

Online meeting of the IYSSE

The fight against the reintroduction of conscription in Germany requires a fight against war and capitalism

Our reporters
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Last Thursday, high school students, university students and young workers discussed how to continue the fight against conscription at an online meeting of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE).

In an introductory report, Tamino Dreisam, spokesperson for the IYSSE in Germany, placed this question within the broader political context. He opened with the fundamental assessment that the fight against conscription “must be a fight against the drive to war as a whole,” because conscription is “an integral component of the development toward a Third World War.”

To illustrate the ruthlessness of imperialist policy, he pointed to the recent attacks on Venezuela and quoted Stephen Miller, the deputy chief of staff in the White House, who stated in an interview with CNN: “We live in a world that is governed by strength, that is governed by violence, that is governed by power.” The US government rules over Venezuela because it has stationed its military around the country. Tamino highlighted that the doctrine of “might makes right” is being elevated to official state policy. This, he argued, is the logic of world war and fascism.

The German government was aligning itself behind the attack on Venezuela and Trump’s methods, Tamino explained. At the same time, he denounced the cynicism of the ruling elites, who invoked international law only “when it benefits them” and “trample it underfoot” when it stands in their way. As an example, he cited the support for Israel’s actions in the Gaza war, which he characterized as an expression of imperialist policy.

Crucial to his report was Tamino’s depiction of the German policy of rearmament as a qualitative leap: Germany was rearming “on a scale not seen since Hitler,” with a massive increase in the defence budget and the declared goal of making the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) the largest military force in Europe. This was linked to the open objective of being capable of defeating Russia within a few years. Raising the question of “what Germany or Europe would look like even one day after a

war against a nuclear power,” he exposed the historic and existential dimension of the dangers.

Tamino drew a clear political conclusion from this: Conscription serves not only military goals but also the disciplining and breaking of opposition, particularly among the youth. “Our generation is to be placed under military discipline” to suppress resistance against war and militarism. It necessarily followed that the fight against conscription cannot be waged merely as an appeal to the government or as a matter of individual self-protection.

He sharply opposed political forces that claim to oppose conscription while simultaneously supporting rearmament and pro-war policies, such as the Green Youth (Grüne Jugend) and the Social Democrats’ Young Socialists (Jusos). He declared that such groups were “certainly not allies,” but rather political opponents.

He also denounced groups like the Socialist German Workers Youth (SDAJ)—the youth organization of the Stalinist DKP—which seek to keep questions of war and militarism out of the movement in order to preserve unity with these warmongers.

Instead, the movement must be oriented toward the only social force capable of stopping the war policy: the working class. A school strike was “a strong signal,” but “a school strike alone remains a protest and will change nothing” if it does not become the spark that draws workers in factories, transport, schools, hospitals and ports into the struggle. Tamino emphasized that appeals to the ruling class fall on deaf ears and will be answered with further repression. The struggle can only be successful if it “grasps the root of the evil”: capitalism and its profit logic, which drives the imperialist powers to war.

He concluded with four principles that the movement must adopt:

- The fight against conscription must be waged as a fight against war and capitalism.
- The movement must be completely independent of all

political parties and organizations of the capitalist class.

- The struggle must proceed from the working class.
- Above all, the struggle must be international and oppose imperialism with the enormous power of the working class in a united global movement.

This international perspective was underscored in the following contribution by David Rye, a leading IYSSE member in the US. He described the attack on Venezuela as a “clear sign of the global crisis of capitalism” and a warning to workers worldwide. The assault exposes the character of US foreign policy as the “use of force to open markets and resources” and an attempt to restore hegemony in the Western Hemisphere.

Crucial to this was Rye’s emphasis that imperialist aggression abroad and repression at home belong together: “Imperialism abroad and suppression at home are inevitably two sides of the same class programme.”

He pointed to polls showing that the war was “deeply deeply detested” by the US population and supported by only a minority. At the same time, he described the domestic escalation as an assault on democratic rights, combined with the militarization of the police, surveillance and austerity policies to finance war. He sharply compared today’s state persecution to the fascist methods of the Nazis and referred to the ICE immigration authority as a “modern Gestapo.” His central appeal was that the international working class must be mobilized because it is the only force that can stop the course toward war and dictatorship. What was necessary is an independent class organization, a revolutionary leadership, and the formation of rank-and-file committees in factories and at universities. “Solidarity across borders” must be organized practically, he said.

These contributions were followed by a lively discussion in which numerous participants raised central questions. A young person from Brandenburg asked what one can do “as a single individual” in a small town. An 11th-grade student in Essen addressed an important problem: Many young people can make little sense of the term “capitalism”; at the same time, the acute danger of conscription must be made concrete, down to the reality of “holding a weapon in one’s hand.”

In their replies, IYSSE members emphasized that the central issue was to fight for a political perspective. Education about the immediate threat and an understanding of capitalism belonged together. One could begin the discussion with the concrete consequences of conscription, but to wage a fight against it required a perspective that explains the causes and points the way forward to the working class.

As the meeting progressed, a debate developed regarding the role of the Left Party (Die Linke), their youth organization Left Youth (Linksjugend) and Stalinist organizations. One participant warned against sweeping generalizations, arguing that there were also honest opponents of war in such organizations. IYSSE members replied that organizations must

be judged not by individual intentions, but by their programme, class interests and practical record. While many young people may join out of honest opposition, the task is to break them politically from these organizations by explaining their pro-capitalist character and winning these young people to an independent, revolutionary orientation.

Finally, Christoph Vandreier, the chairperson of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP), spoke. He highlighted the decisive contradiction: While large sections of the population are against war, the parties in the Bundestag (parliament) support the policy of rearmament. The Greens were the sharpest example of this, as they emerged from the peace movement and today rank among the most aggressive proponents of militarism. Therefore, it was not enough to appeal merely to a general anti-war sentiment. One must explain why these parties have moved to the right and why protests limited to appeals to the government lead into a political dead end.

On the question of how conscription and war preparations can be stopped, Vandreier emphasized that the cause of war—the capitalist system—must be understood and fought. The profit drive, the competition between nation states, and the hunt for resources and markets under capitalism drive the ruling class to rearmament and war. Conscription was therefore not an “isolated measure,” but part of the preparation for a major, potentially nuclear war that would devastate Europe. One must certainly make the immediate reality of war clear to young people, but without a political explanation of the causes, one could neither argue convincingly against militarism nor build a movement that actually wins.

Responding to the objections regarding the Left Party and its youth wing, he answered that organizations must be judged by their programme and practice, not by the attitude of individual members. Some young people join the Left Party out of honest opposition to the government, but they must be told that this party supports capitalism and pro-war policies and organizes the necessary social attacks. Historically, he pointed out that wars have only been stopped by the independent mobilization of the working class and a revolutionary leadership. The conclusion to be drawn: no alliances with pro-capitalist forces, but an international orientation and the building of an independent socialist movement.



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