

No cannon fodder for the profits of the rich!

For a socialist perspective against the reintroduction of conscription in Germany

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE)
7 December 2025

This statement was distributed at demonstrations and protests held throughout Germany on December 5 against the reintroduction of conscription.

Today's school strike against the reintroduction of conscription, in which thousands of pupils and students across Germany are taking part, is an important step in building a movement against militarisation and war. But the organisers are doing everything they can to exclude the central issue—the massive rearmament and war preparations of the federal government—from the protests and to confine them to the narrowest, most immediate demands. They are even prepared to work together with militarist forces in the state and the army if these make verbal declarations against general conscription.

Nothing can be won on this basis. If the German ruling class is rearming on a scale not seen since Hitler, supports the horrific genocide in Gaza and once again openly prepares for war with Russia, conscription will be brought back. The ruling coalition of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) makes this clear in its draft law on the “New Military Service.” It explicitly provides for compulsory registration, compulsory medical examinations and, as soon as the number of “volunteers” is insufficient, compulsory call-up to meet the army's personnel targets.

The struggle against conscription therefore demands a struggle against war and militarism and against their root cause: capitalism. We call on everyone participating in the strike to read and circulate this appeal and to take an active part in building an international, socialist anti-war movement.

We say no to conscription, in whatever form and at whatever time it is planned. We refuse to serve as cannon fodder for the profits of the rich!

The return of conscription is part of the militarisation of society as a whole. Eighty years after the end of the Second World War, the German government is once again preparing to march an entire generation into the barracks and the trenches to sacrifice young lives for the economic interests of the ruling class. The CDU/SPD coalition is driving the rearmament of the Bundeswehr forward at breakneck speed.

The Bundeswehr is to be expanded into the largest conventional land army in Europe. The government plans to increase troop strength by some 80,000 soldiers and to build a reserve pool of

several hundred thousand more. The new military service law creates the legal framework for this massive build-up, through compulsory mustering and subsequent call-ups. German military expenditure has already reached record levels and will be driven still higher through the “New Military Service” in order to finance the planned expansion in personnel and weaponry.

This has nothing to do with “self-defence.” Russia's reactionary invasion of Ukraine does not alter the fact that the imperialist powers systematically prepared this war for years. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, NATO has, in defiance of all assurances made to Moscow, pushed its borders steadily eastwards and encircled Russia militarily. Berlin has played a central role in this offensive.

With its current rearmament programme, the German government is returning to its historic war aims from the First and Second World Wars. Its declared goal is that Germany, 80 years after the catastrophic defeat of Hitler's Wehrmacht (army), should once again be capable of winning a war against nuclear-armed Russia. For us, this would mean the same fate that young people suffered then, and that young people in Ukraine and Russia suffer today: forced recruitment, trenches and death.

The barbarism for which the ruling class is preparing, and the fact that its policy has nothing to do with “democracy” or “human rights,” are already being demonstrated in Gaza. For almost two years the federal government has been participating in genocide there—in the slaughter of tens of thousands of children and young people. Any government that supports such crimes is also ready to sacrifice our generation in a new world war.

In preparation for this, schools and universities are already being militarised. Youth officers appear in classrooms to present killing for the fatherland as “service to democracy.” Universities and colleges are being turned into militarist research and training centres, while protests against war and genocide on campus are brutally attacked by heavily armed police.

Even this has not been enough to inject young people with the poison of militarism. Despite years of relentless war propaganda in schools and universities, opinion polls show that only around 16 percent of young people would be willing to take up arms for Germany in the event of war. This is why conscription is to be reintroduced. Young people are to be placed under military discipline and dragooned in order to break this opposition.

We must not allow this to happen. The drive to war must be stopped and conscription prevented. We will not allow our generation to be sacrificed again on the killing fields of the rich.

Against fake pacifism

We reject conscription not only because we ourselves do not want to die in the trenches, but because we do not want anyone to die in the trenches. We oppose conscription because it is part of a spiral of war that destroys ever more human lives.

There is nothing more revolting than the politics of the Green Youth and the Young Socialists (Jusos), the youth organisation of the SPD, who support the escalation of war and object only when their own heads are on the line. The youth organisations of all the parliamentary parties support the genocide in Gaza and agitate daily for an escalation of the war against Russia. They accept that Russian and Ukrainian young people, and Palestinian children, are sacrificed on the altar of profit—as long as they themselves are not sent to the slaughter.

If German youth are to be sacrificed, these groups insist that it should not be their own ranks, but working-class children who “volunteer” for the Bundeswehr because they see no other way to obtain training or a future. Every cut in education and social spending implemented by the governing parties increases the pressure on working-class youth to “volunteer,” while the Juso and Green Youth functionaries are spared.

We condemn this fake pacifism of the privileged middle-class layers, who are in favour of war as long as it does not affect them personally. For us, stopping conscription means stopping the escalation of war.

We also reject the position of organisations such as the Left Party, which nominally oppose conscription but support the rearmament of the Bundeswehr as an alleged “defence army.” It is no accident that the Left Party voted in the Bundesrat, the upper house of parliament, for the one-trillion-euro war credits and then helped open the way for Merz to become chancellor at the head of the most right-wing post-war German government.

The escalation of the war against Russia, the German government’s support for the genocide in Gaza and the attacks on Iran, show that the strengthening of the Bundeswehr has nothing to do with “defence” but serves predatory imperialist interests.

This raises fundamental political questions. Anyone who claims that the Bundeswehr can be built up as a purely defensive force is claiming that there can be a peaceful capitalism. Two world wars and the acute danger of a third demonstrate that there can be no such thing as peaceful capitalism.

War does not arise from the malice of individual politicians at the top of society, but from the objective contradictions of capitalism. The contradiction between a world market and its division into rival nation-states leads inevitably to the struggle for markets and raw materials, which takes the form of war.

As long as capitalism exists, there will be war. A “peaceful Bundeswehr” is therefore impossible and a dangerous illusion.

A socialist perspective against war

From this, decisive conclusions must be drawn. A fight against conscription means a fight against war and against its root—the capitalist system. We therefore fight for the building of an independent movement of the working class, based on the political principles elaborated by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in its 2016 statement “Socialism and the Fight Against War”:

- The struggle against war must be based on the working class, the great revolutionary force in society, uniting behind it all progressive elements in the population.

- The new anti-war movement must be anti-capitalist and socialist since there can be no serious struggle against war except in the fight to end the dictatorship of finance capital and the economic system that is the fundamental cause of militarism and war.

- The new anti-war movement must therefore, of necessity, be completely and unequivocally independent of, and hostile to, all political parties and organisations of the capitalist class.

- Above all, the new anti-war movement must be international, mobilising the vast power of the working class in a unified global struggle against imperialism. The permanent war of the bourgeoisie must be answered with the perspective of permanent revolution by the working class, whose strategic goal is the abolition of the nation-state system and the establishment of a world socialist federation. Only in this way can the world’s resources be rationally planned and developed to eradicate poverty and raise human culture to new heights.

We call on all young people: organise yourselves in schools, universities and training centres against the reintroduction of conscription. Discuss this statement with your classmates, fellow students and colleagues. Make contact with us and join the IYSSE.



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