Zelensky government cracks down on conscription loopholes

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Members of President Volodymyr Zelensky's Servant of the People political party have introduced a draft law intended to crack down on Ukrainian men avoiding conscription into the country's armed forces through the use of student waivers.

As the *Kyiv Post* reported, men between the ages of 18 and 60 are currently exempt from mobilization if they are enrolled in a higher education course.

The proposed law would limit the exemption to men under the age of 30 in order to increase the number of troops available for the armed forces.

The authors of the draft law admitted that support for conscription is far from universal throughout the country and that "a significant number of individuals of conscription age" exploited the current law to evade conscription during mobilization.

In their words "the practice of evading conscription for military service during mobilization negatively impacts Ukraine's national security and defense. It also affects the morale and psychological well-being of military personnel who defend Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity with arms in hand."

Since the beginning of the full-scale war between Russia and Ukraine, the number of men aged 30 and over enrolled in higher education skyrocketed as tens of thousands sought to avoid conscription in the NATO-provoked slaughter that has already killed between 350,000 and 400,000 Ukrainian soldiers.

According to the *Kyiv Post*, "From 2019 to 2021, around 40,000 male students in Ukraine were aged over 25. After February 2022, this number jumped to 106,000."

Such figures clearly contradict the endless pro-war propaganda in the Western press that Ukrainians are united in their support for the war and ready to surrender their lives to retake "Ukrainian lands" in the east.

The introduction of the draft law is also a clear signal by the Zelensky government that it is determined to continue the war, even as its counteroffensive has failed, with over 40,000 lives sacrificed in just a few months.

Apart from planning to conscript students over aged 30, the Zelensky government is busy introducing a range of measures to expand its pool of reserves to send to the front. This includes growing demands that those eligible abroad be forced to return to the country.

In late August, the Ukrainian Defense Ministry announced changes to the types of permitted medical exemptions in order to force more sick and disabled men into the armed forces. Under the new regulations, people with "clinically cured tuberculosis, viral hepatitis, slowly progressing blood diseases, thyroid gland diseases with minor functional disorders, and those who are HIV-positive but without symptoms" are now fit for military service.

The expansion of potential recruits comes on the heels of the dismissal of Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov and his replacement with Rustem Umerov, an investment banker of Crimean Tatar background.

Earlier on August 28, Reznikov announced at a press conference that there were no plans for a new wave of general mobilization. According to Reznikov, the government had yet to complete the previous round of mobilization approved by parliament.

"This means that we do not need to announce a new mobilization to increase the number of troops today," Reznikov stated, directly contradicting comments made by Zelensky just days earlier at the Crimea Platform summit that a new round of mobilization could not be ruled out.

"To be honest, the military approached me with this,

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to allow us to mobilize more [people]...; that's all I can tell you for now," Zelensky stated.

According to Zelensky, the matter of increased numbers was not an issue that could wait, contrary to what Reznikov suggested.

"It is necessary as soon as possible to accelerate processes, establish order, and then begin discussions about the need to increase [ranks of the military]—how and with whom," Zelensky said.

Apart from his well-known involvement in a corruption procurement scandal and the revelation of wide-scale bribery at military recruitment centers in August, the Zelensky government and its NATO backers likely concluded that Reznikov could not be counted on to direct a new round of mobilization and that his continued presence risked a serious backlash from the military, which is desperately seeking fresh recruits to replenish its depleted ranks.

Along with the dismissal of Reznikov, on September 1, the leader of Zelensky's party David Arachamia inserted himself into the mobilization question by proposing that Ukrainian law enforcement agencies should demand the extradition of men of military age who had illegally left Ukraine to escape mobilization and prosecute them.

According to the Polish conservative outlet *Rzeczpospolita*, it is estimated that within Poland, a staunch backer of the NATO war in Ukraine against Russia, there are around 80,000 Ukrainian men aged 18-60, who were potentially eligible for military service, who had entered the country since the start of the war and whose whereabouts are currently unknown.

In total, over 650,000 men between the ages of 18 and 64 are registered as refugees throughout Europe, according to EU statistics.

Since the beginning of the war, the Ukrainian State Border Guard has detained 13,600 people trying to cross the border outside of checkpoints, according to spokesman Andriy Demchenko. Another 6,100 have been caught attempting to cross with forged documents.

Such official numbers are likely a huge underestimation as they only include those too poor to pay the reported $5,000 to $10,000 bribes necessary to avoid conscription.

Just this week, *Euronews* reported on the well-known secret that tens of thousands of working class Ukrainians would rather be labeled "cowards" and "draft dodgers" than die for Zelensky's billionaire oligarch government.

Ivan Ishchenko told *Euronews* that he willingly volunteered to join following the invasion. However, after just a month of combat, he fled and paid $5,000 for a government-plated car to escort him to a forest on the border with Hungary.

"Before I went to war, I thought I was a superhero. But all heroism ends when people see [war] with their own eyes and realise that they don't belong there," Ishchenko said.

"I saw someone being shot near his spleen; the pain was crazy. Then I saw a severed head. It all built up. ... I didn't want to see anything else."

With emerging reports in the wake of the counteroffensive's failure, Western officials now foresee the war continuing well into 2024 and 2025 and are determined to fund the war for "as long as it takes." This will force the Zelensky government to ramp up its attacks on draft dodgers and the Ukrainian working class. As the WSWS has repeatedly stated, the international working class alone can end this war on a progressive basis.

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