Australia: IYSSE establishes student club at the University of Melbourne

Our reporters
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) has successfully established a student club at the University of Melbourne. At a meeting on Monday, the Clubs and Societies Committee (C&SC) of the university's student union formally approved the final stage of the IYSSE's application and informed club executives that the IYSSE was now affiliated.

The founding of an IYSSE club—based on the revolutionary socialist and internationalist program of the world Trotskyist movement—at one of the country's oldest and most prestigious universities—is of considerable significance. It underscores the desire of growing numbers of students to take up a political fight against the program of war, austerity, attacks on education, and the erosion of democratic rights being implemented by the entire official political establishment, including Labor, the Liberals and the Greens.

The attraction of young people to the IYSSE's program, including its call for students to turn to the working class and take up a study of Trotskyism, i.e., classical Marxism, is an indication of mounting opposition to what has passed for "left" politics on campus, based on the promotion of identity politics by organisations that speak for a privileged layer of the upper middle-class.

Many of those who joined and fought for the establishment of the IYSSE club expressed their hostility to the attempts by this milieu to divide the working class along the lines of gender, race and sexual orientation, and to suppress the fundamental class questions, including the mounting threat of world war. The IYSSE's opposition to the nostrums of post-modernism—that there is no "objective truth" or law-governed historical process—appealed to numbers of students who want to understand the global economic and political crisis in its objective historical context.

The IYSSE's affiliation was the product of a political struggle spanning more than two-and-a-half years. Its initial application, in the first semester of 2014, was rejected by the C&SC on the grounds that it had "overlapping aims" with the club of the pseudo-left and anti-Trotskyist organisation, Socialist Alternative (SAlt).

A second application in the first semester of 2015 was rejected on the same grounds and supporters of the IYSSE were told that they should join Socialist Alternative. After the IYSSE issued a detailed public response, outlining the unbridgeable gulf between its socialist and internationalist program and SAlt's politics, the C&SC shifted to a new pretext. It rejected the IYSSE's third application in the second semester of 2015 on the basis that the committee could not have a "good faith working relationship" with the IYSSE because the latter had issued an open letter to the student body opposing the C&SC's previous decision.

This year, the IYSSE stepped up its campaign for the right to affiliate and was able to expose the anti-democratic conceptions underlying the C&SC's ongoing proscription. This culminated in Semester One of 2016, when the IYSSE demonstrated that the C&SC had violated its own constitution by refusing the IYSSE's fourth affiliation application without citing any of the required grounds for rejecting it.

As part of its fifth affiliation campaign, in Semester Two, the IYSSE collected more than 80 expressions of interest from students signalling their support for the formation of a club. Faced with this growing student support, the C&SC allowed it to proceed with its affiliation and hold an Inaugural General Meeting (IGM).

In the weeks prior to the IGM, IYSSE members

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distributed thousands of leaflets and held hundreds of discussions with students on the necessity to build an international anti-war movement based on a socialist program to halt the mounting threat of a global conflict.

IYSSE campaigners explained that Labor, the Liberals and the Greens had placed Australia on the frontlines of US preparations for war against China. They warned that this would inevitably be accompanied by a stepped-up assault on democratic rights and the ever-greater promotion of nationalism and xenophobia, including denunciations of "Chinese influence" in Australian society by pro-US politicians and media commentators (see: "Australia: Opponents of war with China labelled "rats, flies, mosquitoes and sparrows"). They also raised the fundamental historical questions, including the contemporary significance of the Russian Revolution amid another breakdown of world capitalism, and of the struggle waged by Leon Trotsky against its betrayal by the Stalinist bureaucracy.

In an indication of the response among students, the IGM was attended by 46 students, including 38 members of the IYSSE. Following the election of the club's executive and the ratification of its constitution, Socialist Equality Party national secretary, James Cogan, delivered a detailed presentation outlining the US-led plans for war against China and Russia.

In the course of the ensuing discussion, members of the Socialist Alternative club denounced the IYSSE for opposing the upper middle-class interests underlying identity politics and movements such as Black Lives Matter, which had just received a $100 million grant from the Ford Foundation, an institution with the closest ties to the US state and the corporate and financial elite. The clear chasm between the class orientation and political perspective of the IYSSE and Socialist Alternative demonstrated to all those present the false character of the C&SC's earlier claims that the two organisations had "overlapping aims."

In the aftermath of the IGM, the IYSSE submitted its membership list of 67 students.

A leading member of the club spoke to the WSWS on the significance of the campaign: "This was a product of the protracted struggle that we waged against the censorship of our club. It was a principled campaign based on the demarcation of our movement from the pseudo-left tendencies on campus and the fight against the danger of war. We opposed the claim from the C&SC that we should form an unprincipled alliance with the pseudo-left clubs.

"We insisted on the democratic right of all students to form the club of their choice and it was on that basis that we won a lot of support. The IYSSE is the only anti-war club on campus, it's the only way that the growing anti-war sentiment of students can find expression."

In 2017, the University of Melbourne IYSSE club will wage an offensive for Trotskyism, in opposition to the pseudo-left politics that have dominated on campus. Like its counterparts at other universities and colleges throughout Australia and internationally, it will raise the necessity for students to turn to the working class on the basis of the fight for a socialist program. In the centenary year of the Russian Revolution, the IYSSE will hold major lectures and events outlining the critical historical experiences of the working class in the 20th century—above all, the 1917 October Revolution— and the lessons that must be drawn for the enormous social struggles that will erupt in the period directly ahead. Students can contact the IYSSE, and join the club here.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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