

ISO endorses IYSSE application for club status at New York University

Isaac Finn
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The International Socialist Organization has posted a statement on its Facebook page, stating that it now supports the International Youth and Students for Social Equality's application for club status at New York University. The endorsement was issued on February 13, three days after the publication of an IYSSE Open Letter, which criticized the ISO's silence on the NYU Student Activities Board (SAB) refusal to grant the club status to the IYSSE. The SAB justified its November decision with the claim that the IYSSE was too similar to the ISO, which has club status at the university.

In its Facebook statement, the ISO claims that it had not been aware of the IYSSE's efforts to achieve club status, and that it had not previously refused to support its efforts to reverse the action of the SAB. It also attacks the IYSSE as "sectarian."

We print below the reply of Isaac Finn, the IYSSE representative at NYU, to the ISO's Facebook statement. The ISO's statement is reprinted below Finn's reply.

To the International Socialist Organization,

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality welcomes the belated decision of the International Socialist Organization to end its long silence and support the democratic right of students at NYU to form an IYSSE club.

It is, however, regrettable that the ISO's statement includes an absurd and obviously false explanation of the long delay in issuing this declaration. Referring to the IYSSE's call for support, the ISO claims that it was "unaware of said request until this notice was published denouncing us for not responding to it."

In fact, the IYSSE at NYU sent an email to the president of the ISO club at NYU, Sean Larson, on December 6, 2016. The email included the text of the open letter sent to the NYU SAB on November 29—titled "Reverse the rejection of club status for the International Youth and Students for Social Equality"—along with a call for the ISO and other student clubs to support the IYSSE in its "fight for free speech and to democratize the club application process" at

NYU. Neither Mr. Larson nor any other representative of the ISO replied to this email.

IYSSE members encountered the vice president of the club, Paul Heideman, and other ISO members on several occasions during their petition campaign to obtain club status and reverse the SAB's decision. Mr. Heideman refused their requests that he sign the petition.

In any event, the IYSSE should not even have had to ask the ISO to take a position on the matter. Your organization was well aware of the SAB's refusal to recognize the IYSSE as a club. Our campaign for club status has been widely publicized on the NYU campus. The university newspaper, *The Washington Square News*, has published several articles and an opinion piece on this issue. The IYSSE has distributed thousands of leaflets on campus. It has campaigned extensively both for its own right to form a club and against the anti-democratic club policy at NYU. The campaign won the support of hundreds of students and many members of the NYU faculty, including Bertell Ollman, the prominent radical professor who has taught at NYU for decades.

The real reason for your initial refusal to support club status for the IYSSE is revealed in the text of your belated and grudging endorsement of our democratic rights. Most of your statement is devoted to denouncing the IYSSE as "sectarian."

Your letter asserts that the IYSSE and its parent organization, the Socialist Equality Party, spend "an entirely unhealthy amount of time denouncing other organizations on the left." Attempting to make the IYSSE and SEP appear ridiculous, you write:

"A search of their website, wsws.org, for example, for the term "pseudo-left" (their preferred designation for all groups outside of their own sect), reveals, as of February 13th, 25,423 articles using that term (no doubt by the time this response finds readership, the number will have grown)."

Your brilliant statistician arrived at this absurd number by failing to recognize that a WSWs site search of the term "pseudo-left" includes in its calculation all articles in which

either or both of the words (“pseudo” and/or “left”) appears. Nor did it occur to your statistician that the search engine does not distinguish between the use of the word “left” as a noun (“The left”), an adjective (“The left politician”) or a verb (“He left the room”).

Using the same careless approach to his or her calculations, the ISO statistician claims to have discovered no less than 13,887 articles in which the term “white chauvinism” appears in the WWS. As anyone familiar with the WWS would immediately know, the term “white chauvinism” rarely appears on our web site because we do not employ the categories of race-obsessed identity politics.

But you arrive at the astronomical number of 13,887 because the search engine is including every use of the word “white”—in whatever context (i.e., “the black and white film” or “The White House”)—on our web site.

On the basis of your wild distortion of the content of the *World Socialist Web Site*, you denounce our “aggressive sectarianism,” writing: “For the SEP, fighting the rottenness of capitalist society takes a back seat to the task of fighting the rest of the left.”

What you mean by “sectarianism” is our defense of Marxist principles and opposition to the sort of political opportunism practiced by the countless middle-class organizations—the ISO included—which is oriented to and collaborates with the capitalist class and its political agents. By your standards, every revolutionary socialist going back to Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky and Luxemburg would be branded as “sectarian.” A substantial portion of the writings of all the great Marxists was devoted to an exposure of opportunist tendencies within the socialist movement.

Notwithstanding our irreconcilable political differences, we welcome your acknowledgement that NYU “should not be in the business of deciding which groups are too politically similar to be allowed club status.” If nothing else, the content of your letter definitively refutes the notion that the IYSSE is too similar to the ISO to justify an independent club at New York University.

Yours sincerely,

Isaac Finn

Response from the ISO to the IYSSE’s open letter, February 13, 2017

On Friday, February 10th, the organization International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) published an open letter to the NYU International Socialist Organization, accusing us, among other things, of “solidarizing [ourselves] with the NYU administration and its allies on Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus” and engaging in “political censorship” for “refusing to support the IYSSE’s democratic right to free

speech.”

These accusations caught our organization quite unawares, most centrally because we had made no such refusal. The IYSSE letter states that our club has been emailed with a request for support. We received no such email at the account we use for club business, nyusocialist@gmail.com, and were unaware of said request until this notice was published denouncing us for not responding to it. Similarly, the article accuses our Vice President, Paul Heideman, of refusing to sign an IYSSE petition on Wednesday, February 1st. Once more, this accusation is false, as Paul was, to his knowledge, not even asked by the IYSSE to sign a petition.

This is, unfortunately, all too typical conduct from the IYSSE and its parent organization, the SEP, both of which spend what seems an entirely unhealthy amount of time denouncing other organizations on the left. A search of their website, wsws.org, for example, for the term “pseudo-left” (their preferred designation for all groups outside of their own sect), reveals, as of February 13th, 25,423 articles using that term (no doubt by the time this response finds readership, the number will have grown). A search for the term “white chauvinism,” (their preferred designation for racism) finds only half as many articles, 13,887. “Male chauvinism” rates even lower, turning up a measly 2,859 articles. For the SEP, fighting the rottenness of capitalist society takes a back seat to the task of fighting the rest of the left.

Nonetheless, despite their aggressive sectarianism towards all left organizations besides themselves, and despite their abuses of the truth in their open letter to our organization, we do, of course, support their right to have a club at NYU. It is a basic democratic principle that the university administration should not get to police student organization. If students at NYU wish to organize themselves into a branch of the IYSSE, it should be their right to do so.

In particular, we would like to register our opposition to the SAB’s policy on similar student groups. The university should not be in the business of deciding which groups are too politically similar to be allowed club status. Students themselves should decide when they belong in the same group, and when they do not. This is a policy that is often weaponized against the left at universities across the country, and we strongly feel that it is an inappropriate basis for denying club status.

We will be passing this sentiment along to the SAB.



To contact the WWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact