

Committee minutes reveal anti-democratic discrimination against IYSSE at University of Melbourne

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (Australia)
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On March 23, 2016, following a meeting of the Clubs and Societies Committee (C&SC) of the University of Melbourne Student Union, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) was informed that our application to form an affiliated student club had been rejected for the fourth time in two years.

The C & S Coordinator—an employee of University of Melbourne Student Union (UMSU)—verbally informed the IYSSE’s representative that the committee had denied the application on the grounds that it believed it could not have “good faith” relations with the IYSSE, the youth movement of the world Trotskyist movement and the Socialist Equality Party (SEP).

The minutes of the March 23 meeting, which were finally posted on the UMSU website in late April 2016, show that this was not the case. After considerable discussion and a number of prior motions, the Committee voted down a motion to grant the IYSSE initial approval by four votes to three. As we will shortly review in detail, the minutes reveal that the C&SC violated UMSU regulations, which it is obliged to uphold, in order to once again deny the IYSSE affiliation.

The Committee’s willingness to contravene the UMSU constitution, however, can only be fully appreciated in its wider context—as part of a series of attempts to use anti-democratic methods to prevent the IYSSE from establishing and developing its presence on university campuses across Australia.

From early 2014, the IYSSE launched a political campaign against the Australian government’s support for the US “pivot to Asia” and preparations for war on China, and its far-reaching assault on democratic rights under the false pretext of combatting “terrorism.” We warned students that the ruling elite was seeking to indoctrinate young people in militarism and nationalism, by launching a four-year “celebration” of the centenary of World War I. We explained that Canberra was spending more than any other country on commemorating that imperialist slaughter—especially the role of the Australian military in the British-led invasion of Gallipoli in Turkey in 1915, now known as “Anzac Day.”

Since then, IYSSE members have campaigned extensively on campuses, distributing thousands of statements and holding numerous meetings to discuss the socialist and internationalist program required to fight war and reaction.

University administrations and student unions have responded

with attempts to proscribe our activities. We have had to fight against instructions that political clubs are prohibited from inviting election candidates onto university grounds (University of Newcastle) and against demands to hand over our leaflets to be “checked” by university security before we can distribute them to students (University of Western Sydney). In 2015, University of Sydney management blatantly censored the SEP and IYSSE, by refusing to allow us to hire a venue to hold an April 26 public meeting opposing war and the Anzac Day glorification of militarism.

Arguably, the UMSU C&SC has waged the most determined vendetta against us. In April 2014 and April 2015, it rejected IYSSE applications on the false grounds that we had “overlapping aims” with the club of the pseudo-left organisation Socialist Alternative, with which the IYSSE has publicly stated political differences. In August 2015, the committee rejected a third application, on the grounds that it could not have a “good faith working relationship” with the IYSSE, because we had publicly exposed before students its earlier, factually incorrect and therefore anti-democratic decisions!

This year, on March 23, the C&SC rejected our fourth application.

The Committee consists of seven students elected from the executive members of affiliated clubs on campus: Gulsara Kaplun of the Secular Society, Kayley Cuzzubbo of Potter Heads, Jacinta Cooper of the Science Students’ Society, Julianna Rozek of Horticulture, Nicholas Hynes of the Arts Students’ Society, Alexander Tashevski-Beckwith of the Political Interests Society and Angela Keyte of the Physics Students’ Society. All were present at the meeting, along with Coordinator Sanders and Ryan Davey and Yasmine Luu, the two C&SC “office bearers.”

Kaplun, Davey and Luu were part of the seven-member 2015 committee that twice rejected IYSSE applications.

The minutes record that the IYSSE’s representative attended the meeting. They state that, during this time, “Discussion of good faith and intimidation were considered” and that the C&SC acknowledged that the IYSSE had “aims directly opposed the [sic] Socialist Alternative.”

After the IYSSE representative left, a motion was moved by Alexander Tashevski-Beckwith to grant the IYSSE initial approval and seconded by Angela Keyte. It was defeated two to four, with

one abstention.

