

Oppose political censorship at Griffith University!

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (Australia)
21 February 2015

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) calls on all students to oppose the anti-democratic bans imposed by the Griffith University Clubs & Societies Office on the IYSSE, barring it from registering as a club on its Brisbane campuses, and from holding an orientation week stall.

This is a direct political attack on the IYSSE, which is the only organisation that advances an anti-war, socialist and internationalist perspective at Griffith University, and other universities across the country. It is also an assault on the basic democratic rights of students, including their right to decide for themselves which clubs to form and join.

On February 2, the IYSSE received an extraordinary email from Deb de Silva, Clubs Support Officer, Campus Life Clubs & Societies Office: “I’ve had a discussion with the Clubs Coordinator with regards to IYSSE’s attempt to start a club here at Griffith. Unfortunately, due to previous attempts, which proved unsuccessful in gaining student interest, we will not be proceeding further with this organisation registering as a student club. You can try to get a stall at O Week by contacting whats-on@griffith.edu.au. Please note that a fee will be required to be paid in order to come on to campus.”

This was followed by an email the same day from Alice Rozynski, the Events Coordinator, stating: “We have received the email from Deb in the Clubs Office in regards to having a stall at O-Week. Unfortunately due to limited space and full capacity, we have had to strictly close applications as we simply do not have the room for any more stalls.”

In other words, the Clubs & Societies and university management have arrogated to themselves the right to determine, in advance, that students—including all the new domestic and international students—will be

blocked from joining an IYSSE club. Has any other club been banned in this way?

The political character of this censorship is clear from examining the record since the IYSSE first established a branch at Griffith University in 2013. Far from failing to “gain student interest,” the IYSSE submitted the required list of 15 members to Clubs & Societies last year and was granted provisional registration. The IYSSE has been the only political club on campus to hold regular information stalls (including during O Weeks) and advertised meetings—addressing the questions of war, social inequality and democratic rights that are of mounting concern to all young people.

In Orientation Week 2013, we held our inaugural meeting: “The global crisis of capitalism and the international socialist perspective of the IYSSE.” The next month, we screened *From Tsar to Lenin*, a famous documentary on the 1917 Russian Revolution. On August 15, we held a meeting on “Defend Edward Snowden! The socialist answer to the assault on democratic rights.” On September 26, we held another meeting: “No to war against Syria!” In 2014, we held a forum during O week, followed by a meeting on March 27: “The glorification of WWI and the preparations for WWII.”

Then, when the IYSSE sought to book a room for another meeting last April—on “Ukraine, the dangers of fascism and war”—the Clubs & Societies Office suddenly declared, in an email sent on April 2, that the IYSSE was banned from booking meeting rooms because it was “a very political club.” The pretext offered was the former Labor government’s anti-democratic Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) legislation, which bars student services fees from being used to “support political parties.”

Again, far from failing to “gain student interest,” the

IYSSE launched a campaign that won decisive support from students, forcing the university management to back down. In our April 4 statement and leaflet entitled “Defend the democratic rights of Griffith University students!” we exposed the fraud of the university’s pretext: “The administration is justifying its position on the absurd ground that if a political club like the IYSSE holds a meeting in a lecture theatre or tutorial room on the campus, this is equivalent to a student organisation using SSAF funds to make financial donations to a political party or election candidate—which, in any event, it should also be able to do!”

In that statement, the IYSSE explained that university managements nationally were turning to the SSAF legislation to “manufacture pseudo-legal justifications” to suppress any student club activities aimed at clarifying the underlying causes behind the drive to war, austerity and elimination of democratic rights.

That warning has been confirmed by the current attack, which is specifically aimed against the IYSSE. After overturning last year’s ban on booking rooms, which forced us to hold a meeting outside the library, we held two further meetings off-campus last year, the first on the renewed US-led war in Iraq and Syria and the second on “Why have Australia’s parliamentary parties all signed up for war?”

Students should consider the conditions under which the bans have been imposed on the IYSSE. Not only is the Australian government slashing budget spending on education, health and other social services, it is pushing through laws to permit mass on-line surveillance, stepping up its involvement in the Middle East war and placing Australia on the frontline of US confrontations with Russia and China.

Young people are also being subjected to a barrage of pro-war propaganda. As the centenary of the invasion of Gallipoli by Australian and allied forces during World War I approaches, the government and the media are spending hundreds of millions of dollars to “celebrate” that disastrous war, as a means of cultivating nationalism and militarism.

Griffith University is facilitating this pro-war campaign. While the IYSSE has been denied an O Week stall, the military has been invited onto campus to hold a recruitment barbeque on March 17. Students have been invited to: “Come along, enjoy a sausage sizzle, find out about the wide range of careers in the

Australian Defence Force.” This is part of a saturation media campaign promoting the military as an attractive career option in the face of mounting youth unemployment.

The bans on the IYSSE have not been withdrawn, despite an IYSSE email to Clubs & Societies last Friday opposing the political censorship and stating that the IYSSE would campaign among students against it. In reply, Wade Hurst, the Clubs Coordinator and Student Representative Council Liaison Officer, claimed that the IYSSE had failed “five or six times” to attend a club sign-on day, “in the hope of forming a club,” and declared: “As other organisations (including corporate and not for profits) pay for a stall on these [O Week] markets, it is not fair for them to be charged but others not.”

The record is that the IYSSE held O Week stalls in 2013 and 2014, as well as numerous information stalls throughout both years. It was on that basis that we obtained provisional registration last year. In any case, what gives the Clubs Coordinator the right to arbitrarily set a limit on how many times a club can seek registration? The priority given to fee-paying “corporate and not for profit” organisations over the IYSSE’s democratic right to hold a stall speaks volumes about the pro-business orientation of Clubs & Societies.

We urge all students to insist that the Griffith University authorities retract their anti-democratic bans on the IYSSE, and we call on all students who agree with our political perspective to sign up as members of the IYSSE today.



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