

IYSSE campaigns against war at universities in Australia and New Zealand

Our reporters
5 March 2016

Over the past two weeks, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the student and youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party, has waged an extensive campaign at university Orientation Week events, which mark the beginning of the academic year, across Australia and in New Zealand. Warning students of the advanced preparations for war in the Asia-Pacific region and internationally, IYSSE members and supporters raised the urgent necessity for building an anti-war movement based on a socialist and internationalist program.

The IYSSE manned stalls at the University of New South Wales, Western Sydney University, Macquarie University and Newcastle University in New South Wales, at the University of Melbourne in Victoria, and at Griffith University in Brisbane. In New Zealand, they campaigned at the University of Wellington. In the course of the campaign, scores of students signed up as new members of the IYSSE clubs.

Thousands of copies of the IYSSE statement, “A Socialist Program to fight war, austerity and dictatorship,” were distributed. The statement highlights the emergence of flashpoints for a new global conflict in every corner of the world, including the imperialist intervention in Syria and the preparations for a US confrontation with Russia in Europe. It emphasises the threat of war that lies behind the US “pivot to Asia,” which is an all-sided military, economic and diplomatic campaign aimed against China.

The statement warns, “Behind the backs of the population, the entire political establishment—Labor, the Liberals, the Greens and their pseudo-left adjuncts in groups such as Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance—has signed-up to Washington’s preparations for war against China, in defiance of the anti-war

sentiment among the vast majority of workers and young people.

“As students and youth, we are being placed on the frontlines of a new global conflict and have definite historic responsibilities in this struggle. To halt the relapse into imperialist barbarism we must be at the forefront of the fight to politically educate and mobilise the great social power of the working class to overthrow the source of war, the capitalist profit system itself.”

Students beginning their university studies this year, predominantly around 18 years-old, responded strongly to the IYSSE’s analysis and perspective. They belong to a generation that has grown up in the shadow of the eruption of continuous criminal US-led wars, all of which have included Australian participation. (See: “Australian university students denounce the drive to war and austerity”).

Many were young children when the US launched its invasion in Afghanistan in 2001, following the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US. For most of them, the war in Iraq, beginning in 2003, which led to an estimated one million deaths and destroyed an entire society, was a vague childhood memory. Since then, they have witnessed the ensuing humanitarian catastrophe throughout the Middle-East, and, under the fraudulent “war on terror, the militarisation of society, the brutal persecution of refugees in Australia and around the world, and the ongoing glorification of war by the official political and media establishment.

These experiences have left their mark. Among the vast majority of students there is palpable anti-war sentiment. But most of those who spoke to the IYSSE were not aware of Australia’s central involvement in the US preparations for war against China—a reflection of the conspiracy of silence being maintained by the

corporate media and every other political party, including the pseudo-left organisations such as Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative.

Students were shocked to learn that the Australian Defence White Paper, released on February 25, included proposals for military acquisitions totalling an estimated \$195 billion over the next decade. They contrasted the massive funding for the military, with their own experiences of the running-down of education, healthcare and other essential social services.

At the same time, there is a broader political radicalisation of young people underway. Numbers of students said they were closely following the US presidential elections, and backing Bernie Sanders, the Democratic candidate who falsely claims to be a socialist. At Macquarie University, a group of five students approached the IYSSE stall, and immediately said that they wanted to join. At the University of New South Wales, a student said that she had been looking for the socialist club on campus and immediately signed-up to the IYSSE.

Many students recognised that the IYSSE was alone in raising the question of war. While in the past, the Greens and the pseudo-left groups postured as anti-war, they now openly support US regime-change operations in the Middle East and align themselves with the US and Australian imperialism in their war drive against China. In New South Wales, the Greens' campaign centred on "sensible drug law reform."

Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative focused almost exclusively promoting identity politics, the preoccupation of affluent sections of the middle class directed specifically against the development of socialist consciousness in the working class. Socialist Alliance also campaigned on environmental questions, in line with their orientation to the Greens. Socialist Alternative promoted the "Let them stay" campaign, an initiative backed by Labor, the Greens and the trade unions aimed at diverting widespread hostility to the persecution of asylum seekers back behind the very organisations responsible for Australia's notorious mandatory off-shore refugee detention regime.

Following its O-week activities, the IYSSE has held introductory club meetings at each of the campuses, provoking lively discussions and questions on the causes of war; whether a nuclear conflict is likely; the

nature of the nation-state system and the significance of the 1917 Russian Revolution. Over the course of the semester, the IYSSE clubs will hold major meetings on the International Committee of the Fourth International's historic statement, "Socialism and the Fight Against War," as well as screenings of *Tsar to Lenin*, the unique documentary featuring archival footage of the October Revolution.



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