

University of Melbourne student union imposes third ban on IYSSE club

**The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (Australia)
1 September 2015**

On August 18, for the third time in 18 months, the Clubs and Societies Committee (C&SC) of the University of Melbourne Student Union rejected the application of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), to affiliate a club on campus, on grounds that can only be described as extraordinary.

The C&SC cited the IYSSE's decision to circulate among students an open letter to the committee, dated April 16, opposing its anti-democratic decision in March to block the IYSSE's affiliation. The committee declared that by writing the open letter, the IYSSE had undermined any possible "good working relationship" with the committee, and would therefore not be allowed to affiliate a club.

What outraged the C&SC members was that the IYSSE refused to silently submit to this ban on its activities. Instead, it held the committee to account before the very student body that it nominally represents.

The C&S Committee consists of two office bearers, Stephen Smith and Claire Pollock, who were elected at the end of 2014 as part of the "More Activities!" student election organisation, and seven students chosen from the executive members of affiliated clubs on campus: Yasmine Luu (Science Students' Society), Lauren Taylor (Cosmic Hitchhikers Appreciation Society), Gulsara Kapulan (Secular Society), Eilish Hunt (Engineering Students' Club), Steven Connolly (Pirates), Ryan Davey (Arts Students Society) and Phillip Mallis (International Relations Society).

In their vindictive treatment of the IYSSE, the C&SC members are setting a far wider precedent. The message has been sent: students who publicly challenge, or even seek to publicly discuss, the committee's decisions, will be targeted and banned from forming their own clubs.

In particular, the C&SC has implicitly threatened the 56 students who signed up to establish the IYSSE that it will place an indefinite ban on the club if they don't keep quiet.

The anti-democratic character of the committee's actions is a continuation of its politically-motivated efforts, over the past 18 months, to prevent the IYSSE from forming a club.

The C&SC's first rejection of the IYSSE's affiliation application came in April 2014, on the spurious grounds that the club's name was "unreflective" of its aims, which, the C&SC claimed, "overlapped" with the student club of the pseudo-left organisation Socialist Alternative.

The IYSSE published a reply, on April 28, 2014, refuting both these claims. Answering the first, it stated: "The fight for internationalism and social equality, both of which are contained in the name of the IYSSE, have been the cornerstone of the socialist movement for over 160 years." In response to the second, it made clear that, "The IYSSE has no overlapping aims with Socialist Alternative, which is openly opposed to the program and principles of Trotskyism fought for by the ICFI." The statement exposed Socialist Alternative's support for US and Australian imperialism in the war on Syria, the fascist putsch in Ukraine and the preparations for war against China, and attacked the organisation's defence of the trade unions, which function as nothing but an industrial police force, on behalf of government and big business, to suppress any independent struggles by workers and youth in defence of jobs and conditions.

The following year, in March 2015, the committee again rejected the IYSSE's application, citing the same discredited pretext of "overlapping aims." The IYSSE responded by issuing an open letter, laying out before the University of Melbourne student body the objective record of the committee's flagrant political censorship.

The letter began: "First and foremost, the notion that the C&S Committee, or any other organisation, should be able to determine which clubs can or cannot be formed undermines the fundamental rights of students to organise and exercise freedom of expression. All students should be permitted to establish whatever clubs they choose, whether their interests be cultural, spiritual, political, sporting or academic."

The letter explained that the submitted aims of the IYSSE were to "educate students in the history and principles of the Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International," whereas Socialist Alternative was "not part of the ICFI and is not a Trotskyist organisation. It traces its origins to a petty bourgeois political trend known as 'state capitalism,' which broke from the Fourth International in 1951, on the basis of an explicit rejection of its principles."

The letter again reviewed the fundamental political differences between the IYSSE and Socialist Alternative and exposed the false and completely unsupported claims used by the C&SC to block our affiliation. In a particularly revealing comment, made just before the C&SC's decision was announced, C&S office bearer, Stephen Smith declared that the IYSSE should not have attacked the committee's earlier decisions as "undemocratic" because

“committee members are elected,” and any criticism or exposure of their actions would “undermine the student representative system.”

