

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A central element of the return of German militarism is the complete orientation of society towards war, including at home. As the *World Socialist Web Site* recently commented, Germany's new National Security Strategy is "a blueprint for war abroad and the establishment of a police state at home". All "areas of economic and social life" are to be "subordinated to the concept of 'security' and de facto declared relevant to war".

This increasingly affects young people and even children. Against the backdrop of NATO's escalation of the war against Russia and the constantly advancing rearmament offensive, schools are also becoming more and more militarised. At the same time, the reintroduction of compulsory military service is being discussed and prepared. The government is pursuing the declared goal of massively enlarging the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) and recruiting "new blood" among young people, i.e., the necessary cannon fodder for Germany's pro-war policy.

According to a report in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, which is based on information from the Ministry of Defence, a total of 119 lectures or events by career advisers at German schools are planned for this purpose up to September 2023 alone. "From comprehensive and middle schools to secondary schools and grammar schools", "everything is included", and "the Bundeswehr is also present" at vocational schools. A total of several hundred presentations have already taken place this year—350 in the first three months of the year and 196 between April and June.

The militarisation of schools stands in line with the official policy of the government. Speaking to the newspapers of the Bavarian Media Group, Eva Högl (Social Democrat, SPD), the Bundestag's (parliamentary) Commissioner for the Armed Forces,

said in mid-June, "I would be pleased if the teaching community would say: It is an important part within the framework of education to also deal with the armed forces."

The army already recruits more than 1,500 young people per year. According to Bundeswehr data, it commissioned 1,773 underage soldiers last year alone. That corresponds to almost 10 percent of the total of 18,776 new recruits. But from the point of view of the government and military leadership, it cannot stop there. In order to boost recruitment for the army, Högl is advocating the introduction of a general muster for service in the Bundeswehr.

In an interview with *T-Online* on 4 June, she demanded: "You could invite an entire cohort of young people to the Bundeswehr for muster, as in Sweden. And then let them decide for themselves, if they are fit for military service, whether they want to enlist or not. And this muster should be directed at all genders."

Using Sweden as a model for Germany makes it clear what the ruling class is planning. Sweden reintroduced conscription in 2017, after it had been abolished in 2010 and the country—according to then Swedish Defence Minister Peter Hultquist—subsequently had problems "filling our war units on a voluntary basis".

The *World Socialist Web Site* commented at the time: "Workers and youth across Europe should regard this announcement, which is supported by all parties in Sweden, including the Swedish Left Party, as a warning. After two devastating world wars in the 20th century, even the ruling class in supposedly peace-loving Sweden is again recruiting the cannon fodder for a new great war."

This is precisely the point. In the interview, Högl explains that it would not help "to reverse the suspension of conscription in Germany". However, the

only reason she gives is that there were “not enough trainers and not enough infrastructure for it”. That is unmistakable. A possible reinstatement of conscription needs, above all, more preparation. In any case, the Bundeswehr must therefore already play a more central role in social life.

Högl gives free rein to her dream of a militarised society: “But more visibility among the population also means creating more encounters. This includes swearing in ceremonies in public places, ceremonies when units leave for foreign missions or return. A sign of appreciation would also be to invite the Bundeswehr whenever there are celebrations such as shooting club festivals, regional fairs or the like.”

Such open homage to the army was common in the Kaiser’s Empire and during Nazi rule. Now it is returning with a vengeance. The call for the militarisation of society and the reintroduction of conscription—which officially only the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) raises in its programme—runs through all the establishment parties.

Recently, at the “Bundeswehr Day” in Bückeburg, Lower Saxony, Defence Minister Boris Pistorius (SPD) complained that reinstating compulsory military service would not help recruit enough young people fast enough. It would tie up too much “energy, time and money”. Instead, he suggested, “Young men and women could participate in the everyday life of the troops for a certain period of time, almost like an internship, and get to know the procedures and different areas.” In this way, he said, one could “arouse the interest of young people in a commitment [to signing up]”.

There are forces in the Left Party that are openly calling for the reinstatement of conscription. Last year, the Left Party state prime minister of Thuringia, Bodo Ramelow, promulgated the “proposal of a Bundeswehr as a land defence army, as a parliamentary army and embedded in the entire population via conscription”. He said he was “deeply convinced that a social year [of service] would be good for all people in our country”.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and its youth and student organisation IYSSE have declared war on the return of German militarism and all pro-war parties. We reject the reintroduction of conscription and the militarisation of schools and universities as well as the horrendous

rearmament, the NATO war offensive against Russia and the Bundeswehr’s missions abroad.

Opposition among pupils, students and young workers against war and militarism is enormous. After its crimes in two world wars, if the ruling class thinks that it can once again use millions of young people as cannon fodder for the predatory interests of German imperialism, it is mistaken. But the struggle against war requires a clear perspective. In its programme for the 2024 European elections the SGP writes:

The only social force that can prevent another world war is the international working class—that is, the vast majority of the world’s population, which today is more numerous and more interconnected than ever before. Together with its sister parties in the Fourth International, the SGP is building a worldwide socialist movement against war and its cause, capitalism.

· Stop the NATO war in Ukraine! No sanctions and weapons deliveries!

· Two World Wars are enough! Stop the warmongers!

· €100 billion for day care centers, schools and hospitals instead of rearmament and war!

Young workers and students who want to fight against war and militarism should study this programme carefully and contact us. Register today as a member of the IYSSE.



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