

IYSSE campaigns against University of Melbourne affiliation ban

Our correspondents
7 September 2015

A meeting will be held tomorrow by University of Melbourne students to discuss the anti-democratic decision by the Clubs and Societies Committee (C&SC) to refuse to affiliate, for the third time in 18 months, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

Over the past week, IYSSE and SEP members have been distributing the IYSSE statement “University of Melbourne imposes third ban on IYSSE club,” via email, social media and leaflets at the campus, drawing students’ attention to the letters of protest that have been sent from across Australia and internationally to the C&SC, in response to the appeals published on the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The statement documents that in 2014 and April 2015, the C&SC rejected applications on the basis of spurious assertions that the IYSSE had “overlapping aims” with the club of the organisation Socialist Alternative. In August, the C&SC rejected a third application, asserting that it could not have a “good working relationship” with the IYSSE because its members had publicly exposed the committee’s false claims and anti-democratic actions in an open letter to students.

As the statement noted: “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.”

Students gave brief comments to the IYSSE on Friday and Saturday after being told about the situation.

Richard, a first-year Bachelor of Arts student, said the refusal to affiliate was “a straight up rejection of your democratic rights to maintain a relationship with this committee, while still at the same time expressing your views publicly. They’re saying you have to go through

this application, but that you can’t speak publicly about it, or critique it, and have to submit to whatever they say.”

Aravind, a structural engineering student, and said: “Having a grudge against a particular club, just because they’ve been open with the student body, blocks basic rights, the right to express oneself. The student union should be doing a proper review of your application.”

Shen, who studies civil engineering, said: “Everyone has the right to say the truth. For someone in power to be against your opinion, and to target you because of it, is not right. The clubs applications should be a transparent process, meaning that everyone should know what’s going on. It shouldn’t be kept secret.”

Allen, a first-year commerce student, said: “I don’t see a reason why they should reject any club, since they’re a student body. Their role is supposed to be to encourage student life. Even if the aims between your club and Socialist Alternative were overlapping, it wouldn’t matter. We should be able to have clubs competing with one another.”

On September 4, the Rupert Murdoch-owned *Australian* published extracts of the IYSSE statement in its “Cut and Paste” section, in an effort to legitimise the treatment of the IYSSE by the C&SC.

The “Cut and Paste” headline significantly referred to the IYSSE as “TROTS”—the term used by the political cynics who seek to dismiss the immense issues involved in the struggle against Stalinism by the Trotskyist movement. It introduced quotations from the IYSSE statement with the question “Judean Peoples Front?”—a reference to a skit in Monty Python’s 1979 movie *Life of Brian* that ignorantly sought to ridicule the differences between political organisations.

The *Australian* quoted the IYSSE statement to the effect that Socialist Alternative is “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 *Australian's* aim in trying to mock the IYSSE's discrediting of the C&CS's assertions of “overlapping aims” was to trivialise the fundamental questions of democratic rights raised by its actions. The C&CS's banning of the IYSSE is an attack on the right of *all* students to freedom of speech and freedom of association on campus—which includes the right of *all* students to affiliate the clubs of their choice and to freely use campus facilities to hold their meetings and activities.

Students should reject the claim that some should be denied this right because there is only “limited” funding for clubs. As DL, one of the 112 students who have expressed interest in establishing the IYSSE at University of Melbourne, wrote to the C&SC:

“While I acknowledge that the committee may wish to reduce the proliferation of clubs due to limited funding, there are more appropriate ways to combat such an issue rather than disallowing the formation of clubs. For example, raising awareness in the student body concerning lack of funding and subsequent pushes for increased funding may be appropriate.”

In other words, beginning from the rights of all students, there should be a fight for the necessary funding to support the activities of affiliated clubs and societies.

Another student who signed up for the IYSSE, PK, wrote to the committee:

“I am not a member of the political party, and I don't have a political agenda, but I was curious [about the IYSSE] and I wanted to learn more. It disturbs me that a recent decision by your Committee has stopped the affiliation of this student club. At university we are free to learn and to be educated, supported by those students chosen to represent our interest.”

Such basic democratic conceptions are alien to those who have accommodated themselves to the far-reaching assault on democratic and social rights taking place in Australia and around the world. Successive conservative and Labor governments here have steadily built-up the edifice of a police-state as they have committed to US-led military intrigues in the Middle East and Asia and sought to impose corporate demands for the slashing of public spending and wages and working conditions.

On the false grounds that there are not enough resources, welfare recipients are vilified and refugees subjected to xenophobic persecution, in order to divide and divert the population. The trade unions openly collaborate with the employers to force workers to accept

job destruction and attacks on conditions. Opponents of government policy are spied upon, demonised and persecuted by police agencies. Electoral laws have been imposed that are designed to block political challenges to the major establishment parties. Surrounding the entire anti-democratic atmosphere is the endless promotion of nationalism and militarist conceptions through the glorification of World War I and past Australian wars.

As for the social right of youth to a higher education, it is being steadily undermined by the transformation of the universities into corporatist business enterprises, and the plans to further slash public funding and drive up tuition fees. Far from centres of critical thought, the campuses are being turned into bastions of conformity with the agenda of the corporate and political establishment.

The IYSSE will meet at University of Melbourne tomorrow, Tuesday, September 8, at 1.00 p.m., in the Project Room 5, Level 1, ERC Library (Extended Hours Zone). We invite all students who want to discuss the affiliation refusal, the context in which it takes place and the IYSSE's campaign in defence of democratic rights.

We encourage IYSSE members and supporters, and WWS readers, in Australia and around the world, to continue to write letters demanding that the Clubs and Societies Committee of the UMSU retract its ban on the IYSSE and uphold, as a basic democratic principle, the right of students to freedom of expression and association.

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 also 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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