

Australia: Oppose anti-democratic attacks on student clubs at Macquarie University!

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (Australia)
12 August 2022

In a blatantly anti-democratic attack on students, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) and numerous student clubs have been arbitrarily disaffiliated at Sydney's Macquarie University. The IYSSE calls on all students and student groups to fight this assault and demand the reinstatement of all clubs.

On May 30, without prior notice, Student Engagement Inclusion & Belonging, an arm of management that controls student clubs on campus, sent an email demanding all clubs reaffiliate within an 18-day period, or be disaffiliated.

The email stated that affiliation applications opened on June 1 and closed on June 19. It proclaimed: "This applies to all groups, whether currently affiliated or not. Regardless of whether your group is well established, long standing, or brand new, every group must register by 19th June 2022 if they wish to be affiliated."

The email declared that "student group requirements have now changed." Clubs now had to have 30 members, a 50 percent increase from the previous 20, with at least 80 percent currently enrolled at the university, up from 75 percent. Club executives had to have "current Macquarie University students and of satisfactory academic standing."

The email concluded: "If you do not complete student group registration in time, your group will not be affiliated for at least the remainder of 2022."

This edict resulted in the disaffiliation of several clubs on campus, including the IYSSE, which has been a registered club since 2010 and successfully reaffiliated last October.

Many clubs were unable to complete the requirements within this deliberately restrictive time frame, with the email sent just before the beginning of the exam period at the end of Semester 1. Moreover, the email was not sent to members of club executives, as correspondence previously was, but instead sent to a single email address for each club.

Until now, the requirements for affiliation had remained virtually unchanged for the more than a decade. Each year, clubs were required to hold an annual general meeting and then submit to Student Engagement a list of members and club office holders and endorsement of the club constitution,

which was mirrored on recommendations from Student Engagement.

This bureaucratic process thus required that all the names of club members be handed to the university management. While the IYSSE opposed this anti-democratic requirement, we complied with it each year.

This latest development sets a dangerous precedent. University management can arbitrarily change the requirements for clubs and demand immediate reaffiliation.

Comparing the list of registered clubs on the Macquarie University website between March 12 and today shows that 45 percent of the clubs that were affiliated at the beginning of the year are no longer listed. The total number of clubs in March was 148. As of August that dropped to 95, with 67 clubs from March no longer on the website and 14 new clubs being added.

This preemptive attack on the right of clubs to exist and for students to join the club of their choosing is a transparent act of political censorship. There has clearly been a decision that the number of clubs on campus has to be culled. To do so the university has dispensed with due process by implementing measures which are designed to ensure clubs are given no notice and little time to meet the bureaucratically devised "new requirements."

Political or social clubs can be targeted if the management disagrees with their views.

That was demonstrated on July 28, when campus security sought to use the disaffiliation of the pseudo-left group Macquarie Socialists to prevent it from campaigning on campus.

The Macquarie Socialists is the student club of Socialist Alternative, to which the IYSSE is fundamentally politically opposed. It advances the interests of upper-middle class layers and utilises socialist phraseology while defending the pro-capitalist trade unions and lining up behind the US imperialist war operations against Russia and China. Nevertheless, the IYSSE defends its democratic right to campaign on campus.

A video on Facebook shows campus security demanding

that the group shut down a stall that the group said was set up to “to defend and extend abortion rights.” Within two hours, police were called to the scene. The police did not force the campaigners to leave but stood next to them in an intimidating operation.

In a statement, the Macquarie Socialists said it spoke to a Student Engagement representative, who said the stall around abortion could not continue because “it’s a sensitive issue and we have to take everyone’s beliefs into accounts. We need to make sure campus is a safe space for everyone.”

This is not the first time Student Engagement has shut down campaigns of student clubs. In June 2018, campus security blocked a campaign by the IYSSE against university funding cuts, calling for a united struggle of students and staff.

The IYSSE has been the subject of similar attacks across the country. In 2015, the University of Melbourne blocked the IYSSE’s right to affiliate, falsely claiming its aims “significantly overlapped” that of Socialist Alternative. In 2014, the University of Newcastle utilised the Students Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) laws, reinstated by the last federal Labor government, to try to ban clubs from supporting political parties such as the Socialist Equality Party (SEP).

Similar attacks have taken place at Griffith University in Brisbane, the University of Sydney, Western Sydney University and the University of NSW. In the majority of cases, these attacks have been successfully defeated through a coordinated campaign led by the IYSSE and joined by students and clubs on the campuses.

This latest assault on the basic democratic right of students at Macquarie University comes within the context of an accelerating social and political crisis in Australia and internationally, as the COVID-19 pandemic has been allowed to spread unchecked worldwide.

On campuses the IYSSE has led the fight against the unsafe reopening of universities and return to face-to-face classes. Labor and Liberal-National governments alike have ended all basic public health measures in the interest of profits and big business. This has resulted in the mass infection of the population and more than 10,000 deaths this year alone.

Just as the return to face-to-face classrooms in February transformed primary and secondary schools into Petri dishes of infection, university students and staff were placed on the frontline of the “let it rip” agenda. University managements join the chorus falsely claiming the pandemic was over.

When leading health expert and Zero-COVID advocate Dr. David Berger was threatened with deregistration by the Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency (AHPRA), the IYSSE joined the SEP in launching a

powerful campaign in his defence.

After Twitter then shut down the @SEPAustralia twitter page, demanding the deletion of a video defending Berger and linking his defence to that Julian Assange and free speech, the IYSSE and the SEP mobilised widespread opposition to the ban. As a result, Twitter lifted the lock after six days.

The IYSSE also has been in the forefront of opposition to the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and the parallel war drive against China in this region, in which the Labor government is playing a pivotal role. The IYSSE has opposed the accelerated drive to integrate the universities into servicing the needs of the military apparatuses.

Throughout the past two years, sweeping cuts have taken place on campuses, as thousands of academics and staff members have been retrenched. The IYSSE has played a leading role in fighting these cuts, including by launching a campaign in defence of Dr Frank Valckenborgh at Macquarie University last year.

The latest act of censorship by Macquarie University management must be opposed by all students and student clubs. Universities should be havens of discussion, not profit-driven hubs of censorship and war.

The IYSSE is launching a campaign against this anti-democratic attack. We demand that all clubs, including the IYSSE, be reaffiliated immediately, with all affiliation rights restored. Student Engagement Inclusion & Belonging must explain under whose authority it has carried out this assault on student rights and why the attack was initiated.

We urge all students and campus clubs to join our campaign. Get in contact with the Macquarie University IYSSE, give statements of support and fight this anti-democratic offensive.

To get in contact with the IYSSE email at iysse.macquarie@gmail.com.

Join the IYSSE Facebook page here: <https://www.facebook.com/IYSSEaustralia>

Follow us on Twitter at @IysseA



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)