

IYSSE statement on the May 8 school strike

No cannon fodder for war plans of the German ruling class!

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE)
8 May 2026

That Friday's school strike against conscription is taking place on May 8, the day of liberation from the Nazis, is of enormous historical and political significance. At the same time, it is a warning. Eighty-one years after the end of the Second World War in Europe, the spectres of war and fascism, which many thought long overcome, are back.

When the head of the High Command of the Wehrmacht (Hitler's army) signed the capitulation in Berlin on the night of May 8 to 9, 1945, the city lay in ruins. Germany's army had been crushingly defeated.

A few days earlier, soldiers of the Red Army had liberated the prisoners of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Berlin and the Berlin-Plötzensee prison, where thousands of resistance fighters had been executed. The liberators were presented with a picture of unimaginable horror.

In the Second World War, 70 to 85 million people died; the number of civilians killed is estimated at up to 55 million. The Nazis' war of annihilation cost the lives of 27 million Soviet citizens, and 6 million Jews were systematically murdered in the Holocaust.

The global end of the war was sealed four months later by the capitulation of Japan, after US imperialism dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Eighty-one years later, the world is not simply confronted with the danger of a new world war, it is already developing. The global war fronts and conflict zones extend from Iran and the Middle East via Europe to Asia and Latin America; they reach into the Arctic and into space.

Conscription means war

The reintroduction of conscription must be seen in this context. German militarism is back. As on the eve of the First and Second World Wars, it is grasping for world power and preparing to enforce its geostrategic and economic interests with military force. For this it needs cannon fodder.

One must face reality: Berlin is already de facto waging war against Russia again. German war cooperation with Ukraine and the new military strategy of the government leave no doubt about this. Chancellor Merz speaks bluntly of "great power politics" and of the fact that Germany must once again "speak the language of power politics." The defence budget is being driven up to a historical level; the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) is to become the largest in Europe. This is not a defence programme; this is the preparation of a war that would end in a nuclear catastrophe and lay all of Europe in ruins and ashes.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine was reactionary. But NATO had systematically provoked this war over decades through the gradual

eastward expansion of the military alliance contrary to all promises made to Moscow, through the military encirclement of Russia since 1991, through the pro-Western coup in Kiev in 2014 led by right-wing extremist forces and through the subsequent active building up of Ukraine as a NATO staging area.

All this stands in a dark political continuity. German imperialism is grasping for world power for the third time in its history. In the First World War, in the Second World War and today, it pursues the same historical goals: dominance over Europe, control over resources and markets in the East, pushing back competitors. Conscription forms the personnel substructure of this project. An entire generation is to march in rank and file again—not to defend democracy, but to die for the profits of the ruling class.

The fact that the ruling class is once again prepared to commit monstrous crimes is shown by its unconditional support for the Israeli genocide in Gaza. Tens of thousands have been slaughtered, entire cities razed to the ground—and the German government supplied weapons and political cover. When the US and Israel began the war of annihilation against Iran, Merz rushed to Washington to kiss Trump's ring and assure him of Berlin's loyalty. Ramstein and other German bases are made available for these wars. A ruling class that covers up such crimes is also prepared to commit them itself. This is why conscription is being introduced.

All the capitalist parties support the war policy, including the Left Party

Anyone who thinks they will find an ally against conscription in the establishment parties is fundamentally mistaken. The Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), Social Democrats (SPD), Greens, Liberal Democrats (FDP), and of course the fascists of the Alternative for Germany (AfD), all support the massive rearmament programme. But the Left Party too, which poses as a party of peace in its Sunday speeches, has long since revealed its true nature. In the Bundesrat, it voted in favour of the trillion-euro rearmament package that forms the material basis for conscription. Then it paved the way for Friedrich Merz into the Chancellery.

And when US and Israeli bombs murdered the Iranian leadership, its chairman Jan van Aken stepped in front of the cameras and declared that Khamenei should "rot in hell"—it was "good that they are gone." This is not a political blunder. It is the programme of a party that essentially supports the imperialist war course and only has tactical differences over the choice of means.

