Support the youth protests! Unite workers and youth for socialism and a European general strike!

International Youth and Students for Social Equality
18 November 2026

On Friday, demonstrations against the war frenzy, the introduction of conscription and social devastation will take place across Europe. For the first time, the protests are a coordinated action across more than 20 countries. The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) calls on workers and young people to take part in large numbers. We are fighting to develop the movement, through a conscious struggle against capitalism, into a European general strike.

The demonstrations are part of a growing movement that has developed in recent weeks across dozens of European countries, largely independently of the trade union bureaucracies and capitalist parties. They are fuelled by the irreconcilable conflict between a warmongering financial oligarchy and the needs of the broad masses, and are on a collision course with capitalism. The movement must become conscious of its own international and anti-capitalist character.

Youth and workers everywhere face common problems

It is no coincidence that the protests are taking place in numerous countries, because the problems are the same everywhere. Every area of social life is being subordinated to the profit interests of a super-rich elite. Rents are rising, schools are decaying and unemployment is growing.

This finds its sharpest expression in the insane war policy. In Ukraine, the NATO powers deliberately provoked Putin's reactionary invasion in order to wage a proxy war against Russia. The aim is to gain control over the enormous natural resources of both countries and establish total domination over Eastern Europe. To this end, they are risking the nuclear annihilation of the entire continent. European governments have long since declared that they want to be able to defeat nuclear-armed Russia militarily within three years. Their support for the Israeli genocide in Gaza demonstrates daily that the ruling elites are once again prepared to commit the worst crimes.

This is the future capitalism holds in store for us: we are to be exploited to the bone to finance rearmament and feed the financial markets, and ultimately to give our lives on the battlefields of the rich.

Under these conditions, the simultaneous protests in different countries must become the starting point for building a truly international movement that discusses, decides and acts together. We must counter growing nationalism and the drive to war with the international unity of the youth and workers and the fight for the United Socialist States of Europe.

Capitalism means barbarism, fascism and war

We are not simply confronted with the bad policies of individual politicians, but with the bankruptcy of an entire social system. As in the twentieth century, capitalism is again leading to fascism, barbarism and war.

War policies and social attacks are being driven forward by governments across Europe, whether that of the fascist Meloni in Italy, the Grand Coalition in Germany, Labour in Britain or the supposedly left-wing PSOE-Sumar government in Spain.

The only way to prevent a catastrophe is the overthrow of capitalism. The big banks and corporations must be expropriated and placed under democratic control. The vast fortunes of the super-rich must be used to meet society's needs: education, healthcare and infrastructure. The great Marxist Rosa Luxemburg declared during the First World War: “Socialism or barbarism.” The mass slaughter of the war confirmed this. It was the October Revolution in Russia and the revolution in Germany that brought the war to an end. Today, the question arises anew. Either capitalism is overthrown and replaced by a democratic, egalitarian and socialist society, or the nuclear annihilation of humanity looms.

The working class is the decisive force

None of this is a question of generations. These are questions of class. The only social force capable of

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overthrowing capitalism and preventing a world war is the international working class. It constitutes the great majority of society, produces all its wealth through daily labour and can bring the capitalist warmongers to their knees.

The protests at schools and universities must therefore be consciously linked to the struggles in the workplaces. At the same time as the youth protests, a major strike against the Meloni government is taking place in Italy. Across Europe, workers in industry, healthcare, the public sector and transport face layoffs, wage cuts and social cuts. They are fighting against the same policies through which billions are being raised for rearmament and war.

These struggles must be brought together across workplaces, industries and national borders. In this way, the international youth protests can develop into a powerful movement of the working class that prepares joint strike action and raises the question of a European general strike in practical terms. Such a general strike can paralyse the entire continent and pose the question of power: Which class decides? Will society be organised according to the needs of the financial oligarchy or those of the working class?

Build an independent movement of workers and youth

But for workers and youth to act as an independent social force, they must free themselves politically and organisationally from the paralysing influence of the pro-capitalist parties and the trade union bureaucracies and turn to a socialist perspective. The supposedly “left” parties also support the war policy because they defend capitalism. The Left Party in Germany approved the government’s trillion-euro rearmament and supports the witch-hunt against opponents of the genocide. Sumar is part of the Spanish government and backs its militaristic course.

The major trade union bureaucracies in every European country have lined up behind the war policy and have enforced cuts and mass layoffs against workers. When they call for limited actions, it is only to let off steam and maintain control.

If workers, especially the younger generation, want to oppose social cuts and the war policy they must organise independently. We call for the building of democratically elected action committees in schools, universities, workplaces and neighbourhoods, independent of the trade union bureaucracies and capitalist parties. These committees must unite across national borders within the framework of the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

The fact that the youth protests have developed relatively spontaneously and independently must become the starting point for conscious political independence from all capitalist parties and trade union bureaucracies. We must not approach governments as petitioners. We must fight against them and pose the question of power.

Protest organisers seek to contain the movement

The self-appointed organisers of Friday's day of protest are hostile to this perspective. They want to contain the movement and subordinate it to the capitalist parties. In some countries, such as Germany, the list of organisers even includes youth organisations of parties that are responsible for the war policy and social devastation, such as the Green Youth and Linksjugend Solid. The Greens are among the most aggressive warmongers. They are drumming up support for a war against Russia and oppose conscription only because they want working-class youth, not themselves, to end up in the trenches.

Some of the organisations adopt more radical rhetoric and have published a manifesto ahead of the protests. It voices sharp criticism of capitalism, imperialism and NATO, and even demands NATO's dissolution. But when it comes to the decisive political consequences, the text remains vague. It is deliberately silent on the escalation of NATO's war against Russia and studiously avoids calling for the overthrow of capitalism.

Radical phrases conceal efforts to ensure that the pro-capitalist policies of the Left Party in Germany or the Labour left in the UK are not challenged. The pro-militarist trade unions are celebrated as allies, without so much as mentioning their role in enforcing rearmament and social attacks.

Fight for a socialist perspective—Join the IYSSE!

We fight to develop the movement consciously on an international, independent and socialist basis. We call on school and university students to join us at the factory gates and fight for this perspective among workers.

Join the International Youth and Students for Social Equality! The IYSSE is the youth organisation of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). The Fourth International was founded in 1938 under the leadership of Leon Trotsky to defend socialist principles against Stalinism and social democracy.

It is precisely these principles of internationalism, working-class independence and socialism that are of the greatest importance today. Study this history, our programme and our perspectives, and take part in the fight against capitalist exploitation and world war!

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