

How the Stalinist SDAJ sabotages the school strike against the reintroduction of conscription in Germany

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE)
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A broad movement is developing across Germany in the struggle against the reintroduction of conscription. On December 5, 55,000 school students went on strike in more than 90 cities. Strike committees are forming at numerous schools, and preparations are already underway for the next strike on March 5.

This movement is developing at a time when the situation in Germany resembles a powder keg. The policies of war and militarism are deeply hated. The Merz government—a coalition of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD)—has historically disastrous approval ratings. Rearmament is accompanied by massive social devastation: thousands of jobs are being destroyed week after week, and every social sphere is being slashed in order to finance war.

In this situation, a serious school strike could be the spark that ignites this powder keg. It could develop from a strike in schools into a broad movement throughout the working class, not only against conscription, but against militarism itself.

However, the self-appointed protest leaders are doing everything possible to prevent this and to lead school students into a dead end. While tens of thousands are taking part in the movement because they want to wage a genuine struggle, the organisational structures are dominated by pseudo-left and Stalinist groups such as the “Socialist German Workers Youth” (SDAJ), which use their present dominance to suppress political discussion and isolate the movement.

The SDAJ operates at both federal and local level, sometimes openly, sometimes covertly, to keep all organisational threads in its own hands. The nationwide leadership is not determined democratically by elected representatives of the local strike committees but is self-appointed and maintains its links to the individual committees through SDAJ representatives.

This became particularly clear at the “School Strike Online Conference” on December 18. This first open nationwide meeting was essentially chaired by SDAJ members, who did not openly identify themselves as such and at no point explained when and in what form they had been elected to the nationwide leadership of the protest movement.

In every respect, the entire meeting was a caricature of a democratic movement. After the self-appointed leadership had delivered lengthy speeches, it only allowed school students to ask them questions. It was even explicitly stated that there would be no space for a real debate.

How the SDAJ is destroying the movement

This undemocratic approach has a political logic. The SDAJ and other

pseudo-left groups do not want to allow discussion because they are not interested in developing and expanding the movement, but rather in subordinating it to the youth organisations of the SPD, Greens and Left Party, which themselves are driving forward the policy of war. That is why they also want to prevent it from becoming the starting point of a broad movement against the militarism of all parties represented in the Bundestag (federal parliament).

During the “question round” at the online event on December 18, when representatives of the IYSSE emphasised the necessity of directing the protests against the entire policy of war and extending them into the working class, many participants reacted enthusiastically and supported this in their own contributions.

The leadership of the meeting then abruptly broke off the discussion. Hannes Kramer (SDAJ) announced that the next strategic step should be to focus first on “anchoring the movement more firmly in schools,” and that one should not “trip over one’s own feet” by attempting to extend the movement beyond schools.

At the same meeting, Kramer explained that at local level, cooperation with the Green Youth and the SDP’s Young Socialists (Jusos) was to be welcomed, as long as they were “anti-militarist and against conscription.” The absurdity of this is hard to beat. The youth organisations of the SPD and the Greens are among the most fervent militarists imaginable. From the genocide in Gaza to the war in Ukraine, they support every war crime of German imperialism. If they oppose conscription, it is only because they do not want to end up in the trenches themselves, but would rather send to their deaths working class children, who often have no other choice.

In Munich, members of the SDAJ spoke out at a strike committee meeting against a draft leaflet by an IYSSE member that denounced the militarism of the Greens and the Left Party, on the grounds that this would divide the movement. In Flensburg, SDAJ representatives are said to have even demanded that militarisation be removed from the statement of principles so as to be able to invite members of the Young Liberals to join the strike.

What perspective does the movement need?

It must be stated clearly: such “unity” with warmongers does not strengthen the movement, it destroys it. We cannot fight conscription if we do not oppose its underlying cause: the return of German militarism. The federal government is organising rearmament on a scale not seen since Hitler and has seriously set itself the goal of being capable of

militarily defeating the nuclear power Russia within three years.

Such a war would threaten the existence of the continent and of human civilisation as a whole. Under these conditions, it is not enough to oppose conscription. We must reject militarism in its entirety. No one must ever again be sacrificed on the battlefields of the rich, and schools and universities must never again be transformed into recruitment centres for the army and institutions of war propaganda.

With their support for the horrific genocide in Gaza, the ruling elites have long since demonstrated that they are not concerned with “peace” or “human rights.” As in the first two world wars, they are rearming to bolster the profit interests of the corporations and banks internationally. Capitalism is once again leading to barbarism and war.

If this madness is not stopped, the introduction of conscription is inevitable; on the one hand, to provide cannon fodder for wars, and on the other, to suppress our resistance and subject us to military discipline.

When the SDAJ demands that these questions be kept out of the movement so as not to endanger an alliance with the warmongers, it is breaking the movement’s backbone. Our strike has enormous potential. At every single school in the country, the vast majority is opposed to militarism and war. If we mobilise them independently of the war parties, we can make this the starting point of a broad movement in the working class.

