

Australian IYSSE holds meetings against war in Ukraine and preparations for war with China

Our reporters
17 March 2023

This week, as part of an international series of events titled, “The war in Ukraine and how to stop it,” the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Australia held meetings in Melbourne, the country’s second largest city, and the regional New South Wales (NSW) town of Newcastle.

IYSSE meetings have already taken place in the US and Sri Lanka, with more to come in those countries as well as the UK, New Zealand, Brazil, Canada, France and Germany.

The two Australian meetings attracted youth, students and workers, both in person and watching live online from around the country.

Speakers explained the history of the conflict in Ukraine which is in essence a US-NATO imperialist war against Russia, and the socialist and international strategy to end it. They also pointed to the preparations in the Asia-Pacific region for a US-led confrontation with China, which the ruling elite in Washington view as the chief threat to their global hegemonic rule.

These developments, attendees were told, threatened to spiral into a nuclear catastrophe unless youth and students joined the fight to build an international anti-war campaign.

IYSSE members Morgan Peach and Phoebe Burnham spoke at the Melbourne meeting on Tuesday evening.

Peach who chaired the event, said the war in Ukraine was rapidly developing into an open military confrontation between the US and its NATO allies, and Russia. “This is not a local or regional conflict, which will be confined to Ukraine, but one which threatens to spark a catastrophic Third World War,” he said.

Peach also highlighted Australia’s involvement in US-led war plans against China and referred to the Labor government’s \$368 billion decision earlier that day to purchase nuclear-powered submarines as part of the AUKUS military alliance with the US and Britain.

Burnham noted the social crisis confronting youth and its relationship to the war drive.

“War abroad means war against the working class at home. As more than \$575 billion over a decade is to be spent to expand the military, Australia’s ruling elite is slashing spending on education, healthcare and social infrastructure,” she said.

Evrin Yazgin, national convenor of the IYSSE in Australia, delivered the main report in Melbourne. He explained that the US-NATO war in Ukraine and the drive to war against China were

part of Washington’s attempts to shore up its domination over the world’s markets and resources.

The speaker also counterposed the Marxist internationalism of the IYSSE to that of fake left organisations such as Socialist Alternative in Australia who have become open cheerleaders for imperialism.

“In the traditions of genuine revolutionary Marxism and socialist internationalism, the IYSSE opposes all the tendencies in the fake left who pledge their allegiance to imperialism under the guise of defending the so-called Ukrainian ‘right to self-determination.’ We are for the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers against their own capitalist governments, and against the war,” Yazgin stressed.

Yazgin elaborated the necessity for the anti-war movement to be oriented to the international working class and drew on the lessons of history. “The Russian Revolution in October 1917 overthrew the profit system in a socialist revolution and established the world’s first workers’ state. It was the most progressive event in human history and the world’s greatest ever anti-war movement, setting in motion the end of the First World War.”

The Newcastle meeting was addressed by leading IYSSE members Robert Creech, John Davis and Oscar Grenfell, who is an upper house candidate for the Socialist Equality Party in the March 25 New South Wales state elections.

Creech, who is president of the IYSSE club at the University of Newcastle, highlighted the rapid escalation of the war in Ukraine by the US and NATO powers, including the sending of 120–140 main battle tanks by 12 NATO member nations to Ukraine to fight Russian forces.

“In March last year, Biden promised the public that the US would not send ‘offensive equipment’ and ‘tanks and planes’ to Ukraine, because this would trigger ‘World War III.’ Nevertheless, this is precisely what NATO is doing and discussing,” Creech said.

Davis drew attention to the barrage of militarist propaganda presented in the “Red Alert” series of articles appearing in Australian newspapers the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* the week before which were aimed at making the population accept that war with China is inevitable.

The authors of “Red Alert,” Davis said, insist “Australia must be prepared to fight in a US-led war against China, not in the distant

future, but immediately.” These articles, he added explained promote the stationing of nuclear weapons and up to 200,000 US troops in northern Australia, as well as reintroducing conscription.

