Humboldt University IYSSE denounces Australian university's anti-war meeting ban

Our reporter
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany has sent a letter to the University of Sydney and the Burwood City Council opposing their blocking of an anti-war meeting called by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP). The IYSSE and the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit in Germany are waging a determined campaign against the revival of German militarism and attempts to transform Humboldt University into a major base for producing war propaganda.

Students at the University of Sydney and Griffith University in Brisbane have also spoken out, denouncing the anti-democratic attacks on the SEP by Burwood Council and the University of Sydney. The SEP's April 26 meeting, which will now be held at another venue, is entitled, "Anzac Day, the glorification of militarism, and the drive to World War III."

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"We stand in solidarity with our comrades in Australia in opposing these acts of political censorship"

The IYSSE at Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany, condemns the efforts of the Burwood City Council and the University of Sydney to silence the Socialist Equality Party, the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

We stand in solidarity with our comrades in Australia in opposing these acts of political censorship. We demand the immediate reversal of both decisions to deny the SEP access to meeting space and call for a full public disclosure of the process by which they were carried out.

In acceding to the demands made by the "Reclaim Australia" movement, the Labor-dominated Burwood City Council has provided a right-wing, anti-immigrant and pro-war group with veto powers over political meetings. This group's denunciation of SEP meetings as "un-Australian" brings to mind nothing so much as the denunciations of "un-German spirit" used by the Nazis to justify mass book burnings in the 1930s.

This exposes the nationalist and militarist agenda which has dominated the Anzac Day celebrations and Australia's commemoration of the centenary of the First World War. These celebrations have been used to falsify history, whitewashing past crimes of Australian imperialism in order to intimidate opposition to war and to lay the ideological framework for new military interventions. Similar processes are taking place in imperialist countries all over the world. In this, the universities play an indispensable role.

In Germany, the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit and the IYSSE have fought efforts to turn Humboldt University into a center for war propaganda. In the course of our campaign against the resurgence of German militarism, the administration at Humboldt has made repeated efforts to block access to rooms for our public meetings and demanded that we refrain from criticizing members of its faculty.

Despite these attempts to intimidate our movement, we have won broad support on campus and in the working class. Our recent meetings have attracted hundreds of participants and in January we led a successful campaign to win a seat in Humboldt University's student parliament.

We commend the principled stand taken by our Australian comrades. The work of the Australian section of our movement has world historical significance.

Not a single tendency outside of our own fights for the international unity of the working class in a common struggle against imperialist war and its root cause, the capitalist system.

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Scores of University of Sydney students have signed SEP petitions this week demanding that the university's vice-chancellor reverse his administration's decision to

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ban the SEP's anti-war meeting.

Tanile, 18, a liberal arts and science student from Mount Druitt, said the SEP meeting should be allowed to go ahead. "People have a right to express their beliefs, to talk about war and why it should be stopped," she said. "I want to live in a world where war is a thing we learn about in history and a concept we no longer have to worry about. That can only happen if we can talk about war openly.

"We all learn about World War I, World War II and the Vietnam War at school but we don't learn about the people that fought against conscription or the war itself. We don't hear the stories of the men in Gallipoli who were pacifists and medical practitioners. We hear about the man who threw a grenade into a bunker and killed 12 men to capture a town …

"All the aircraft and machines that [Prime Minister] Tony Abbott spent money on have military purposes. He's not spending money on hospitals … People don't realise that celebrating war promotes war. They see it as two different situations but they are closely bound together."

Justin, 18, a computer science student, said: "Everyone has the right to their own opinion. If one party disagrees with someone else they shouldn't be able to completely silence them. If they want to outright ban your meeting then it shows that they are weak and that they don't want to, or can't, deal with your views because theirs are flawed."

Stuart, a PhD student in museum studies, said: "It's a university and we should be encouraging freedom of expression and speech. There shouldn't be any bans like this unless there is a certainty of physical danger to any one person. Universities should foster enquiry and knowledge, probably the two most important values."

Cooper, 23, a maths and nano-science student, said he could not understand why the university stopped the event. "Surely it's unconstitutional when so many political parties with different agendas meet here on a daily basis, including socialist ones," he said.

"How they can justify banning one political group, especially when it is quite established? So is the suggestion that the university is against anything that brings into question our Australian values on the sacred holiday of Anzac Day? It looks like that!"

At Brisbane's Griffith University, **Jordan**, said the censorship of the SEP's meeting was "shocking." Jordan, a member of the IYSSE at Griffith University, said: "I think it is an oppression of an idea … Where do you stop? The anti-war message seems to be being lost in the glorification of 'the Great War' in World War I. To glorify war is to glorify the atrocities that took place in the war. You can't glorify war without praising men for killing men.

"I am repulsed by the ANZAC centenary propaganda, to be quite honest. There is a difference between holding in memory the sacrifice that was made and glorifying the brutality of it. What you are seeing is more of the glorifying of the brutality.

"My granddad fought in Borneo in World War II … Being young kids we always asked him about the war. He always said he never killed anyone. That was all he said. He would not say anything else. I lived with him and supported him when I was in my mid-teen years. He was very old and needed a live-in carer. So we got talking about things. He did not see any glory in what he did.

"There is a big push toward war now. As far I can see, our anti-war movement is against the government's agenda, so they oppose it … They are ramping up for something bigger and there is enough destabilisation in the world now to harbour something akin to World War I or World War II."

The SEP calls for letters of protest to be sent to the University of Sydney, demanding that it reverse its refusal to hire its venue for the SEP's April 26 anti-war meeting. Letters should be directed to Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Dr Michael Spence, at vice.chancellor@sydney.edu.au, who is responsible for the executive decisions of university management. Please CC all emails to the SEP at sep@sep.org.au.

The SEP is continuing to insist that Burwood Council rescind its hall cancellation. WSWS readers and supporters should send emails to the Labor Party Mayor of Burwood, Councillor John Faker, at mayor@burwood.nsw.gov.au and to Burwood Council management, at council@burwood.nsw.gov.au. The email addresses of all seven current Burwood councillors can be seen here. Please specify "Complaint" in the subject field and CC all emails to the SEP at @sep.org.au.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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