Millions of workers face wage cuts and the destruction of their jobs, through which Germany is to be made capable of waging war and trade war. They make up the vast majority of the population and bear the full burden of the policy of war. But they also have the power to stop militarism, because they keep the entire country running. If a mass movement of workers expropriated the major banks and corporations and placed them under democratic control, war and capitalism could be overcome.

Such a movement can only be international. Instead of adapting ourselves to the warmongers, who want once again to pit German students and workers against those in other countries, we must counter rising nationalism with international unity in the struggle against war and capitalism. War can only be prevented by an international movement from below. The basic precondition for such an international movement is the struggle against the warmongers in one’s own country.

This is precisely what the SDAJ wants to prevent when it seeks to hitch the movement to the cart of the SPD, the Greens, the Left Party and even the Liberal Democratic Party (FDP). These war parties contribute nothing to mobilising young people against militarism. They are hostile to our movement and want to end it or reduce it to harmless appeals to the government, because they defend militarism and its root cause, capitalism. Mobilisation comes from us, school students, and we can only expand it if we decisively oppose the policies of the capitalist parties.

That is why we must organise the movement democratically and develop it into a forum for debate on these questions. In all cities, strike committees with regular meetings must be established, in which everyone can participate who seriously wants to fight conscription and war.

These committees must not be display boards for pseudo-left organisations, but fully democratic organs of struggle—by school students and for school students. Open discussions must take place at these meetings on all relevant political questions. Anyone who wants to fight conscription must understand what it is. And anyone who wants to understand it must discuss it.

Every committee must elect representatives who will network nationwide and internationally to organise the protests. These representatives must be accountable to the rank-and-file and removable at any time. The federal level must not consist of self-appointed functionaries but must be decided from below.

In these committees, the IYSSE argues for orienting the movement independently of all capitalist parties, directing it with a socialist

perspective against the root of war and organising it internationally. For only the independent mobilisation of the working class can put an end to the madness of war.

Socialism or Stalinism?

It is precisely this perspective that the SDAJ and other pseudo-left groups seek to suppress with their undemocratic measures. This is not simply due to the shortcomings of individuals, but to the perspective embodied by these organisations.

The SDAJ is the youth organisation of the Stalinist German Communist Party (DKP), which was re-founded in 1968 following a deal between the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR, East Germany) after the banning of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in 1956. The DKP was financially completely dependent on subsidies from the GDR and followed its political directives.

The GDR called itself socialist and, under the pressure of the Cold War, had adopted the socialised property relations of the October Revolution. But power was held by a privileged bureaucracy that brutally oppressed the working class and ultimately oriented itself towards the reintroduction of capitalism.

The Stalinist bureaucrats in East Berlin had no interest whatsoever in fighting for a socialist revolution in West Germany, because this would also have swept away their own dictatorship. Instead, they instructed the DKP to shape the conditions for the peaceful coexistence of the two German states in the most favourable way possible for the GDR. Thus, the DKP was to strengthen the peace movement of the 1980s and win bourgeois forces to it. For this reason, the party suppressed all socialist demands and instead embraced the clergy and trade union bureaucrats.

In this way, the DKP continued the so-called Popular Front policy, which the Stalinists had already advocated from the mid-1930s onwards in the struggle against fascism. This policy holds that the mass movement of the working class must renounce all socialist demands in order not to frighten capitalist parties as allies. Concretely, this led to the Stalinists, for example in Spain, using brutal violence against striking workers while sabotaging the struggle against the fascists and allowing Franco to come to power. For the capitalist parties already had one foot in the fascist camp and were in no way allies in the struggle against Franco.

Even then, Stalin’s aim was to suppress the independent movement of the working class to secure his own power and ensure peaceful coexistence with the capitalist countries.

Today, neither the GDR nor the USSR exists, and the Stalinists are only a shadow of their former selves. Deprived of their main source of funding, their existence essentially consists of begging trade union bureaucrats and representatives of the capitalist parties for attention and compliantly courting them. Bound by their traditions of suppressing every independent impulse of the working class, they offer themselves as foot soldiers to quash socialist perspectives and genuine discussion.

The IYSSE stands in the opposite tradition. We are the youth organisation of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and the International Committee of the Fourth International, which was founded in 1938 by Leon Trotsky to defend the socialist principles of workers’ democracy and internationalism against the Stalinists. Our fundamental principle is the struggle for the political independence of the workers’ movement from all bureaucracies and capitalist organisations.

The despicable intervention of the SDAJ in the school strike movement shows how significant these questions are today. We can only develop the

movement and stop conscription if we draw on the rich historical experiences and on genuine socialist principles.

That is why we call on all pupils and students to discuss these questions with us online on Thursday, January 8, at 6:30 p.m. Register now to take part. There is no time to lose. Discuss this appeal with friends and classmates and sign up with the IYSSE to link the struggle against conscription with the struggle against capitalism.



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