

Australian IYSSE holds Inaugural General Meeting at the University of Melbourne

The IYSSE (Australia)
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) held a highly successful Inaugural General Meeting (IGM) at the University of Melbourne (U of M) on October 13, attended by 45 students. The meeting was the culmination of a two-and-a-half-year fight by the IYSSE to establish a student club at the university.

Beginning in Semester One, 2014, the Clubs and Societies Committee (C&SC) of the Student Union rejected four applications by the IYSSE to establish a club. On each occasion, the IYSSE had met all the stipulated requirements. The Committee nevertheless advanced a series of bureaucratic grounds to prevent the IYSSE from holding an IGM and affiliating.

The IYSSE refused to bow to this attack on its democratic rights and answered, in statements circulated to students, each of the C&SC's arguments. On the basis of this ongoing clarification of the issues involved, the IYSSE won growing support among students. In August this year, the C&SC approved the IYSSE's fifth application and allowed the club to hold its IGM, the final stage in the affiliation process.

In the lead up to the meeting, the IYSSE waged a broad campaign among U of M students centring on exposing the central role of Australian imperialism in the US-led preparations for war against China and Russia and the mounting dangers of a nuclear world war. Its campaign highlighted the anti-Chinese chauvinism appearing in the media and characterised the hysteria over Chinese "agents of influence" in Australia as war propaganda.

IYSSE members explained to many hundreds of students that the only alternative to the catastrophe being prepared was the fight being waged by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world Trotskyist movement, to develop an international anti-war movement of the working class, students and youth on the basis of a socialist and internationalist perspective.

The number of club members who attended was more than double the 20 required by the C&SC's regulations. International students from China, the Indian subcontinent and South East Asia were among those who joined the club

out of their alarm at the prospect of war, opposition to the chauvinist campaign in the media and agreement with the perspective of unifying the international working class.

The support won by the IYSSE expressed the developing political radicalisation among young people, in Australia and around the world, and a deep-going concern, among the most politically thoughtful, about the eruption of militarism, the assault on the social and democratic rights of the working class and the associated turn to authoritarian forms of rule.

Will Fulgenzi, a leading member of the IYSSE, opened the meeting by welcoming the club's new members. "By attending this meeting, you have taken a stand in defence of democratic rights, and against militarism and the drive to war. You have ensured that a genuine socialist, anti-war organisation will be able to hold meetings and events on this campus. This is of real objective significance." He explained that the IYSSE, as the youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the ICFI, was the only political tendency on university campuses raising the immense dangers of war.

The club's meeting was overseen and chaired by C&SC officer Ryan Davey. When Davey moved the various motions calling for the adoption of the club's constitution and statement of aims, they were endorsed unanimously, without dissent. The club's aims outline its orientation to the working class, the need for young people to learn the lessons of the revolutionary struggles of the 20th century and make clear the club's opposition to all forms of pseudo-left and identity politics. The IYSSE membership elected its club executive of six office-bearers, as required under the C&SC regulations.

Following the formal proceedings, James Cogan, national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), gave a presentation on the dangers of imperialist war against China and Russia. Cogan pointed to the warning issued by the Union of Concerned Scientists in May that the US and China were "a few poor decisions away from starting a war that could escalate rapidly and end in a nuclear exchange." He

noted that the US and Australian governments were actively preparing for such a scenario.

Placing the danger of world war in the context of the eruption of US militarism over the past 25 years, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Cogan warned: “US imperialism, wracked by a historic economic and social crisis, is now prepared to gamble the fate of humanity on its ability to use military threats to compel the Russian and Chinese regimes to accept the status of semi-colony, give US banks and corporations full access to their markets and resources, and kowtow to American demands in every part of the globe.”

Cogan urged students to study the February 18, 2016 statement of the ICFI, *Socialism and the Fight Against War*, which outlines the fundamental principles upon which an international anti-war movement must be built. He stressed that the only answer to war was revolution: the mobilisation of the international working class to end capitalism and its nation-state divisions and establish world socialism.

The Question and Answer session that followed Cogan’s report was dominated by heated opposition to the perspectives of the IYSSE from the fake-left organisation Socialist Alternative, which has postured, for years, as the only “Marxist” club on campus. Significantly, the C&S Committee rejected the IYSSE’s affiliation applications in both 2014 and 2015 on the grounds that it had “overlapping aims” with Socialist Alternative. At no point, throughout this two-year period, did Socialist Alternative issue any principled statement to the C&SC making clear that it had fundamentally opposed aims to those of the IYSSE.

A leading staff member of Socialist Alternative, Louise O’Shea, attended the IGM with a few students who belong to the organisation’s club. O’Shea attacked the IYSSE and the ICFI for talking only about the “need for socialist revolution,” but not involving itself in various protest campaigns led by pro-capitalist forces, such as the Greens. She specifically asserted that “socialists should be supporting Black Lives Matter [BLM]” in the US.

Cogan answered by clarifying the class nature of both the BLM leadership and Socialist Alternative. He cited the recent decision of the Ford Foundation, an institution with intimate ties to the US military-intelligence apparatus, to provide a \$100 million grant to organisations associated with BLM. He drew attention to the fact that hundreds of whites, Hispanics, Asians and Native Americans, as well as blacks, are being killed by police each year, and that the victims are overwhelmingly poor and working class. Cogan explained that the corporate funding for BLM constituted an acknowledgement that its aims—above all, to cover-up the fact that class, not race, is the basis of oppression—were entirely compatible with those of the American state and

Wall Street.

Cogan stressed that behind all variants of identity politics—which elevates issues such as race, gender or sexual orientation over social class—are the interests of affluent layers of the upper middle class. While the conditions of the working class of all backgrounds are plummeting and social inequality has reached unprecedented levels, identity politics are being used to advance the careers and financial positions of a privileged minority.

Socialist Alternative responded to this Marxist critique of the identity politics that it promotes with unconcealed hostility. For the remainder of the meeting, its members repeatedly interjected and sought to prevent further discussion on the IYSSE’s analysis and perspective.

In her most revealing statements, Socialist Alternative’s Louise O’Shea accused the IYSSE of being “racist” and “sexist” because of its class opposition to identity politics and declared that the IYSSE should be “driven from the campus.”

The statements from Socialist Alternative are highly significant. First, they shed light on some of the political conceptions that lay behind the repeated rejection of IYSSE affiliation applications. For the first time, one of the most active political groups on the University of Melbourne campus, with representation on the Student Council, has publicly declared that the IYSSE should not be allowed on campus because it fights for Marxism and the political independence of the working class, against every pro-capitalist party and perspective.

Second, the positions of Socialist Alternative make clear that at the very centre of the IYSSE’s struggle to develop an internationalist and socialist anti-war movement on the campuses and among youth is its continuous political differentiation from the pro-capitalist identity politics of the various pseudo-left formations, which function as apologists for Labor, the Greens and the entire political establishment.

Over coming weeks, the University of Melbourne IYSSE will be holding regular meetings to discuss and develop its Marxist analysis of identity politics, and further clarify its many new members on the political role of the pseudo-left.



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