Oscar Grenfell reviewed the historical origins of the war in Ukraine, pointing out that US strategists saw the Stalinist bureaucracy’s dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 as an opportunity for American imperialism to exercise its unchallenged dominance over the globe.

Grenfell explained that the anti-war movement cannot be based on appeals to one or another section of the capitalist class. He drew on the experience of the anti-Iraq War protests of 2003 which were the largest anti-war rallies of all time. The leaderships of that movement, however, promoted the bankrupt perspective that this illegal war could be stopped by appealing to the United Nations, European powers such as France and Germany, or the Labor Party in Australia and the Democrats in the US.

He concluded by pointing to the only social force capable of ending war. “The dangers are great. But we know that the same contradictions that lead to imperialist war, propel the working class onto the path of socialist revolution. That is the basis for building an international anti-war movement,” he said.

The meetings prompted a lively discussion with attendees asking IYSSE speakers a range of questions. These included the motivations of Russian President Vladimir Putin, the socialist perspective needed to combat climate change, and how to end the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and save lives.

A student in Newcastle asked how the IYSSE would build the anti-war movement. In response, IYSSE speakers raised that the latent anti-war sentiment among students and the shift to the left in the broader working class due to the cost-of-living crisis needed to be imbued with a political perspective. The IYSSE, the speakers stressed, has a program: that of world socialist revolution. IYSSE members spoke with students and young workers who attended the meetings.

In Melbourne, **Aden**, a psychology student at La Trobe University and a warehouse worker, said, the meeting “was very informative. I got a lot out of it. The Ukraine-Russia situation is very complex, but I agree with the IYSSE’s attempts to build an anti-war movement.”

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On the cost-of-living crisis, the student said, “It’s getting hard to survive out there. Governments spending so much on the military doesn’t make sense. It’s about profit.”

Vicky, studying digital media at Victoria University, said: “I think the meeting provides a fresh perspective. It’s refreshing not to hear about simply ‘good and bad’ because it’s not just about good or bad. It’s interesting to see it from the class struggle and the imperialist outlook and their real interests.

“The world is in the imperialist stage. The bourgeoisie is exploiting the population. Governments have geopolitical interests. War is the extent to which they’re willing to go. The US wants to secure its geopolitical interests. I think that the IYSSE targeting youth is the way forward because they are the future.”

A young food production worker in Melbourne said the meeting was “eye opening.” He explained that he not previously known

about the US promotion of far-right forces in the CIA-orchestrated 2014 coup in Ukraine that toppled a pro-Russian government.

He also referred to a leaked phone call between Victoria Nuland, the State Department’s top official on Europe and Eurasia, and Geoffrey Pyatt, the US ambassador to Ukraine, in 2014. The audio was played at the IYSSE meeting.

“I didn’t believe America was involved directly in the coup, until I heard that phone call. US officials were talking about which particular politicians in Ukraine should form the new government.”

Prudence, a data analyst student who attended the meeting in Newcastle, said: “The meeting challenged me to learn more about the past—past wars and the political climate, how this relates. There’s a saying—those who fail to learn from history are going to repeat it.”

The student commented on how the war has affected ordinary people. “I come from Kenya and we’re a very agricultural-based country, and we rely on imported fertiliser. After the war in Ukraine started, the prices of fertiliser went up.”

She endorsed the IYSSE’s fight to mobilise students, youth and the working class internationally to fight against war. “I agree with that perspective, especially because governments have to get the money to fund wars from somewhere. They’ll cut back on budgets for sectors like education or health. You mentioned that the Russian people in the revolution helped to end the First World War—there is proof that this works.”

Details for the Sydney meeting:

7pm AEST, 4 April

T2 Theatre, 14 Sir Christopher Ondaatje Ave
Macquarie University
14 Sir Christopher Ondaatje Avenue,
Macquarie Park, NSW

Register here:

<https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/the-war-in-ukraine-and-how-to-stop-it-tickets-578612424337>

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