Stop conscription in Germany! Stop the Ukraine war! Freedom for Bogdan Syrotiuk!

International Youth and Students for Social Equality
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On Friday, school students in more than a hundred German cities took strike action against conscription for the fourth time. Recent weeks have shown just how important this fight is, as Germany escalates a war against Russia at an unprecedented pace. Conscription is being introduced so that we young people can serve as cannon fodder in this war.

The German government is implementing the largest rearmament programme since the Second World War. The Bundeswehr is to become the strongest army in Europe. NATO has agreed to raise defence spending to 5 percent of GDP by 2035. Berlin is permanently stationing an armoured brigade in Lithuania, close to the border with Russia and Belarus.

The weapons Kiev uses are financed, jointly developed and often directly supplied by NATO. In close cooperation with the German government and the other NATO powers, Ukraine is carrying out attacks deep inside Russian territory—on energy facilities and infrastructure, with residential buildings also being hit. Only a few days ago, during the Russian Duma elections, the heaviest drone attack yet struck Moscow. Russia, in turn, is intensifying its attacks on Ukraine. On both sides, it is workers who bear the cost.

This must be said openly: Germany is once again, in effect, at war with Russia.

Russian retaliatory strikes are not merely accepted as a risk, but deliberately provoked. Every incident serves as a justification for ever more direct NATO intervention. In early August, without presenting any solid evidence, the German government blamed Moscow for a drone found near Leipzig Airport. It immediately stepped up its propaganda to rally the population behind its war course. Russian consulates and cultural institutions were closed, severing diplomatic and cultural ties built up over decades.

The government cannot secure fast enough the cannon fodder it needs for this war. By its own timetable, nationwide conscription medical examinations were not due to begin until July 2027, yet more than 1,000 young men in Kiel and Flensburg have already been summoned to one, many of them having stated explicitly on their registration forms that they had no interest in military service. One of them was told by phone that police would come if he again refused to attend. At the same time, Defence Minister Boris Pistorius (Social Democratic Party, SPD) has announced that soldiers will be compelled to serve in the Lithuania brigade so that it is ready for deployment by the end of 2027.

This makes clear just how serious the question of conscription is. It is not simply a matter of spending a year in barracks. We are to be drafted into the Bundeswehr—if necessary, against our will—and stationed on the eastern front, where the government is now igniting an open war.

Workers and young people are being made to pay twice over for this war: with their lives at the front—and with higher prices, crumbling schools, universities and hospitals starved of funding, and with cuts to youth clubs and social benefits. The hundreds of billions of euros spent on tanks and drones are missing everywhere they are needed. Rearmament means social cuts.

What is this war about?

According to the government and its media mouthpieces, rearmament is necessary to defend “democracy” and “freedom” against the Russian threat. But this is a propaganda lie.

The war in Ukraine is not about defence, but about the economic and geopolitical interests of German capital: access to raw materials and labour in Russia and Ukraine, huge profits for the arms industry, and the control and subjugation of Russia and the entire former Soviet Union.

The Putin regime’s invasion of Ukraine was reactionary and must be condemned. But it was the reaction of the Russian oligarchy to decades of NATO’s eastward expansion, through which the country was systematically encircled.

In the 20th century, German imperialism has already marched eastward twice. In the Second World War, Hitler waged a barbaric war of annihilation against the Soviet Union, in which at least 27 million Soviet citizens lost their lives and the Jews of Europe were systematically murdered. Today, more than 80 years after the defeat of the Nazi regime, Berlin is reviving this tradition. And it is doing so in collaboration with a regime in Kiev that venerates the Nazi collaborators of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) as “national heroes” and integrates fascist forces into the state and the army. This is no coincidence, but a deliberate programme.

The war has already cost hundreds of thousands of young people their lives on both sides. In Ukraine, armed squads from the recruitment authorities drive through the streets, seizing men to be thrown into the meat grinder at the front. Around 2 million Ukrainians are evading conscription, and at least 200,000 soldiers have deserted. Spontaneous protests against forced recruitment keep breaking out. The German government is actively assisting Kiev in this. Foreign Minister Wadephul wants to hand over the data of Ukrainian refugees of military age living in Germany to Kiev and have them swiftly

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deported.

