May Day 2026

Youth, conscription and the war on socialist opposition

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This speech was delivered by Tamino Dreisam, a leader of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (Germany), at the 2026 May Day Online Rally, organized by the WSWS and the International Committee of the Fourth International.

We meet today on May Day under conditions of extraordinary political gravity. War and crisis are not approaching—they are here. The assault on Iran has opened a new front in the spiral of imperialist violence reshaping the world order, and our generation is being asked to pay the price.

Workers and youth: We are not spectators to this crisis. We are its targets.

Every government on the planet is preparing for war and in that preparation, they are coming for us. On December 5, the German Bundestag approved a new military service law. The 2026 US National Defense Authorization Act mandates automatic draft registration for all men aged 18 to 26. In Greece, the "Agenda 2030" reforms have extended training, centralized all recruits in the army and funneled them directly to the borders.

The machinery of mass mobilization is being rebuilt not to defend our lives but to feed them to imperialist war. They want to put us in uniform, put us in formation, march us to the front and tell us this is our patriotic duty.

In Ukraine and Russia, hundreds of thousands of young workers have been slaughtered. The ruling classes of the imperialist world are working furiously to extend their slaughter to the youth of their own countries.

Against this war drive stands our comrade Bogdan Syrotiuk, the 26-year-old leader of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists (YGBL), the Trotskyist youth movement in the former Soviet republics. Bogdan has sat in a prison in Nikolaev for two years, jailed for his opposition to the war and to the Zelensky regime's suppression of the working class. He faces charges of "high treason under martial law," carrying 15 years to life.

What is the "evidence"? Nine volumes of political material—articles on the *World Socialist Web Site*, speeches at ICFI May Day rallies, an essay by Trotsky on the October Revolution, greetings from David North to the Young Guard. The SBU's central charge is that the WSWS is a "Russian propaganda and information agency"—a declaration of war on the entire socialist opposition to the Zelensky regime, and above all on the ICFI. The WSWS was banned in Ukraine one month after Bogdan's arrest.

Bogdan's persecution is part of an international offensive against the emerging socialist opposition to imperialist war. Here in Germany, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei has been placed under surveillance by the Verfassungsschutz for the "crime" of fighting against nationalism, imperialism and militarism. And the IYSSE has been added to the list of "anti-constitutional organizations."

In the United States, Trump's September 2025 National Security Presidential Memorandum directs a "whole-of-government" offensive against "anti-capitalist" and "anti-American" organizations, and he has repeatedly threatened to invoke the Insurrection Act to put the military on American streets. The imperialist states intend to criminalize internationalism itself.

We declare our deepest solidarity with Bogdan Syrotiuk. We demand his immediate and unconditional

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release. Freeing Bogdan is inseparable from the fight against war and the drive towards dictatorship.

The militarization of society does not only take place on the battlefields. It is being carried into our schools and universities, which are subordinated to war propaganda and military recruitment. Education budgets are slashed and social programs cut—not because the money does not exist, but because young people must be made desperate enough to enlist. The destruction of public education is a weapon in the arsenal of the war machine.

We need to be honest about what our generation has inherited. Since we were born, the United States has not gone a single year without waging war. The 2008 financial crisis devastated millions of working-class families. The wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya became permanent features of global reality. The COVID-19 pandemic was allowed to tear through our schools while governments protected the profits of the wealthy. More than 30 million excess deaths, hundreds of millions disabled by Long COVID. Then the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine and the Gaza genocide. Now the war against Iran. We have never known a world without war and crisis.

And yet our generation has also grown up amid the return of mass class struggle. The global wave that opened in 2019—the Yellow Vests in France, the uprisings in Chile, Iraq, Iran, Hong Kong, Algeria, Sudan and Ecuador—marked the beginning of a new period. Since then, young people have poured into the streets against the Gaza genocide, against conscription, against social cuts. On March 28, 8 million participated in the “No Kings” demonstrations, the largest single-day protest in American history.

But these years have also revealed a decisive lesson. Without a revolutionary socialist perspective, mass movements are derailed, suppressed and absorbed by the bourgeois parties. The question is not whether to fight, the question is how, and on what basis.

There is only one answer: Turn to the working class, the one social force with the power to end war and capitalism. That is why we say to young people everywhere: Study Marxism. Study the revolutionary struggles of the 20th century. Draw the lessons of their defeats and victories. Join the IYSSE and build the sections of the Fourth International in your country.

The fight against war, the fight for our future, is the fight for socialism. There is no other way forward.

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