

IYSSE blocked from leafleting at Australia's Macquarie University

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On June 29, members of the Macquarie University International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) club were confronted by the university's security service while campaigning among students and academics over the need for a unified struggle against ongoing funding cuts.

This is an attack on the basic democratic rights of students and staff, as well as the IYSSE club, to discuss and debate the political questions raised by the deteriorating conditions throughout Australia's public universities.

Two club members and a supporter had been distributing material in the Geology/Law/Indigenous Studies building. They were discussing with staff and students two important resolutions that IYSSE and Socialist Equality Party members successfully moved at a June 19 meeting of National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members on campus, calling for such a unified fight.

Two security personnel told the IYSSE members they had received a complaint from a concerned academic, and demanded the identification of the IYSSE members. They insisted that university regulations stipulated that students must not distribute leaflets without prior authorisation.

The security guards refused to name the alleged complainant, while saying the security office would provide the person's identity. They also displayed evident confusion about the supposed regulations they were enforcing. When asked to clarify who was to grant such approval, they gave three different answers.

First, the guards said the IYSSE members must contact the dean of Macquarie Law School, inside whose area they were campaigning. Then the officers said students had to be authorised by the department head of the courses they were studying. Finally, the IYSSE members were told they had to contact Gina Lewis, the university's assets manager.

The IYSSE club members were circulating *World Socialist Web Site* articles that reported the outcome of the June 19 NTEU meeting, and the events leading up to it, because most students and staff members have been kept in the dark by the union about the critical resolutions passed by the

meeting.

The first resolution, adopted by 13 votes for and 9 against, with 14 abstentions, said the meeting: "Opposes the splitting up of university employees, via individual EAs [enterprise agreements], and calls for a unified national struggle against the Liberal-National government's latest multi-billion-dollar cuts, and the overturn of all previous cuts imposed by both Labor and Coalition governments."

The second resolution, passed almost unanimously, with 35 for, 1 against and no abstentions, said the meeting: "Demands that billions of dollars be poured into education at all levels, from pre-school to tertiary, to guarantee the social right of all young people to a free, first-class education and the social right all staff to decent, well-paid and permanent positions."

These resolutions offered a perspective for staff and students across the country to collectively fight the assault on public education, after decades in which the NTEU and other trade unions have effectively enforced intensifying budget cuts, erosion of conditions and the growing transformation of universities into corporate entities.

The votes for the resolutions reflected rising opposition among staff members to this record, and the latest enterprise agreement proposals being pushed by the NTEU, which will go even further in splitting tertiary education workers, university-by-university, and imposing the demands of each institution's management.

The articles being circulated by the IYSSE members also outlined the intensive collaboration being undertaken by the NTEU and Macquarie management on the university's next three-year enterprise agreement.

The agreement proposes a 2 percent annual pay rise—well below real cost of living increases—and a plan to permit the management to impose 80 percent teaching loads on up to a quarter of the academics, as opposed to the traditional 40 percent teaching, 40 percent research and 20 percent administration load.

This scheme will create a two-tier workforce, with "teaching-only" academics bearing the brunt of the extra

work demanded by ever-increasing class sizes. Despite encountering significant opposition from its members at previous meetings, the union is continuing to push educators to accept the plan.

The Macquarie IYSSE has been a registered student club at the university since 2010. It has campaigned frequently on campus, including in front of the library, student centre and inside departmental buildings. It has not previously been stopped from distributing its material on the grounds that the material must be approved in advance.

Numerous attempts have been made since the incident to clarify the regulation that the IYSSE supposedly violated. However, no clarification has been given. The Macquarie IYSSE club president wrote to Lewis, the assets manager, asking her to provide the club with the details of the regulation.

The letter stated: “We object to the actions of your staff in preventing the IYSSE from carrying out the legitimate activity of an affiliated student club. To carry out such punitive action because of a complaint by one person is not only extraordinary, but anti-democratic. Surely, it cannot be the case that one person is to determine the political activity of every club on campus ...

“Why does the security department of Macquarie University respond with such swift retaliation following the receipt of this complaint and in so doing, trample on the democratic rights not just of the IYSSE members, but of all clubs and students on campus? We request the identity of the complainant, as your staff advised would be the case.

“Universities are institutions where the free flow of information, discourse and discussion should be defended and promoted, not suppressed because of disagreements by individuals or even groups of people. Please confirm that no future action of this nature will be carried out against the IYSSE or any other club at Macquarie University.”

In her reply, Lewis failed to provide the requested details. Instead, she simply asserted that the university had a “no flyers or posters policy” unless they were approved in advance. She justified the actions of the security officers on the spurious basis that they were keeping the campus “a safe space for all to enjoy,” even though no safety issue was involved whatsoever.

The IYSSE then contacted the main security office, which also failed to identify any complainant, regulation or rule.

If such regulations exist, and none has ever been cited, they represent an attack on the democratic rights of students and staff to freely express their opinions on campus. The university is insisting on the right to censor the information that student clubs distribute.

Furthermore, the contradictory instructions given of whom to contact and the inability of university officials to provide

the details of any regulation display a disturbing and arbitrary approach to democratic rights on campus.

These events point to the fears of management and the NTEU that years of cuts to university funding and staff conditions have produced seething discontent. The cuts to university funding have included \$3 billion implemented in 2012-13 by the Greens-backed Labor minority government and \$2.2 billion imposed late last year by the current Liberal-National Coalition government.

There is a growing upsurge of the international working class in response to worsening inequality and attacks on social rights, including education. This year has seen significant protests and strikes, with educational staff and students often in the forefront. There have been stoppages by schoolteachers across the southern United States, lecturers in Britain and non-academic university workers in Sri Lanka.

In response, governments have turned increasingly to authoritarian methods, accompanied by mass spying, the brutal treatment of refugees and political censorship of the Internet by Google and other social media giants. In Australia, governments have imposed sweeping “counter terrorism” laws, boosting police and surveillance powers, and pushed through “foreign interference” legislation that strips away civil liberties.

The IYSSE condemns the actions of the Macquarie University management and security services. Their actions constitute an assault on fundamental democratic rights to organise, disseminate information and freely debate political perspectives. We call on all staff and students at Macquarie and across the country to oppose this attack.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact