Fourth nationwide school strike in Germany: 45,000 protest against conscription

Our reporters
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Tens of thousands of school students across Germany once again took to the streets against the reintroduction of conscription. According to the "School Strike Against Conscription" alliance, more than 45,000 people took part in around 100 cities in the September 25 protests. In Berlin alone, 3,400 students demonstrated, 1,900 in Hamburg, 700 in Munich and 600 in Kiel, with several hundred also in Dresden, Leipzig, Frankfurt and Nuremberg.

It was the fourth nationwide school strike in 10 months. The strikes show the continuing opposition among young people to the return of conscription and the war policy bound up with it. At the same time, the German government has begun compulsory medical screening of young men and has dramatically stepped up rearmament, war propaganda against Russia and social attacks.

The widespread anger at the government of Chancellor Friedrich Merz was most recently expressed in the state elections in Berlin and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, in which the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) suffered heavy losses. The day after the school strike, the unions forming the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) called demonstrations nationwide in order to keep the simmering mood under control.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) took part in the school strikes in Berlin, North Rhine-Westphalia, Baden-Württemberg, Hesse and Bavaria, distributing hundreds of copies of the leaflet "Stop conscription in Germany! Stop the Ukraine war! Freedom for Bogdan Syrotiuk!" IYSSE members discussed with students why the introduction of conscription and the escalating world war can only be stopped by an international movement of the working class that fights for the overthrow of capitalism.

In the Bavarian city of Landshut, Sophia, a university student and IYSSE member, addressed the protesting school students:

> Above all in recent weeks, it has become clear how important this struggle is. Germany is escalating the war against Russia more and more, and de facto we are already in a war with Russia—with weapons that Germany also pays for. Conscription did not just fall from the sky. It is to be reintroduced in order to generate cannon fodder for precisely this war.

The Ukraine war was not about "defence" or "democracy," Sophia said, but about economic interests such as raw materials and markets. Workers and school students had to unite internationally against the war.

"Our Ukrainian Comrade Bogdan Syrotiuk also fought for this. He is a young socialist, 27 years old. He said that workers on both sides—Russian and Ukrainian—must stand united against the war." For this stance and for the six articles he wrote for the *World Socialist Web Site*, he has been sentenced in Ukraine to 15 years in prison. "Bogdan Syrotiuk is an example of how opposition to war and fascism is increasingly being suppressed, and how it is being concealed that this war is, after all, not being waged for democracy."

Sophia concluded by calling for the fight against war to be waged independently of all bourgeois parties. For this, the working class needed a revolutionary programme, as represented by the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and its youth organisation, the IYSSE.

"Bogdan's approach is inspiring"

In the Ruhr city of Essen, where around 200 school students demonstrated, IYSSE members spoke with Malina and Mascha, who attend a grammar school in a working-class neighbourhood. Asked about rearmament and the escalation of the Ukraine war, Mascha said, "That scares me. In my opinion, war is something where the powers or the heads of government of two countries fight each other and shift it onto the people, so that the people fight each other, even though in real life they would never have anything against each other." She rejected the idea that the population should "die for the interests of a few elites."

She also rejected the justification that the war defended democracy and freedom. "Defending freedom with war—to me, that is an absolute contradiction. War does not create peace. We have seen that so often in history. You can see it now, too. Civilians suffer most of all."

Malina pointed to the social situation in Germany. The focus had to be on completely different things, she said, because people were being "socially weakened more and more" so that they could be "instrumentalised for their own wars, to make even more profit." She sharply criticised the politicians who say, "You have to go to the front, you have to defend your fatherland," while they get millions from some lobbies.

Referring to the genocide in Gaza, Mascha recalled that the entire Middle East had previously been attacked "under the pretext of fighting terrorism, and in the end, they stuffed their pockets with raw materials of some kind." The effects were still being felt today.

When IYSSE members raised the 15-year prison sentence handed down in Ukraine to the young anti-war activist Bogdan Syrotiuk, Malina reacted with outrage. "That is press censorship, that is definitely not democracy. The greatest freedom a person can have is to be able to express their own opinion." Bogdan's approach of uniting workers on both sides against the war was "so inspiring—for us here in Germany too," she said. She recalled the Christmas truce of the First World War, which she had heard about at school. In the first winter of the war, in 1914, British, German and French soldiers on the Western Front had spontaneously fraternised, celebrated Christmas together and played football.

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For Malina, this raised the question of why the soldiers went on fighting afterwards. How could the generals and governments have continued the war if the soldiers had refused to fight?

