

# Germany's May 8 school strike underscores the necessity of a socialist perspective against conscription and war

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15 May 2026

On May 8, 2026, the 81st anniversary of Germany's liberation from the Nazis, around 45,000 school students took to the streets in over 150 cities. According to the organisers, there were 10,000 in Berlin alone, in the third nationwide school strike against conscription and war. The first two strikes, on 5 December, 2025 and 5 March, 2026, saw around 50,000 school students demonstrating each time.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth and student organisation of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) and the Fourth International, intervened in the protests on 8 May and distributed the statement "No cannon fodder for the war plans of the German ruling class!"

The protests underscore the enormous opposition of an entire generation to conscription, rearmament and war. This opposition extends far beyond the street protests. It is reflected in the growing number of conscientious objectors and in the silent resistance of hundreds of thousands of young people and their families. The ruling class is reacting to this by intensifying the remilitarisation of Germany, reintroducing conscription and rearming for a major war.

Since 15 January, 2026, the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) has been sending pre-muster questionnaires to all 18-year-old men. For German imperialism's war planners, the result is chastening: More than one in four young men contacted – 28 percent – simply ignored the letter. The Ministry of Defence is reacting as the bourgeois state always reacts when its appeals fail to catch on—by threatening fines. Specifically, young men who do not answer are to pay a fine of €250.

Even more revealing is the development of formal conscientious objector applications. In the whole of 2024, 2,998 people submitted such an application. In 2025, the number had already risen to 3,867. In the first quarter of 2026 alone, 2,656 applications were submitted. If this trend continues, 2026 will reach the highest level of conscientious objections since the suspension of conscription in 2011. And this is at a time when conscription has not even been formally reinstated. People are acting preventatively to avoid military service.

The message in these figures is clear: Opposition to war and militarisation is not a marginal phenomenon. It is on a mass scale, it is growing, and it finds expression both in open protests on the streets and in individual acts of resistance.

But the ruling class is not changing its policy by a single millimetre. On the contrary, it is intensifying its war course, thereby demonstrating that it simply regards the youth as disposable and ultimately as cannon fodder in pursuit of its geostrategic interests.

At the end of April 2026, for the first time in the history of the Bundeswehr, Defence Minister Boris Pistorius and Inspector General Carsten Breuer presented a comprehensive military strategy. As the WSWs aptly analysed, even what leaked to the public left no doubt:

"Germany is systematically preparing for a major war—especially against Russia." The strategy paper is not a defence concept, it is an imperialist war programme.

At the centre is the declared goal of expanding the Bundeswehr into the strongest conventional army in Europe and making Germany the leading military power within the EU and NATO. In concrete terms, this means a troop expansion to at least 460,000 soldiers, 260,000 active and 200,000 reservists, the setting up of fully equipped divisions for war in Eastern Europe, the permanent stationing of a German combat brigade on the Russian border in Lithuania, as well as massive investments in heavy weaponry, drones, cyber and space capabilities.

At the Hanover Trade Fair, Pistorius demanded that German industry as a whole align itself with the requirements of "total defence"—a formulation that unmistakably means the transition to a war economy.

The tensions between Europe and the US under the Trump administration have further accelerated this process. The European imperialists, above all Germany, are using the conflicts within NATO to expand their military independence and pursue their own global power claims. Rearmament is being directed not only against Russia, it is an expression of German imperialism's striving for an independent role as a world power—for the third time in its history.

Pistorius boasts that Germany is "learning from the experiences of the Ukrainians on the battlefield for our Bundeswehr." Hundreds of thousands of lives have already been destroyed in this war. Exactly such "experiences" are being planned by the Defence Ministry and the military leadership for the Bundeswehr—and for a generation of young people who refuse to be cannon fodder.

Whoever refuses is defamed. The ruling class and its media are reacting to the growing opposition not only with threats of fines, but also with ideological incitement. In the days before 8 May, public broadcasters BR and WDR presented reports portraying the school strike as infiltrated and controlled by "left-wing extremists". The Secret Service (*Verfassungsschutz*) was called upon as the chief witness, and the organisers were defamed as "enemies of the Constitution."

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What lies behind this campaign is not hard to see: Those who portray school students who do not want to go to war as an anti-state threat want to intimidate and delegitimise the opposition before it grows further. Young people who take to the streets against conscription and war—a spontaneous, mass expression of the resistance of a generation that refuses to die for the interests of German imperialism—are to be criminalised.

Against this background, the question of the political strategy of the school strike movement must be posed openly and bluntly. The fact that the number of participants is not rising despite the growing opposition, but is declining, is the inevitable result of conceptions that are leading a movement with enormous potential into a dead end.

The main political force behind the organisation of the school strikes is the SDAJ, the Stalinist youth organisation of the German Communist Party (DKP), which is trying to politically disarm the movement. At the nationwide conference against conscription on 14 February, 2026, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) submitted a motion to expand the joint declaration with concrete demands: Stop the genocide in Gaza, no weapons deliveries to Ukraine, no war against Iran, socialism instead of war. The SDAJ's answer was that one must not take concrete positions on ongoing wars—and socialism was "not suitable for the masses."

This is no difference of opinion on tactical questions. It is an expression of political bankruptcy that stems directly from the Stalinist tradition: the subordination of the class struggle to supposedly broader bourgeois alliances, the rejection of socialism as a perspective, and the restriction of the movement to what the ruling class will tolerate. Those who separate the struggle against conscription from the wars for which it is being introduced are not conducting a policy of left-wing unity. They are protecting the pro-war policy of the ruling class from criticism.

The result is obvious: A movement that gives no answer to the genocide in Gaza, no answer to the war against Iran, no answer to the NATO provocation against Russia—and that crosses the word "socialism" off of its demands so as not to frighten the rulers—can achieve nothing. It is appealing to a government that wants conscription. It appeals to a parliament in which all parties support rearmament—Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, Greens, Liberal Democrats, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and also the Left Party, which agreed the trillion-euro rearmament package in the Bundesrat. Appeals of this kind are not only ineffective, they channel the explosive protest of a generation back into the institutions from which war emerges.

In its statement, the IYSSE formulated clearly what is at stake and what tasks present themselves. We quote again one of the central sections:

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.

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**