

# IYSSE holds first meeting in Canada on the war in Ukraine and how to stop it

**Our reporters**

**30 March 2023**

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) held a successful public meeting entitled “The war in Ukraine and how to stop it” at Conrad Grebel University College on the campus of the University of Waterloo in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, Tuesday evening.

WSWS Managing Editor Niles Niemuth gave a lecture that traced the origins of the war back to the Stalinist bureaucracy’s dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the unending series of imperialist wars instigated by the United States over the course of the past three decades.

That the meeting was even able to take place is the product of a determined effort on the part of the IYSSE. Last week, in a display of craven capitulation to pressure from pro-war Ukrainian-Canadian nationalists, the university administration attempted to censor the meeting, but retreated in the face of an IYSSE countercampaign. Far-right Ukrainian nationalists sought to disrupt Tuesday’s meeting, but proved unsuccessful.

Niemuth’s lecture made it abundantly clear from the outset that the IYSSE opposes both sides in the conflict—the US imperialist-led NATO alliance on the one hand and the reactionary nationalist Putin regime on the other.

Addressing the meeting from the standpoint of socialist internationalism, he said, “We are not speaking as partisans of either side in this conflict. We are irreconcilable opponents of all those responsible for this war, whether they sit in the White House or the Kremlin ... Putin’s invasion of Ukraine is without question a reactionary crime. But understanding a conflict’s origin and character is not a matter of determining who fired the first shot. And further, just like in medicine, you cannot cure a political disease—in this case the catastrophic war in Ukraine—without understanding its origins.”

Pointing to the suppression of any discussion of the antecedent history, encapsulated in the media’s incessant references to “Putin’s unprovoked war,” Niemuth insisted that “to build a mass anti-war movement, it is necessary to oppose the unrelenting propaganda barrage of the political establishment and corporate media in the western powers, Canada included.” Reporting on the conflict has been conducted in an entirely one-sided fashion, ignoring the never-ending illegal wars and military actions—including the first Gulf War, the bombing of the former Yugoslavia, the invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq and the regime-change war in Libya—conducted by US imperialism over the past three decades.

Tracing the long series of wars conducted by all American presidents from Bush Sr., through Clinton, to George W. Bush to Obama, Trump and now Biden, Niemuth insisted that the war is “the outcome of two interrelated processes: the Stalinist bureaucracy’s

disastrous restoration of capitalism and dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991; and American imperialism’s response—a drive for global hegemony, in which it has sought to use its military might to offset its declining economic power relative to its global competitors.”

He cited an oft-overlooked but essential document, the US Defense Planning Guidance in 1992: “Our first objective is to prevent the reemergence of a new rival. This is a dominant consideration underlying the new regional defense strategy and requires that we endeavor to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power. These regions include Western Europe, East Asia, the territory of the former Soviet Union, and Southwest Asia.

“... Finally, we must maintain the mechanisms for deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role.”

The perspective advanced in this document has guided the US in incorporating all the former Warsaw Pact members and three former Soviet republics into NATO, despite security assurances given to the Soviet government at the end of the Cold War that NATO would not advance to Russia’s doorstep.

The lecture also drew attention to the great litany of lies that have been used to justify the wars of US imperialism. “The media-orchestrated lie, pioneered in the promotion of the WMD lie (which was used to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq), has become a permanent state of affairs: the pandemic is over, the US is not at war with Russia, one lie piles on top of another until it is nearly impossible to tell the truth from falsehood,” said Niemuth. He noted that Bush, Cheney, Obama and Trump walk free, while those who have exposed the crimes of imperialism, such as Julian Assange, are behind bars.

The chronicle of falsehoods, however, “are foundering or being dashed on a great truth, that truth is the class struggle. Great struggles from Sri Lanka to France to the American Midwest and right here in Ontario are taking place which challenge the prevailing capitalist order and provide the basis for putting an end to war.”

While noting that US imperialism was playing the most provocative role in the war, Niemuth took time to explain the war aims of Canadian and European imperialism. He pointed to the vast contribution Canada has made to Ukraine. The total just in weaponry exceeds \$1 billion, including eight Leopard tanks, dozens of armored vehicles, an anti-aircraft system and vast quantities of artillery and ammunition. The Liberal government has deployed special forces to Ukraine and has stepped up Operation Unifier, the NATO operation for training Ukrainian forces, in conjunction with the US and UK. Foreign Minister Melanie Joly declared earlier this month that Canada was seeking “regime change” in Moscow.

Pointing to Biden’s first visit to Canada as president last week,

Niemuth noted that its overriding purpose was to secure the means and materiel for global warfare, against Russia, China and beyond. The joint statement issued by Biden and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau at the conclusion of their talks “explicitly committed Washington and Ottawa to continue pouring billions of dollars of weaponry into the US-NATO war with Russia, promising to support Ukraine for as long as it takes.”