The case of Bogdan Syrotiuk

There is no democracy in Ukraine, only a dictatorship. The case of the Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk proves this. On August 10, he was sentenced by a Ukrainian court to 15 years in prison—not for any crime, but because he wrote articles against war and fascism. The court also ordered his socialist books and documents be destroyed.

Bogdan is an opponent of the Putin regime and the Russian invasion, just as he is an opponent of NATO's warmongers and the Zelensky regime. In his articles, he exposed how Nazi collaborators such as Stepan Bandera are glorified in Ukraine. The Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, a Trotskyist youth organisation he founded, called for the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers against their respective governments. For this, he is to spend 15 years in prison. Given his poor state of health and the catastrophic conditions in Ukrainian prisons, this amounts to a death sentence.

Bogdan's persecution is not an isolated case. Since the 2014 Maidan coup, Ukraine has banned left-wing parties, no elections have been held, strikes are prohibited, and critical media such as the *World Socialist Web Site* have been blocked. The German government and mainstream media outlets stay silent about this, including about Bogdan's persecution, even though his case has even been accepted by the European Court of Human Rights.

Bogdan's freedom can only be won by workers and young people. His fight is our fight. We are to be thrown into the very war he opposes and the crackdown on opponents of the war is growing ever harsher.

Why the Left Party and the AfD are no alternative

Anger at the war and austerity policies of the federal government is enormous, which is proven by the recent state elections. But the beneficiaries were two parties that are themselves parties of war: the Left Party and the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

The Left Party, the election winner in Berlin, talks left and acts right. Its predecessor, the PDS, helped carry through the reintroduction of capitalism in East Germany after 1990 and later cut social spending in Berlin and Thuringia. Despite its rhetoric about peace, the Left Party voted in the upper chamber of parliament in favour of billions of euros in rearmament spending for the Bundeswehr and backed NATO's confrontation with Russia. It is not an anti-war party but a party of German imperialism wearing a "left" mask. If the Left Party goes on to lead the Berlin Senate (state legislature), it will carry out the same policy of cuts that it criticised during the election campaign. In doing so, it is paving the way for the far right.

The AfD, which became the strongest party in Saxony-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, is no "peace party" or alternative "from below," but the most aggressive representative of the policy of war and the dictatorship of the financial oligarchy. It was the first to call for raising military spending to 5 percent of GDP and wants to massively build up the state apparatus. It scapegoats refugees for the social catastrophe and divides the working class with its nationalist agitation. The AfD has been systematically promoted and built up by the government, the media and the state apparatus in order to channel opposition to war and social cuts into right-wing dead ends and brutally suppress it.

And the trade unions? In the fight over wages and jobs, they stand on the side of the corporations. In early September, behind the backs of the workforce, IG Metall agreed to the destruction of 75,000 jobs at Volkswagen. Four plants face closure. The German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) and its member unions suppress every act of resistance to war and cuts—and in doing so are driving workers into the arms of the AfD.

That is why the working class needs its own party, one that breaks with all the bourgeois parties and stands on an independent, revolutionary programme. This is what we in the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth organisation of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP), are fighting for.

What perspective in the fight against war?

Ukraine is not an isolated theatre of war but part of an escalating world war with further fronts in the Middle East—from the genocide in Gaza to the war against Iran. The deep contradictions of world capitalism are once again driving all the imperialist powers toward a violent redivision of the world. It is a race for resources, influence and profits—waged on the backs of the workers.

This world war and the introduction of conscription can only be stopped by an international movement of the working class fighting for the overthrow of capitalism. This is the socialist perspective for which Bogdan stands. Workers and young people of all countries must reject nationalism and unite in the struggle against their own governments, rather than being driven into war against one another. "Only internationalism, not bourgeois or petty-bourgeois nationalism, can end poverty, oppression and injustice," Bogdan declared in his speech marking May Day 2023.

Our allies are not to be found in parliament, but in the factories, schools and universities—in Germany, Russia, Ukraine and around the world.

There is no time to lose. Join the fight for socialism!
Support the campaign for the release of Bogdan Syrotiuk!
Join the IYSSE!

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