

Oppose the draft! Build a working class movement against imperialist war!

Statement of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE)
10 April 2026

Late last month, the Trump administration announced that beginning in December 2026 every American male between the ages of 18 and 26 will be automatically registered for the military draft.

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality warn workers and young people throughout the United States: the American ruling class is laying the foundations for the reimposition of the draft. The corporate oligarchy wants cannon fodder for its illegal and expanding wars of aggression.

The automatic registration of millions of young people into the Selective Service System, buried in the 2026 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), is a major step toward conscription. Currently, 46 states automatically register men through their driver's license systems, covering roughly 81 percent of those eligible. The new law federalizes and universalizes this process, using Social Security Administration records to enroll the rest. Registration will no longer be dependent on a driver's license or any individual action. It will be fully automatic, compulsory and tied to federal databases that track every citizen from birth.

This is being implemented as the United States wages war against Iran, prepares for a ground invasion of the Iranian coastline and escalates its confrontation with both Russia and China. Within the framework of a so-called "ceasefire," the Trump administration is continuing to send a massive armada of military forces to the Middle East.

The active-duty US military has roughly 1.3 million personnel, with forces committed globally. At its peak, the Iraq war in 2003 involved 170,000 troops, but it strained the entire military through repeated deployments. A sustained ground campaign in Iran—a country four times larger with three times the population—would likely require 300,000–500,000 troops by most estimates, and potentially far more for a prolonged occupation.

The all-volunteer force simply doesn't have that capacity without either a massive expansion of recruitment (which is already falling short of targets) or conscription. The infrastructure is being quietly modernized at a moment when

the gap between military commitments and available manpower is huge.

This is being actively discussed behind the backs of the American people. On March 8, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt refused to rule out a draft, telling Fox News it is "not part of the current plan right now, but the president again wisely keeps his options on the table."

The war against Iran is itself part of an escalating global war, including the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and, in particular, the preparation for war against China. The project of global conquest requires a return to conditions in which tens of thousands of American youth are sent to die to maintain the domination of American capitalism.

Between 1964 and 1973, the US government drafted 2.2 million men to fight in Vietnam. Conscription fueled a mass antiwar movement and provoked resistance inside the armed forces that contributed to the military's disintegration. Nixon abolished the draft in 1973 because the ruling class could no longer sustain it politically.

For more than 50 years, the United States has relied on an all-volunteer force. The ruling class feared the political consequences of conscription. That system is now breaking down. Recruitment shortfalls have deepened. An NPR report published April 10 notes a surge in calls to military counseling organizations from service members seeking conscientious objector status or early separation, with the Iran war described as a major trigger. Soldiers cited the bombing of a girls' school and the broader climate of illegality surrounding the armed forces.

While Trump signed the measure into law, the drive to reimpose conscription is bipartisan. Democratic Representative Chrissy Houlahan sponsored automatic registration in 2024 and reintroduced it in 2025 after it was stripped from the previous year's NDAA. The final bill passed the House 312-112 and the Senate 77-20. Democrats sponsored it, shepherded it through committee and voted for it on the floor.

This is part of an international process. Eighty years after the crimes of the Third Reich, Germany's Bundestag

approved a new military service law on December 5, 2025, requiring all 18-year-old men to complete a mandatory questionnaire. If conscription is reinstated, young men will need permission from the German army to leave the country. Defense Minister Boris Pistorius declared: “If that is not enough, we will have no choice but to introduce partial conscription.”

France announced a voluntary military service scheme in November 2025. General Fabien Mandon, the chief of the defense staff, said the country must be prepared to “lose its children” in a war with Russia.

The preparations for war are inextricably connected to the assault on social programs. The same youth to be conscripted are already being denied a future. They face impossible rents, student debt, precarious work and the destruction of social services, including public education.

Trump declared earlier this month that social programs must be sacrificed because “we’re fighting wars.” He said, “We can’t take care of day care, Medicaid, Medicare. ... We have to take care of one thing: military protection.” Trump’s fiscal year 2027 budget request devotes \$1.5 trillion to the military—the largest Pentagon request in history—while driving non-defense spending to its lowest share of GDP since the 1950s.

The return of the draft is also inextricably connected to the assault on democratic rights. The same government building the infrastructure for conscription is expanding the powers of ICE, criminalizing dissent and concentrating power in the executive. The program of “total war” cannot be implemented and the extreme levels of social inequality defended without a ferocious military-police dictatorship within the United States.

The SEP and the IYSSE advance the following demands:

- The immediate repeal of the automatic Selective Service registration provisions and the rejection of any activation of conscription for the war against Iran or any other imperialist conflict.

- The immediate withdrawal of US forces from the Middle East and an end to the war against Iran. An end to the bipartisan drive for global domination, the arming of Israel, the escalation against Russia and China, and the use of military violence to offset the crisis of American capitalism.

- The abolition of the standing army and the dismantling of the vast military-intelligence apparatus built up to wage endless war abroad and repression at home. The Pentagon, the intelligence agencies, the global network of bases, the system of private military contractors and the machinery of surveillance and covert operations are instruments not of “defense,” but of imperialist domination.

- An end to the “economic draft,” under which young people are driven into military service by poverty, debt, lack

of decent jobs and the impossibility of affording an education. Every young person must have the social right to a decent job, free high-quality education, healthcare and housing. Put an end to coercion into military service.

- The redirection of the vast resources squandered on war to meet urgent social needs: universal healthcare, free public education, affordable housing and secure, well-paid jobs for all.

The fight for this program must be developed as an independent movement of the working class, in irreconcilable opposition to both capitalist parties and all their political accomplices. The old and principled slogan of the socialist movement must be revived: Not a man nor a penny for imperialist war! Not one worker, not one student, not one young person sacrificed for the predatory aims of the American ruling class.

This is not a pacifist appeal. It is a class policy. The fight against conscription is not a matter of seeking individual exemption from military service, or avoiding personal involvement in war while leaving untouched the war aims of the ruling class. It means active and uncompromising opposition to imperialist militarism itself. It means the defense of the democratic and social rights of the working class.

Opposition to the draft must therefore be linked to opposition to war, to the entire military-intelligence apparatus, and to the capitalist system that produces war.

This movement must be international. Workers in the United States have no interest in killing workers in Iran, China, Russia or anywhere else. The enemy is not abroad. It is at home: the capitalist ruling class, which subordinates the world to profit, plunder and war. The fight against the restoration of the draft is inseparable from the fight against capitalism.

War is rooted in the contradictions of the capitalist system itself. The alternative is socialism: the reorganization of economic life on the basis of social need, under the democratic control of the working class, on an international scale.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact