

“Do you fancy going to the Eastern Front and dying for Germany? Not me!”

Students protest against military recruitment at school in Leipzig, Germany

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Germany’s Armed Forces (Bundeswehr) are aggressively recruiting war volunteers among young people. This is increasingly being met with resistance, as was shown recently at a school in Leipzig.

Two days before the planned Bundeswehr visit to Humboldt School in Leipzig at the end of October, several students staged a so-called “die-in” protest in their schoolyard. They lay down on the ground and played dead while a 16-year-old classmate spoke the following into a megaphone:

Do you fancy going to the Eastern Front? And dying for Germany there? I, for one, am not up for it. I’m not up for lying in some trench at 18 and wondering: will I come out of this with my life or is it just a leg and my humanity that I’m losing? The day after tomorrow, the school has invited the Bundeswehr to visit. They are supposed to make this situation appealing to us. We are told that the Bundeswehr protects Germany and us and wants to bring peace. That’s bullshit! Whose interests are at stake when German weapons are used to kill in Palestine and Kurdistan? Whose freedom are we talking about when warplanes cross the Pacific?

He was not able to finish, because a teacher snatched the megaphone from him. “Massive disruption of school peace” was the school management’s charge against the protest action. They threatened to expel the students involved. In doing so, the school management made itself the stooges of the military and the government.

Asipziger reported *Volkszeitung* the (LVZ) interviewed one of the students involved, he was “threatened with disciplinary action immediately after the protest, and in the following lesson his teacher brought up the incident again. He was then called in to see the head teacher: he was accused of having disturbed the peace at school.” The State Office for Schools and Education backed the head teacher, claiming that the students’ protest had disrupted “successful teaching and educational work,” and the school was allowed to take disciplinary action.

A petition against the threat of expulsion, initiated by the group International Youth Leipzig, has received over 3,600 signatures. It states: “School is no place to advertise the fact that young people are dying on the front lines for German profit interests.”

In other federal states, too, students have opposed the appearance of the Bundeswehr at their schools. Militarisation in Germany is becoming ever more apparent, especially with the growing presence of young Bundeswehr officers in schools and other educational institutions. In order to make a career and service in the Bundeswehr attractive to young people, their reservations about the military and war are to be undermined.

This is done in various ways, some of them hidden. For example, the Bundeswehr offers internships for school students and pays for bus trips for school excursions to museums. In doing so, it deliberately exploits the financial and staffing difficulties schools face, some of which take up such offers in order to organise school trips.

In 2023, more than 3,400 lectures were given by youth officers at schools and universities, reaching almost 90,000 pupils and students, according to the federal

government. Almost 3,000 of them subsequently attended Bundeswehr institutions. As a result, the Bundeswehr is recruiting more and more young people, almost 2,000 in 2023.

Further steps to strengthen the Bundeswehr are constantly being taken. An agreement between the Ministry of Defence and the Federal Employment Agency on November 6 aims to offer military careers to unemployed people in the future.

On November 29, the Ministry of Defence announced the new compulsory military service on its website. Defence Minister Boris Pistorius (Social Democrat, SPD) had first presented parts of the plans to the public in June. The bill to modernise the military registration system is a preparation for mass recruitment among young people in order to better equip the Bundeswehr with personnel. According to the Ministry of Defence, this is Germany's response to "the changed geopolitical situation."

As early as 2014, the grand coalition of the Christian Democrats (CDU) and SPD under Angela Merkel (CDU) decided to increasingly enforce the geopolitical interests of German big business by military means. Since the so-called "new era" of the Scholz government with the outbreak of NATO's proxy war against Russia, the ruling class has been pushing the militarisation of society and the increasingly aggressive and provocative use of weapons, as the latest developments in the war in Ukraine and German participation in the genocide in Gaza show.

The German military is recruiting new soldiers with large billboards bearing cynical slogans such as "Nothing to do yet?", "Do something that really counts" or "All out commitment for peace." The campaign is running on all media channels, including YouTube and Tiktok, which is widely used among young people.

In August, we wrote on the WSWS:

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) condemns the recruitment of minors and the murderous pro-war policy in the strongest possible terms. After two world wars, in which tens of thousands of children and young people and millions of workers were sacrificed to the interests of the German ruling class, there is strong anti-war sentiment in Germany and throughout Europe. For example, 59 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds are against the return of conscription, which the German government is preparing.

Fear of war has increased enormously in recent years. In this year's Shell Youth Study, 81 percent of young people surveyed said they were afraid of war in Europe. In 2019, the figure was 46 percent. Another noteworthy finding of the study is that fear of poverty has increased—from 52 percent in 2019 to 67 percent this year. In addition, 63 percent of respondents said they were afraid of social inequality.

Social attacks and militarism go hand in hand. As in the film *All Quiet on the Western Front* which is based on the novel by Erich Maria Remarque, the aim is to lure and manipulate young people. But what awaits them in reality is a senseless death at the hands of the war machine.

Erich Kästner, who himself experienced the First World War as a youth, wrote in his 1928 poem 'Jahrgang 1899' (Class of 1899):

Then we were called up for the military,
just to be cannon fodder.
The school desks were empty,
and at home, the weeping mother.

To ensure that this does not happen again, students and youth must oppose militarisation and rearmament. The IYSSE calls for further protests against the Bundeswehr in schools and defends students against threats and reprisals from their school administrators!

But we cannot stop the dangerous pro-war policy through protest at schools alone. What is needed is the development of a socialist anti-war movement in the international working class—the most powerful social force that keeps everything running. That is why we advocate a joint struggle of youth and workers around the world. Join us and get involved with the IYSSE!



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