

Rallies in Paris, Berlin and Cologne show growing opposition to the war in Ukraine

Our reporters

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Last Saturday, rallies against the brutal forced recruitment of thousands of men for the war in Ukraine took place in Cologne, Berlin and Paris. They were organised by the “Alliance of the Post-Soviet Left,” a group of Ukrainian and Russian war refugees, which is mainly active in Germany and denounces the dictatorial policies of Ukraine’s Zelenskyy regime. In November, the alliance held its first protest in Berlin, which was reported on by the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The latest protests called on “all opponents of the war, regardless of their nationality” to protest against the Ukrainian government’s attacks, in particular against the closing of the borders “which are turning the country into a prison,” against the “persecution of dissidents, which equates opposition with a crime,” against “the crimes of the recruitment centres” and against the “deportation of Russian citizens from Germany who refused to take part in the war and helped to end the bloodshed.”

WSWS reporters spoke to the organisers and participants in all three cities, and in Cologne Dietmar Gaisenkersting, deputy leader of the Socialist Equality Party, addressed the participants.

Gaisenkersting began by emphasising the basis of the Trotskyist movement’s opposition to the Ukraine war: “Since the beginning of the Ukraine war, we have rejected the claim that it was an ‘unprovoked war of aggression’ by Russia. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is the Putin regime’s reactionary response to NATO’s encirclement of Russia over the last three decades.”

The US and the NATO states had been waging wars for over 30 years. “The causes of these wars,” Gaisenkersting said, “lie in the endeavours of the NATO powers, especially the US, for world domination.” The war in Ukraine was part of a developing world war. “It can therefore not be understood separately from the genocidal war in the Middle East and the preparations for war against China.”

“Our perspective is derived from this,” concluded Gaisenkersting, namely “the struggle for the Ukrainian and Russian workers, together with their class brothers and

sisters in the imperialist countries, to overthrow their governments and capitalism in a common struggle and thus end the Ukrainian war—and all wars.”

Gaisenkersting raised the plight of Bogdan Syrotiuk, the founder and chairman of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, a Trotskyist youth organisation that unites young people from Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and other former states of the Soviet Union, who was arrested by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) on April 25, 2024 and remains in custody to this day.

He called on those present to join the campaign for Bogdan Syrotiuk’s freedom.

The fates of many who were highlighted at the rallies in Paris, Berlin and Cologne showed that the struggle for Bogdan’s freedom has a growing basis in the Ukrainian population, which is increasingly rebelling against the war and the brutal policies of the Zelensky regime that accompany it.

On Pariser Platz in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, the protesters held up posters depicting the fates of various Ukrainian men. One described that of Andriy Panasiuk: “He was abducted by military registration and enlistment officers when he was in the preliminary stages of a stroke. Afterwards he died.” Another showed a man tied to a tree. He was also abducted by recruitment officers and raped in a forest. Boris Glushak was taken away despite his epilepsy and died of an epileptic seizure. Two other young victims are pictured on a poster: Serhii Kovalchuk and Alexander Gashevsky, both were abducted by the military and died.

The leaflet distributed by the organisers documented the fates of several others. In the text, the emigrants write: “In the country that is waiting to join the EU, gangs openly kidnap and abuse men in public in order to fulfil conscription quotas. In many cases, men have died as a result of the abuse, but there are no investigations.” The police look the other way or help the recruiting officers.

In a country that tells the world that it stands up for democracy, “security forces invade the homes of those who

have criticised the government.” Sick men with tuberculosis, epilepsy, hepatitis and even disabled people have already been conscripted.

The 19-year-old Ukrainian refugee Daniel explained to those present: “We are here to inform you about what is happening in Ukraine. Because Ukrainian propaganda is trying to disguise everything as democracy, but at the same time Ukrainian men are being taken away. There are no human rights, it’s not about democracy or saving the country. The Ukrainian government is not in favour of the Ukrainian people. That’s why we are standing here.”

Daniel described President Volodymyr Zelensky to the WWSW as a “failed dictator.” Before his election, he had promised a lot and presented himself in a populist manner as a servant of the people and an opponent of corruption, but then did the opposite. His government was building a dictatorship under the guise of democracy and justified this with the war situation. “From my point of view, however, the people don’t want a dictatorship, but a normal life and democracy,” he said.

Daniel compared the situation in Ukraine with the time before the war: “Before there were fake elections, but at least there were elections. Now there are no elections at all.” Before Zelensky, there was also media propaganda under the influence of the oligarchs, but at least there was some freedom of opinion. “But now only one opinion is allowed.” Children are beaten up at school if they speak Russian.

Daniel described an incident that happened recently in Ukraine: A man in his 20s stood by the motorway with a banner that read: “We are against the military administration. Anyone who agrees with the statement that the military leaders are bandits should honk their horns.” Many cars honked as they drove past until the police arrived and took him away. A few days later, a video appeared in which the demonstrator apologised for his protest. “That means he was forced to do it by the police. It’s like in Russia. There is no freedom of speech,” emphasised Daniel.

Sergei, who fled across the river via Moldova to Germany, denounced the brutal methods of the recruitment centres. Ordinary people were treated like “meat” and abducted. Soldiers’ salaries were cut while the government gave itself a pay rise. “Only the poor people are conscripted, not the rich and famous.”

Other participants in Berlin expressed their anger at the Zelensky government to the WWSW. A Ukrainian mother from Kharkiv described how her 34-year-old son was abducted by the recruitment authorities and locked up in a filthy cellar without windows with around 150 people in miserable conditions.

He had already fought at the front for four months in 2022, was wounded and returned home. He received no medical

help, she said. He did not want to go to war again, but he was abducted against his will. “He disappeared for three days without a sign of life in the dark cellar hole where the men were beaten.” They tried to break her son’s hand. In this way, the men were pressurised into signing a written commitment to serve on the front, the mother said. If they did not sign a document to this effect, they are threatened with a prison sentence.

Her son was then taken to a detention centre in western Ukraine, far away from his hometown of Kharkiv. However, as the prisons and detention centres are overcrowded, he was temporarily released until the beginning of January so that he could join his wife and young child in Kiev. After that, he can either return to the front or be sent to prison.

In Paris, one of the organisers explained that they were against the violence in Ukraine “which emanates from the military recruitment authority, which violates human rights.”

He also emphasised that there was no military solution to this conflict. “Both the NATO countries and Russia have nuclear weapons; it is not possible to end this war militarily.” In response to President Emmanuel Macron’s call to send French troops to Ukraine, he said: “If they send a NATO army directly to Ukraine, it could lead to a nuclear war. And if it starts, there will be no turning back.”

The people of Ukraine were “tired of all this chaos in Ukraine, of the violence and corruption, and this situation has not changed at all.”

The rallies in Paris, Berlin and Cologne show that opposition to the war is growing, not only in Germany, Europe and the US, but also in Ukraine and Russia itself. It is necessary for those opposed to the war to turn to the working class and to arm it with an international socialist perspective, independent of the imperialist powers of NATO as well as the capitalist regimes in Ukraine and Russia.



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