That was exactly what happened three years later, the IYSSE members replied, in the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the German November Revolution of 1918. But spontaneous mutinies alone had not ended the war. In Russia, it was only with the Bolsheviks that the workers and soldiers had a leadership that took power and led the country out of the war. The IYSSE today, and the "Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists" built up by Bogdan, stand on this tradition.

Above all, Malina thought it was important that Bogdan calls on workers to act. People had to recognise "that they themselves are in a position of power to govern their own country," she said, and make the politicians face consequences—through strikes, not only by school students but also by working adults.

Repression by the police and the domestic intelligence agency

The ruling class is alarmed by this opposition and is responding with intimidation and repression. In Berlin, a massive force of 200 police officers was deployed against peaceful young people who marched under the slogan "War and crisis devour your life" through the working-class district of Wedding, past the new Rheinmetall munitions factory in Gesundbrunnen.

Police briefly detained 16 people and filed 11 criminal complaints—including for "insulting behaviour," "damage to property" and "using symbols of unconstitutional and terrorist organisations." Two demonstrators, aged 17 and 19, were briefly detained for "defamation" of Chancellor Friedrich Merz, as reported by *Tagesschau*, the news programme of public broadcaster ARD.

Those detained were released once the police measures had been completed, but the political message is unmistakable: Anyone who, as a young person, takes to the streets against war and conscription must expect police repression.

This is not an isolated case but part of a systematic criminalisation of opponents of war. Even before the latest strike, some media outlets had smeared the student movement as being "infiltrated by left-wing extremists" and called on the domestic intelligence agency (*Verfassungsschutz*) as a star witness. The agency's current 2025 report, in a new chapter on the Ukraine war, explicitly warns of "increased influx into anti-militarist protests."

At the beginning of September, the North Rhine-Westphalia branch of the *Verfassungsschutz* even posted its own anti-communist smear video on its new Instagram channel. "The world is falling apart, and it is your good right to take to the streets against war, rearmament or conscription. But take a close look at who you are protesting with," the agency threatens in it, warning of Marxists, communists and anarchists.

In recent years, the police have repeatedly used brutal violence against Gaza demonstrators and opponents of war. Only in July, they tried to forcibly suppress protests against Rheinmetall, a massive defense and industrial conglomerate headquartered in Düsseldorf. Now the state is also treating students who do not want to die as cannon fodder as a hostile threat.

These repressive methods are the logical consequence of the official war policy and at the same time an expression of the deep crisis of the government. It is pushing ahead with the biggest rearmament programme since the Second World War but has no support among the population for it. On the contrary, anti-war sentiment in the working class is deeply rooted, even if it has so far found no mass organised expression. A government that cannot tolerate even harmless criticism from young people is obviously in a panic. It fears that a limited school strike could become the spark for a mass movement of the working class against war.

The bankrupt perspective of the SDAJ

But it is precisely this extension of the strikes to the working class that the organisers of the movement are trying to block. Although young people's resistance to conscription is not abating, the number of participants has fallen. The first school strike, in December 2025, drew 55,000.

The cause lies in the political strategy of the organisers around the Socialist German Workers' Youth (SDAJ), the youth organisation of the Stalinist German Communist Party (DKP). It insists on separating the fight against conscription from the wars for which it is being introduced. At a nationwide conference against conscription in February, the SDAJ refused to take a clear position against the current wars. It rejected the demand for socialism on the grounds that it was not "suitable for the masses."

A movement, however, that has no answer to the Ukraine war, none to the Gaza genocide, none to the war against Iran—and that refuses to name the capitalist system as the cause of war—cannot grow. It addresses appeals and pleas to a government that wants and needs conscription. In this way, an entire generation is oriented to the very institutions from which war emerges.

The organisers also support the trade union apparatus, which partners with the government and plays a key role in preventing serious strikes against war, social cuts and the jobs massacre in the workplaces. In Berlin, the Left Party youth organisation *Linksjugend ['solid]* stokes the deceptive illusion that pressure can be exerted on the Left Party in the fight against militarism, even though the party voted for rearmament in the Bundesrat (the upper house of parliament) and is just preparing to form a Senate (state government) in Berlin with the SPD and the Greens.

But how is a successful fight against the war policy to be waged if it is not oriented *against* the parties and trade union leaderships that make these wars possible?

The movement against conscription and the escalation of war can only take a step forward if it is independent of all bourgeois parties and pseudo-left organisations, such as the SDAJ, and bases itself on the international working class—the revolutionary force in society. That is what the IYSSE is fighting for.

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