In declaring itself entirely unaccountable, the committee is arrogating to itself the right to unilaterally make decisions without any reference to the democratic rights of the students it purportedly represents.

The predominance of such conceptions within the governing student body at the University of Melbourne—the second oldest, and one of the most prestigious, universities in the country—can only be understood as a reflection of more fundamental economic and political processes, both nationally and internationally.

How else to explain the fact that, simultaneously with the attack on the IYSSE at the University of Melbourne, university authorities, student society administrators and local councils across the country have been engaged in systematically censoring our activities, including at Griffith University in Brisbane, the University of Newcastle, the University of Western Sydney and the University of Sydney?

Over the past decade and a half, the Australian ruling elite and its political establishment, including the Labor Party, the Greens and the pseudo-left organisations, have increasingly repudiated any commitment to basic democratic principles and rights, a process that has rapidly accelerated during the past two years.

Since 2001, under the all-encompassing umbrella of the “war on terror,” successive Australian governments, both Labor and Liberal, have erected the legal scaffolding of a police state, massively expanding police and intelligence agency powers while abrogating fundamental democratic rights. Australian intelligence agencies and spy bases such as Pine Gap have been fully integrated into the US National Security Agency’s global spying network, revealed by whistle-blower and former NSA contractor Edward Snowden.

Since 2013 in particular, the Abbott government and Shorten Labor opposition have passed a series of laws increasing the powers of the spying agencies, while whipping up an atmosphere of crisis and anti-Muslim xenophobic hysteria through the staging of widely-publicised “anti-terror” police raids and the vilification of asylum seekers. This lurch to the right has been graphically demonstrated in the government’s anti-refugee regime, which involves the systematic and illegal rounding up, deportation and detention of asylum seekers in Nauru, Papua New Guinea and Cambodia.

These attacks take place under conditions of a global eruption of militarism, led by the United States and backed by Canberra. Driven by the deepening economic crisis confronting American and world capitalism, during the past four years Washington has launched wars in Libya, Yemen and Iraq, expanded its regime-change operation against Russian-backed Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, threatened war with Iran, escalated military tensions with Russia, and accelerated its preparations for war against China as part of the “pivot to Asia.” Australian imperialism is a key partner in all of Washington’s operations in the Middle East and preparations for war against China.

This war drive is being accompanied within Australia by the fanning of nationalism and militarism—including through the

glorification of war under the official World War I centenary “celebrations”—in order to overcome the deep anti-war sentiments within the Australian working class and youth. Under these conditions, suppressing critical, anti-war voices is of decisive significance for the ruling elite.

The attacks on the IYSSE serve to silence the only student organisation opposing the militarist preparations against China and the US-led military intrigues internationally, and seeking to turn students to the fight for the independent mobilisation of the working class against the accompanying assault on jobs, wages, education, health, welfare and other social rights. In the final analysis, the launching of war abroad and austerity at home is incompatible with democratic rights.

Despite the concerted efforts of the C&S Committee at the University of Melbourne, the IYSSE will not be intimidated into silence. We will continue our campaign in defence of our democratic rights, and those of all students. We stand for freedom of speech and the freedom of association on campus—which entail the right of all students to affiliate the clubs of their choice and to use campus facilities to hold their meetings and activities.

We appeal to all students to oppose the ongoing attacks on the democratic rights of the IYSSE, and to demand the immediate lifting of all obstacles to the club’s affiliation. We call on all students and representatives of other clubs on campus to write letters of protest to the University of Melbourne Student Union, demanding the retraction of the ban on the IYSSE. Students should insist, as a basic democratic principle, on complete freedom of expression on campus, without fear of retribution by university or student union authorities.

Above all, we urge every student who wants to take up the fight against war, social inequality and the ongoing assault on democratic rights to join the IYSSE.

Letters of protest should be sent to Stephen Smith and Claire Pollock, the UMSU Clubs & Societies Committee officers at clubs@union.unimelb.edu.au and to Hana Dalton, the General Secretary of UMSU, at secretary@union.unimelb.edu.au.

Please send copies of all letters to the IYSSE at iysseaus@gmail.com. A selection of letters will be published on the World Socialist Web Site.



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