Niemuth noted how, in their decades long campaign to harness Ukraine to NATO and the European Union and now in waging war on Russia, Canada and the NATO powers have openly aligned with fascistic forces, including promoting their incorporation into Ukraine’s security forces. The appearance of Chrystia Freeland, Canada’s deputy prime minister and finance minister at a pro-war demonstration last March with a banner emblazoned with “Slava Ukraini!” the slogan of the Nazi collaborators in the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, was not just a personal matter. It was “in keeping with Canadian imperialism’s systematic cultivation of and collaboration with far-right Ukrainian nationalists stretching all the way back to the end of World War II.”

Pointing to the political framework within which the war is being conducted, Niemuth drew attention to the crucial political support Canada’s social democratic party, the NDP, is giving to the war. Last March, NDP leader Jagmeet Singh signed a confidence-and-supply agreement with the Trudeau Liberals pledging to prop up the government in parliament through June 2025, to ensure the ruling class’s “political stability.” Similarly, Niemuth explained, “the trade unions are close allies of the Trudeau government, supporting its policies of war abroad and attacks on workers at home.” He noted that this is part of an international process, pointing to the support of the pseudo-left Democratic Socialists of America for the war.

The only social force capable of ending the drive towards a nuclear third world war is the workers of the world. Making an appeal to the students in attendance, Niemuth said, “Workers and young people in Canada, the US, Ukraine, Russia and every other country in the world must unite to end the war. Students, youth and workers in every country must oppose their own ruling class’s war policies. It is only the international working class which can end the wars and the economic and political system, capitalism, which gives rise to these conflicts.”

An animated question and answer session followed the lecture. There were questions from several audience members about the nature of socialism. One woman directly addressed whether Russia was still socialist and about the nature of democracy.

Niemuth replied that the IYSSE is an open partisan of the working class, and that capitalism had been restored in Russia in 1991 by the Stalinist bureaucracy. He also pointed to the global breakdown of bourgeois democracy: in the US with Trump’s January 6, 2021, coup attempt; in Canada with the increasing criminalization of strikes; and in France with Macron’s use of an anti-democratic clause in the Constitution to ram through his pension reform without a parliamentary vote.

An important political issue that emerged in the discussion was the question of the historic role of the fascist Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), whose leaders like Stepan Bandera are openly celebrated by both fascist forces like the Azov Battalion in the Ukrainian armed forces and the Zelensky government, and the OUN slogan “Slava Ukraini!”

WSWS writer James Clayton gave a contribution from the floor on this issue. He explained how the OUN collaborated with the Nazis

during their war of annihilation against the USSR and were heavily involved in the mass murder of Jews in Ukraine. The Canadian government provided refuge to many of these Nazi accomplices, including those who had served in the Waffen-SS Galicia Division, after the Second World War to use them to fight socialist influence in the Ukrainian-Canadian community.

The Ukrainian nationalists in attendance, who had been protesting the presence of the IYSSE prior to the meeting, vociferously denounced Clayton’s exposure of the crimes of the far-right Ukrainian nationalists. It is highly politically revealing that throughout the whole Q&A session, they never felt the need to distance themselves from either Bandera or the extermination of the Jews. One young man went so far as to say that the “Slava Ukraini” slogan was a legitimate slogan for the defence of Ukraine against its “enemies.”

Towards the end of the discussion, an attendee raised the crucial distinction between the Trotskyist programme advanced by the IYSSE and the reactionary nationalism and theory of “socialism in one country” peddled by Stalin—the spokesman of the privileged bureaucracy that usurped power from the Soviet working class in the 1920s, under conditions where the October 1917 Revolution remained isolated in a backward country ravaged by world war and civil war.

Niemuth noted that the revolutionary perspective advanced by the IYSSE has already brought the most class-conscious elements in Russia and Ukraine into solidarity with the IYSSE, as expressed by the support of the Young Guard of the Bolshevik-Leninists. Only by uniting workers and youth internationally can an end be brought to the Ukraine war and the source of war: capitalism and its outmoded nation-state system.

Tuesday’s meeting was animated by the proposition that for a genuine mass working class anti-war movement to develop, it has to be armed with an understanding of the historical origins of the war. Students and young people ready to build an international anti-war movement must turn to the working class, which around the world is rebelling against ever deepening social inequality and economic insecurity and the demand that it pay for war, rearmament and bailouts of the financial oligarchy though further devastating attacks on its social rights and livings standards.

The meeting was a successful intervention on the basis of this perspective in the face of opposition from the university administration and pro-war, right-wing nationalist forces who are aligned with the Canadian government and enjoy the backing of the state-sponsored Ukrainian Canadian Congress.

We urge all readers from the University of Waterloo and throughout Canada to contact us at [iysseincanada@gmail.com](mailto:iysseincanada@gmail.com) and join the struggle to build an IYSSE club on campus and at other university campuses across the country.



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