In the movement against conscription, we ourselves have also experienced the no less reactionary pseudo-left forces in the milieu of the Left Party. At the nationwide conference against conscription on February 14, 2026, the IYSSE introduced a motion to expand the declaration with concrete demands: Stop the genocide in Gaza, no weapons deliveries to Ukraine, no war against Iran, socialism instead of war. The Stalinist youth organisation SDAJ rejected this with the argument that one should not take a concrete position on ongoing wars, and the demand for socialism was “not suitable for the masses.”

This is a declaration of political bankruptcy. Separating the struggle against conscription from the wars for which it is being introduced does not protect the unity of the movement, it protects the pro-war policy of the ruling class from criticism. A protest that omits the central political question becomes a toothless gesture.

When these forces turn up at the school strikes today and pose as their organisers, they are not allies. They represent a political trap. A movement that orientates itself towards them will be led straight back into the arms of the capitalist system that produces war. Conscription cannot be stopped with these forces—because they ignore or even endorse the pro-war policy that demands conscription.

Militarisation attacks the whole of society, including our schools and universities

To prepare for major wars, it is not enough to pass laws and increase arms budgets. The whole of society must be attuned for war—and this also affects schools and universities. Bundeswehr officers visit schools to recruit children and young people for the military. Universities are being transformed into cadre factories for German militarism. The coalition agreement between the CDU/CSU and SPD explicitly names the militarisation of universities as a goal. And the ideological war propaganda is becoming ever more aggressive.

A particularly blatant example can be found at Berlin’s Humboldt University. There, Jörg Baberowski, professor of Eastern European history, has for years been driving the intellectual legitimisation of German militarism. He trivialises the Nazis (“Hitler was not vicious”) and falsifies history in order to obscure the aggression of German imperialism and brand Russia as the sole culprit. His current book “Am Volk vorbei” (“Bypassing the People”) pursues the goal of preparing for the AfD’s participation in government by describing it as a necessary “corrective” for the political system.

This is not an academic question. If a historian at Germany’s leading university rehabilitates the fascists and at the same time delivers the war propaganda of German imperialism, then this shows where the road leads. The militarisation of society and the rehabilitation of fascism are two sides of the same coin.

The IYSSE therefore invites you to an event on May 12 titled: “No AfD propaganda at HU! How Professor Baberowski courts the fascists in his new book.” You can find all the information at iysse.de.

What is needed: An international, anti-capitalist movement of the working class

The school strike is an important sign. Tens of thousands of young people taking to the streets and saying: We will not die for your wars—that carries political weight. But a school strike alone changes nothing if it

does not become part of a larger political movement and possess a clear perspective. Appeals to governments that are themselves driving the pro-war policy come to nothing. Petitions to parliaments in which all parties’ support rearmament are ineffective.

The struggle against conscription must be a struggle against war. And the struggle against war must be a struggle against capitalism, because war is not simply a wrong decision by some government or president. War is the product of a system in which national competition, the compulsion for ever-greater profits and the hunt for resources and markets inevitably drive the rulers into military confrontation. As long as capitalism exists, there will be war, and if it is not stopped, it will lead to world war. This is the lesson of the 20th century and the current escalation of war.

Our allies do not sit in the Bundestag (parliament). They work in the factories, hospitals, schools and ports—in Germany, Russia, the US, in Iran and all over the world. The international working class is the only social force that can truly stop the war machine. To do this, it needs independent forms of organisation: rank-and-file action committees in schools, at universities and in workplaces, which act outside and against the establishment parties and union bureaucracies and link up internationally.

What is needed is a movement that is completely independent of all capitalist parties, that calls out the causes of war by their name and is based on the programme of international socialism. We are not fighting for a reform of this society. We are fighting for its socialist transformation—the only way to permanently overcome war, militarism and conscription. And this requires the building of a Marxist world party—the Fourth International founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938 and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party).

We demand:

- Stop the war against Iran! Withdraw all Western troops from the Middle East!
- No to conscription—in whatever form, at whatever time!
- End the genocide in Gaza! No Israeli weapons deliveries!
- Billions for education and social care instead of for rearmament and war!
- For the building of an international socialist anti-war movement in the working class and the youth!

Join the IYSSE. Come to our event on May 12. Take up the struggle—in schools, at universities, in workplaces. International, socialist, independent.



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