

German army recruits more and more minors

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While Germany wages war against Russia in Ukraine and supports genocide against the Palestinians in the Middle East, the militarisation of society continues, extending to the enlistment of minors. In step with the planned reintroduction of compulsory military service, the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) is targeting teenagers for recruitment.

A response from the German government to a parliamentary question from the Left Party reveals that a total of 1,996 young people under the age of 18 were recruited by the Bundeswehr in 2023. That is just under 10 percent of the total number of new recruits this year and an all-time high.

The figures have risen sharply in recent years. In 2022, 1,773 minors were recruited, in 2021 it was 1,239, and in 2020 the number was 1,148. In 2019, the year before the outbreak of the pandemic, the Bundeswehr recruited 1,705 minors. In total, 7,861 minors have been recruited in the last five years.

The increasing recruitment of minors goes hand in hand with the growing presence of the Bundeswehr in schools and other educational and youth facilities. The Bundeswehr now has 85 youth officers, compared to 73 in 2019.

The Ministry of Defence officially defines the tasks of the youth officers as follows:

The youth officers of the Bundeswehr are available as expert speakers on the subject of defence and security policy and as discussion partners. They offer the interested public a wide range of information in the form of lectures, events and educational trips.

In other words, the youth officers act as propagandists of militarism, whose work consists of getting young

people excited about the army and luring them into the barracks. In 2023, youth officers gave over 3,400 talks at schools and universities. According to the government, they reached almost 90,000 students. Almost 3,000 of these then visited Bundeswehr facilities. Personnel costs for the youth officers rose from €5.4 million in 2019 to €5.8 million in 2023.

The government justifies the recruitment of minors by pointing out that they will not be trained in the use of weapons or take part in missions abroad. But this merely postpones their possible deployment in war.

The threat these recruits face is evident in Ukraine. After two-and-a-half years of NATO warfare, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian and Russian soldiers are dead or wounded. Ukrainian labourers and now also young people are increasingly being forcibly recruited off of the street and sent to the front.

Such methods are also being prepared in Germany. Just a few days ago, Hesse became the first federal state to decide to send Ukrainian men of military age whose residency papers have expired back to Ukraine—thus forcing them to serve as cannon fodder at the front.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) condemns the recruitment of minors and the murderous pro-war policy in the strongest possible terms. After two world wars, in which tens of thousands of children and young people and millions of workers were sacrificed to the interests of the German ruling class, there is strong anti-war sentiment in Germany and throughout Europe. For example, 59 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds are against the return of conscription, which the German government is preparing. The number of professional and regular soldiers has been falling steadily for years.

The multimillion-euro advertising campaigns aimed at enticing teenagers and young adults to join the military have had no major impact. The Bundeswehr's latest campaign, which is being run mainly via Tik-Tok

and YouTube, is primarily intended to appeal to a young audience. In the €6 million campaign titled “Explorers—A roadtrip through the Bundeswehr,” the military is working with four influencers, who guide the viewer through various areas of the Bundeswehr. The army is presented in propaganda terms as a great adventure with excellent career and promotion opportunities.

The fact that the parliamentary question to the federal government comes from the Left Party cannot hide the fact that this party, like all other bourgeois parties, supports the militarisation of society and the Bundeswehr’s war operations. From the outset, it has backed the NATO offensive against Russia in Ukraine and supported arms deliveries to Kiev. The Left Party Youth even organised a fundraising campaign for the Ukrainian army, which is riddled with fascists.

The Left Party also supports Israel’s genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza. On October 10 last year, for example, a pro-Israeli parliamentary motion was passed with the support of all (!) members of the Left Party in the Bundestag. Dietmar Bartsch, then the parliamentary group leader of the Left Party in the Bundestag, celebrated the motion as “Germany’s contribution to the fight against terror.”

Tabling parliamentary questions such as the one about underage recruits serves to disguise the Left Party’s role as a party of war and prevent workers and young people who reject militarism from organising independently and turning to a socialist perspective.

This is precisely what the IYSSE is fighting for as the youth and student organisation of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and the Fourth International. The only way to avert the danger of a third world war and to stop the militarisation of youth is to build a powerful anti-war movement of the international working class based on a socialist programme.



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