

# IYSSE (Australia) holds meeting on coronavirus crisis and resurgence of working-class struggle

**Our reporters**  
**19 August 2021**

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Australia held a successful online meeting last Saturday, reviewing the escalating global coronavirus catastrophe, the resurgence of the class struggle and the political issues posed before young people amid an unprecedented breakdown of the world capitalist system.

The reports provoked a lively discussion among the more than one hundred participants, who included university students from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Newcastle, TAFE pupils, academics and tertiary staff, school teachers and other workers. Attendees also took part from New Zealand and Sri Lanka, while a student from Indonesia tuned in and posed a question on the pandemic.

The meeting, streamed live on Zoom, has now been uploaded to YouTube and can be watched in full below.

Chairing the meeting, Elle Chapman, a leading member of the IYSSE in Sydney, explained that it was taking place under circumstances that were “extraordinary” and “history-making.”

Young people, along with the working class, were on the frontlines of the homicidal policies of capitalist governments around the world, which centred on subordinating public health to private profit amid a deadly pandemic. This was being accompanied by an offensive against social conditions, with youth unemployment and poverty sharply rising, and an escalating drive to war.

Evrin Yazgin, the president of the IYSSE club at the University of Melbourne, reviewed in detail the medical impact of the pandemic on children and young people. Contrary to the claims of governments and the corporate media that young people were posed with little risk by the virus, close to 100,000 children were testing positive each week in the US, and thousands had died around the world. The dangers were also revealed in the current Australian outbreak, where more than half of infections were among children, teenagers and young adults.

Yazgin explained that under these conditions, there was widespread opposition to a drive by governments to fully reopen schools, as part of a broader big business campaign to force workers back on the job. The plan to resume face-to-face

teaching for Year 12 students in Sydney, amid a major spread of the Delta variant, had been met by a petition campaign that won the support of thousands of pupils.

The speaker cited one of the petitions, which demonstrated that the students were taking a stand, not only for themselves but for the working class more broadly. It stated: “[T]he NSW government is not only endangering us, but our families too, as many of us have grandparents, younger siblings, and immunocompromised family members living at home. What’s more, if teachers become infected, our learning will be compromised even further. They do not deserve to be called upon to risk their wellbeing during this crisis.”

There was also widespread hostility among university students to a stepped-up assault on the tertiary sector, which has claimed over 90,000 jobs since the pandemic began. Students at a number of universities had also issued petitions, opposing the sacking of academics and restructuring involving the gutting of courses and entire departments.

Yazgin said that these emerging struggles confronted many obstacles that needed to be politically dealt with. This included pseudo-left organisations, such as Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance, whose “role is to divert the leftward movement of young people behind parties of big business and the thoroughly corporatised and anti-worker trade unions on the basis of phony left-populist rhetoric.” He concluded with an exposure of the nostrums of identity politics and postmodernism, explaining that both were directed against Marxism and its fight to build a leadership in the working class, the only revolutionary force in society.

Cheryl Crisp, the national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party and a decades-long leader of the Trotskyist movement, delivered the main report.

Reviewing the mass deaths and infections of the past 18 months, Crisp explained: “What is becoming increasingly evident to billions of people globally is that capitalism is unable and unwilling to protect the lives of the population. Not because the knowledge of how to deal with the pandemic does not exist but because the response of capitalism and their government representatives is that profits, production and

wealth must be prioritised to lives.”

Australia was no exception. The corporate and financial elite, along with the state and federal governments, Labor and Liberal alike, were engaged in a frenzied campaign for the lifting of safety restrictions, an end to lockdowns for all time and for working people to be forced to “live with the virus.”

The current outbreak was the direct product of the homicidal policies of the New South Wales Liberal-National government, which, with the full support of the state Labor opposition, had rejected the necessary lockdown measures required to curb transmission. The crisis was being used by the authorities, to implement a “roadmap” to reopening the economy, adopted by the national cabinet, composed of all the state and territory administrations and the federal government.

In working-class areas of Sydney, where the virus was spreading most rapidly, residents were being subjected to a major police-military deployment rejecting any bolstering of the chronically-underfunded healthcare system. Instead, as is the case internationally, the crisis was being used to accelerate an onslaught on jobs, wages and conditions.

Crisp explained that the criminal response of governments to the pandemic was an international phenomenon. The crisis was a “trigger event,” analogous to World War I, in that it was accelerating all of the underlying contradictions of capitalism, and ushering in a new period of wars and mass social upheavals.

The speaker outlined the growing resistance of the working class internationally, including the protracted strike by Volvo workers in the US state of Virginia. They had established a rank-and-file committee to resist a combined offensive on the rights and conditions by the transnational auto manufacturer and the United Auto Workers union.

This approach is posed everywhere, Crisp said, and explained that the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement, had called for an International Alliance of Workers Rank-and-File Committees, to coordinate the emerging struggles of workers the world over.

She concluded by raising the necessity for students and youth to take up the fight for a socialist and internationalist perspective in the working class. “You have attended this meeting because you are looking for an alternative, because you want answers to these great historical questions of the day. The IYSSE and the Socialist Equality Party, the Trotskyist movement, will provide you with those answers and analysis. We will train you as conscious revolutionaries in the necessary and inevitable class struggles and upsurge which is beginning. We will educate you in the history of the class struggle and most importantly the lessons which must be drawn and finally we will provide you with the organisation which must be built to lead these struggles.”

The reports provoked a lively discussion. Questions were raised about the motives underlying the school reopening campaign; the attitude of the socialist movement towards

vaccination, and the meaning of ruling class calls for the population to “live with the virus.” One student asked where he could read more about the history and program of the Trotskyist movement. Crisp and Yazgin encouraged all those in attendance to read the *World Socialist Web Site* and directed the questioner to Mehring Books, the SEP’s publishing house.

Attendees expressed their appreciation for the reports and discussion. A 21-year-old politics student said: “The IYSSE meeting highlighted the deadly policies of the ruling class. Despite the high number of deaths and infections globally, the policy of reopening schools is being followed around the world and is having disastrous results in every country.

“The meeting correctly highlighted how schools are being used as childcare facilities to ensure that parents can be forced into workplaces to ensure the continued profits of businesses. This drive back to work campaign is coupled with the rising cost of living in most countries, which means that ordinary working people cannot even afford basic commodities.

“However, there is resistance worldwide to the ruling class policies by the working class. This resistance is evident in the demonstrations of the Volvo workers. It is evident in the protests of thousands of students worldwide who called for the closing of schools and the cancellation of exams.

“Most importantly the meeting highlighted that these pockets of resistance should come together under the leadership of the working class and oppose the capitalist system as a whole and fight for the building of socialism internationally.”

James, a University of Newcastle student who also works in mining backfill, said: “I agree completely with the points raised regarding the unwillingness of our government to go into lockdown. They are protecting large businesses at the expense of working people. The push to bring students back into school for their final Year 12 exams is concerning.

“I would also like to point out that right now our government is directly involved in creating a McCarthyite campaign against China, which is currently the world’s largest vaccine delivering nation. In a time of global pandemic, our establishment is working to manufacture a divide that is directly opposed to the interests of working people not only within Australia, but also to people all around the world.”



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