

No social media ban in Germany for young people!

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2 March 2026

Germany's ruling class is preparing to introduce a social media ban for young people. This has become clear in public debates and party conference resolutions in recent weeks. Parties and media of every stripe are clamouring for a crackdown on social media.

The first step was taken by the Social Democratic Party (SPD) parliamentary group with a position paper calling for a comprehensive social media ban for young people in three stages:

For children and youth under 14 years there should be a complete ban. Platforms should be required to introduce technically effective control mechanisms. Violations would face the threat of appreciable sanctions. For 14- to 16-year-olds there should be a "youth version" of platforms that dispenses with so-called "addiction-enhancing" factors, such as infinite scrolling, and has no personalised feeds. And for 16- to 18-year-olds, personalised feeds should only be available as an on-off feature.

At its party conference in Stuttgart, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the chancellor's party, then adopted calls for a similar ban by a broad majority. While the CDU resolution, compared with the SPD paper, remains generally rather vague about the concrete design of the ban, it also calls for a complete ban for under-14s and restrictions for 14- to 16-year-olds.

The Greens have already announced their support for a social media ban. Asked about the resolutions of the CDU party conference, the Greens chairwoman, Franziska Brantner, said, "I have been calling for this for a long time." At the same time, she criticised the CSU for its hitherto hesitant stance: "Protecting our children and young people would definitely be worth showing a clear edge here even against [Christian Social Union, CSU chairman Markus] Söder."

The Left Party, which has so far spoken out against a ban, does not do so on principle, but merely from the standpoint of optimal implementation. Left Party parliamentary leader Heidi Reichinneck said on the ntv talk show "Pinar Atalay" that such a ban would be difficult to implement because young people were "too clever." Instead, she relies on tried-and-tested methods: in news weekly *Der Spiegel* she demanded that existing censorship measures, such as the Digital Services Act (DSA), be "finally implemented consistently."

Germany is not alone in these plans. After Australia introduced a social media ban for young people under age 16 last December, dozens of countries worldwide are planning similar bans. The French National Assembly recently passed a social media ban for young people under age 15. President Macron is pushing for its enforcement by the new school year. Similar restrictions are also being discussed or put in place in Spain, Italy, Belgium and Denmark.

The social media ban is being justified in that it would allegedly protect children and young people. It is supposed to especially protect against mental health problems such as online addiction, sleep or eating disorders as a result of the use of social media.

Claims the planned bans are about the well-being of young people is a blatant lie. Scientifically speaking, the positive benefit of a social media ban for young people is at best disputed. In Australia, the overwhelming majority of mental health advocacy groups rejected a social media ban. With a ban, the risk of social isolation increases sharply, especially among vulnerable groups.

Coming from the government and parliamentary parties, the claim that they care about the welfare of young people is particularly hypocritical. For decades they have been smashing apart the welfare state, letting

schools and other educational institutions rot, and robbing young people of any future prospects.

During the COVID-19 pandemic they systematically allowed the population to become infected, especially in schools, leading to the avoidable deaths of tens of thousands. Now, with the reintroduction of conscription in Germany, youth are to die again at the front for German imperialism. So while at 16 one is just old enough to watch short videos on social media, two years later one is old enough to kill with a weapon and die in battle.

The ruling class is completely indifferent to the well-being of youth—whether it is young people in Germany who have been neglected for decades, Ukrainians and Russians who must give their lives in the interests of imperialism, or Palestinian children who are being killed by the thousands by Israel with support from Germany.

What the social media ban is really about is the attempt to curb the growing politicisation, radicalisation and international networking of youth. In a situation where bourgeois media are only broadcasting war propaganda, it is often social media that offers young people a differentiated perspective.

Through live reports about wars and crises around the world, young people are increasingly recognising that capitalism has nothing left to offer them except poverty and death, and that the explanations of official politics are empty rhetoric and lies. At the same time, young people are searching for an alternative perspective and not infrequently encounter a socialist one through social media.

In recent years, hundreds of thousands of young people around the world have participated in protests against the genocide in Gaza, which they were able to follow on social media. At present, a movement against war and the reintroduction of conscription is developing among young people and young adults. Both movements are based on information that young people obtain through social media. At the same time, they enable young people to network internationally.

The new Sinus Youth Study by health insurer Barmer shows that among the concrete fears of young people, the issue of war is clearly at the top, at 63 percent, an increase of 10 percentage points within three years. Behind it follow climate change, populism and extremism and environmental pollution, each at 43

percent. Young people who are worried about the development of war are now to be isolated and pacified.

The social media ban is an authoritarian act of censorship that is intended to make it impossible for young people to independently verify facts and network with each other. They are to only have the right to hear the ruling class's propaganda and must trust it unconditionally. Germany today is thereby ideologically tying itself to the Prussian authoritarian state of Bismarck, and even going beyond it. While in 19th century Prussia articles were excised from newspapers, today youth are to be excluded and isolated from central parts of the internet.

Workers and young people must firmly reject this ban. The plans to ban social media are a serious warning. Germany is rearming as has not been seen since Hitler and is preparing for a third world war, for which the youth are to be sent into the trenches and brought into line. This must be prevented.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) call on all young people to resist this. Independent rank-and-file action committees must be formed at schools and universities to organise international resistance against war and enforced conformity. And above all, a socialist organisation must be built to lead this struggle.

We call on all young people who agree with this perspective: sign up today via the form below to get in touch with the IYSSE and wage this struggle. No time must be lost.



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