Gulsara Kaplun—also a member of the Student Council, UMSU’s “paramount governing body”—then moved a motion to reject the IYSSE’s application “on the ground that the C&S staff or Committee cannot transact the affiliation with the Contacts on a good faith basis.” Only three of the seven Committee members voted in favour. One voted against and three abstained. In other words, a majority of the seven-member Committee did not support the rejection of the IYSSE’s application on the grounds of an absence of “good faith.”

In response to the clear divisions in the Committee, C & S officer bearer Ryan Davey moved to “strike” both motions—meaning neither would have standing. This extraordinary motion was “carried without dissent.”

Nicholas Hynes then moved to grant the IYSSE initial approval, seconded by Angela Keyte. This time, three committee members voted in favour, while four voted against. The motion was declared “Lost” and no other motion concerning the IYSSE was moved.

The significance of this fact is that while the C&SC refused to approve the IYSSE’s application, no motion was either moved or passed to reject the IYSSE’s affiliation *and the Committee gave no grounds for such a rejection*. Yet, UMSU Clubs and Societies Regulations, Section 4, “Affiliations,” is explicit on this issue. The regulations state: “*If denied, advised with reasons, resubmission invited for next affiliation period*” [emphasis added]. Section 4.1.3 proceeds to set out the 14 sweeping grounds on which an application can be rejected.

Thus, the minutes demonstrate that the IYSSE was subjected to an unconstitutional travesty. No motion was passed citing grounds to deny the application and the IYSSE has not been “invited” to resubmit. The only conclusion that can be reasonably drawn is that the vote against approval by the four-member majority of the seven-member C&SC was motivated by unstated political prejudices—in other words, discrimination, which is prohibited in both the UMSU constitution and the Clubs and Societies Regulations.

Davey and Luu, the C&S officer bearers who are “bound at all times by UMSU Policy and Regulations in the exercise of their duties,” presided over this violation of the rights of the more than 50 students who had expressed interest in establishing an IYSSE club.

Clearly, it was not the IYSSE that displayed a lack of “good faith.”

Given the constitutional issues and potential legal implications involved, it is noteworthy that the University of Melbourne Student Council, to whom the C&SC is accountable, has taken no action. And this under conditions where the C&SC has now established a precedent for rejecting the affiliation of any student clubs without providing a reason.

The crucial political issue is how University of Melbourne students respond to this assault on democratic rights and the conclusions that students everywhere draw from the IYSSE’s experiences.

The actions of the UMSU C&SC reflect broader social processes and tendencies. Over a period of decades, the universities have been transformed from centres of free-ranging intellectual debate

and inquiry, into stultifying, corporatised institutions, where management views anything deemed “controversial”—such as the IYSSE—with suspicion and as a potential threat to business sponsorships and lucrative international student enrolments. The student unions have degenerated into conformist and complacent apparatuses. The funds at their disposal are granted to them by university administrations from the amount raised by the “Student Services Amenities Fee,” which all students are required to pay.

Student politics is dominated by a narrow layer, with ties generally to the pro-capitalist Labor, Liberals, and Greens, and to the pseudo-left groupings, such as Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance. It is well known that a student union position often becomes the stepping-stone to a lucrative career. The vast majority of students, however—up to 95 percent on some campuses—are so alienated from student politics and the unions that they don’t even vote in student elections.

At the same time, increasing numbers of students are becoming politicised by the endless worldwide cycle of military violence, unprecedented levels of social inequality, savage cuts to tertiary education and ever more naked police-state measures. There is growing interest in socialist policies and recognition of the need for an alternative political movement. That is why the IYSSE, despite being proscribed, has been able on four occasions since 2014, to submit to the C&SC the names of dozens of students who want a University of Melbourne IYSSE club.

Important layers of students are responding to the IYSSE’s insistence that oppositional sentiment towards war, austerity and attacks on democratic rights can only go forward through a political break with the establishment parties and, above all, through an understanding of the irreconcilable political differences that exist between a genuine socialist perspective, represented by the IYSSE, and the pro-imperialist and identity-based politics of the pseudo-left.

If students want rights on campus—including the right to hear a genuine socialist alternative—they will have to take a political stand. We appeal to students everywhere to come to the defence of democratic principles, oppose discrimination against the IYSSE and support our fight to have the C&SC decision overturned.

Students can contact us at the IYSSE/SEP webpage or through the IYSSE-Australia Facebook page.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact