

Oppose political censorship at the University of Western Sydney!

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (Australia)
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) calls on all students to oppose the political censorship imposed on the IYSSE student club at the University of Western Sydney (UWS), Bankstown campus.

Since April 23, UWS officials have placed a series of extraordinary conditions on the IYSSE. These amount to an attempt by the university administration to politically vet IYSSE leaflets and club meetings, and identify students participating in IYSSE campaigns, in violation of the most basic democratic rights.

In an email sent to the IYSSE on May 21, Katalin Stern, head of security at UWS Bankstown, outlined the conditions imposed on the club:

"All materials that IYSSE will be handing out to be submitted to myself for review via email 48hrs in advance.

"Contact details for [name of student associated with the IYSSE] and any other students that will be taking part in the campaigns on campus.

"There must be a student present responsible for any IYSSE campaign."

According to earlier instructions by the UWS security department, details of the titles and contents of IYSSE meetings must also be submitted to security for prior review.

The measures are aimed at silencing the only club on campus putting forward a socialist and internationalist perspective against the escalating drive to war. This is an attack on the basic rights of all students to access and consider anti-war and other political material.

Moreover, the assertion that students conducting political activity must give their names to university authorities is a fundamental and unprecedented assault on civil and political rights.

The IYSSE has been affiliated as a student club at UWS for more than three years, during which time it has

conducted weekly, and at times twice-weekly campaigns, without issue. The Socialist Equality Party, the Australian section of the world Trotskyist movement, to which the IYSSE is affiliated, has conducted campaigns at UWS Bankstown for decades.

Significantly, IYSSE supporters were first forced to shut down a campaign in April, amid a deluge of militarist propaganda by the entire political establishment, including the universities, to glorify the centenary of the "Anzac Day" British-led invasion of Turkey at Gallipoli.

On April 23, IYSSE supporters distributed statements advertising a Socialist Equality Party public meeting entitled "Anzac Day, the glorification of militarism and the drive to World War III." The leaflets called on students, workers and young people to oppose the political censorship of that meeting by the Labor Party-controlled Burwood Council, which cancelled a booking for the event, and the University of Sydney, which refused to permit the meeting to be held on its campus.

An individual who identified herself as a librarian accosted the IYSSE campaigners. She claimed there were multiple complaints by students. In fact, the IYSSE campaign had received a warm response from students. Nevertheless, she demanded that the IYSSE campaign team leave. She expressed concern that the IYSSE leaflets would be associated with the library.

The IYSSE supporters upheld their democratic right to conduct political work on campus as representatives of a registered student club. The librarian contacted the security department, whose officers duly ordered the IYSSE team off campus, claiming that a leaflet distribution constituted an "event" that required a minimum of a week's notice, and approval from security.

On the same day, Katalin Stern, representing UWS security, told an IYSSE member over the phone that this procedure was instituted to ensure that "nothing offensive" was distributed on campus.

On May 20, IYSSE representatives met with Stern, and were again informed they would have to submit any material to be distributed on campus a week in advance. When the IYSSE members pointed to the anti-democratic character of this edict, Stern maintained her stand, but said leaflets could be submitted with 48 hours' notice.

Asked why the IYSSE was being subjected to these unprecedented conditions, another UWS official who was present at the meeting said the instructions had come from "higher up," but refused to be specific.

On May 29, the UWS Campus Life Officer, who is responsible for student activities, told an IYSSE representative that the club's material must be vetted so that nothing "harmful to the university" was distributed. He asserted that security officials had the right to curtail student activities on campus, even though these powers were not laid out in any document relating to student clubs. He further stated that these powers were deployed on a "case-by-case basis."

For security officers, or any other university officials, to decide what political material can be distributed on campus, which discussions can be carried out, and whether meetings are held is a fundamental attack on the democratic rights not only of the IYSSE, but of all students.

What the university authorities mean by "offensive" and "harmful" material was demonstrated by the removal of IYSSE campaigners from campus on April 23. Their only "offense" was to oppose the promotion of militarism, and fight for a socialist perspective against war among students.

The political significance of this bid to censor the IYSSE is demonstrated by recent events. Australia is playing a central role in US provocations against China in the South China Sea—a development that threatens the outbreak of a catastrophic conflict in the Asia-Pacific region.

The IYSSE, as the youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party, has been the only organisation to warn students of Australia's complete integration into the advanced preparations for war against China, being carried out under the banner of Washington's "pivot to Asia."

The IYSSE club has won widespread support from the diverse student body at UWS Bankstown, which includes many students from a Middle Eastern background, who are acutely aware of the horrific consequences of the predatory wars launched in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen by the US and its allies, including

Australia.

The moves to silence the IYSSE demonstrate that the drive to war is incompatible with the most essential democratic rights. In order to prepare the political conditions for new wars, the entire political establishment, with Labor, the Liberals and the Greens in the lead, is attempting to intimidate and suppress the overwhelming anti-war sentiment among young people.

Universities are playing a pivotal role in this reactionary campaign. University authorities at Griffith University, in Queensland, unsuccessfully sought to ban the IYSSE at the beginning of the year. The Clubs and Societies Committee at Melbourne University has refused to affiliate an IYSSE club on transparently political grounds, while the University of Newcastle IYSSE has successfully repelled repeated attempts to block its political campaigns.

Universities internationally are resorting to political censorship. In Germany, students associated with "Münkler-Watch," a blog that criticises the militarist positions of Herfried Münkler, a prominent professor at Berlin's Humboldt University, have been threatened by the university and denounced by a host of daily newspapers, and even likened to terrorists by some. The IYSSE is at the forefront of opposing the promotion of militarism at Humboldt University, successfully initiating a motion to the university's student parliament defending the democratic rights of students and condemning the witch-hunting of anti-war students.

Students at UWS and other Australian universities must take a similar stand. If university administrations at UWS and elsewhere can politically vet and censor anti-war material, what is next? If students involved in campaigns must be identified to university security officials, then anti-war and socialist students can be threatened with disciplinary measures, such as suspension or expulsion, for their political activities.

The IYSSE calls on all students to oppose political censorship at UWS, as part of the fight to build a socialist and internationalist movement of the working class against war—the only means of preventing a new global conflagration, and securing fundamental democratic rights.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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