

IYSSE in New Zealand holds meeting against the war in Ukraine

Our reporters
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) held a successful meeting on Tuesday at Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) in New Zealand, in opposition to the escalating US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, the build-up to war against China, and the increasingly imminent danger of a third world war.

The event, which attracted an attentive audience of students and workers, was part of an international series of anti-war meetings held by the IYSSE, the youth organisation of the world Trotskyist movement.

The Wellington meeting and a meeting in Sydney, Australia, held on the same day, both went ahead despite attempts by the right-wing NAFO (North Atlantic Fellas Organisation) to get them cancelled. This mostly anonymous internet-based group is heavily promoted by the corporate media in the US and Europe. Its members agitate on Twitter against anti-war groups and spread propaganda on behalf of the Ukrainian regime and military.

NAFO supporters made hundreds of fake online bookings for the Wellington meeting, and at least one individual contacted VUW trying to get it cancelled. These efforts failed.

Evrin Yazgin, national convenor of the IYSSE in Australia, chaired the Wellington event. His introductory report highlighted the extremely rapid escalation of the war, including the admittance of Finland into the NATO imperialist alliance, and the decisions by the US and Germany to supply the Ukrainian military with tanks and other offensive weapons.

Contrary to the slanders of NAFO and other right-wing nationalists, Yazgin explained that the IYSSE opposes the Russian government's invasion of Ukraine—a desperate and reactionary, nationalist response to US military encirclement. “But our opposition is from the socialist left, not the pro-imperialist right. We condemn the role of NATO and the US government in instigating the conflict, motivated by the global geopolitical and economic interests of US and European imperialism.”

Yazgin also addressed the role of Australian imperialism, which “functions as the most aggressive attack dog” in the US-led war preparations against China in the Indo-Pacific region. As part of the AUKUS military pact with the UK and US, Australia's Labor government is spending \$368 billion on

nuclear-powered submarines. New Zealand, another imperialist ally of the US, has been invited to take part in AUKUS and is strengthening its support for the US-NATO proxy war in Ukraine.

The main speaker was Tom Peters, a leading member of the Socialist Equality Group in New Zealand and organiser of the IYSSE. Peters outlined the origins of the war in Ukraine, stressing that it was the outcome of the disastrous dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the transformation of the Stalinist regimes in both Russia and Ukraine into rival capitalist oligarchies.

US imperialism seized upon the end of the USSR to unleash a wave of brutal and predatory wars—including in Iraq, the Balkans, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria—aimed at preventing the emergence of any new global competitor. Three decades of war, which killed over a million people and turned tens of millions into refugees, have now culminated in the explosive confrontation with Russia and China.

The US and NATO powers are escalating the war in Ukraine in order to inflict a devastating military defeat on Russia, which will pave the way for war against China, and the imperialist carve-up of these countries to plunder their wealth and resources.

Peters drew attention to the sharp rightward shift of tendencies representing the affluent middle class in New Zealand which had previously led demonstrations against the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The Green Party, part of the Labour-led government, and various pseudo-left groups have all joined the camp of imperialism, supporting the government's alignment with US imperialism.

The pro-Labour *Daily Blog*, Peters said, “has carried out hysterical attacks on our movement, the Socialist Equality Group, declaring that we should be subject to surveillance by the SIS [Security Intelligence Service] for ‘treason’ because we oppose the constant war propaganda that they have been spewing out.”

The speaker noted that the pseudo-left International Socialist Organisation (ISO) “published an article last year glorifying the Zelensky regime and the Ukrainian military, and demanding that its ‘right’ to join NATO and make its own ‘security arrangements’ be upheld. Last week the ISO advertised an anti-

fascist meeting on campus. But it is impossible to fight fascism while supporting the US and NATO and their fascist proxies in Ukraine.”

Peters also denounced the university for hosting an exhibition last November and December, organised by the Ukrainian Gromada of Wellington, which glorified the fascist Azov Battalion, part of Ukraine’s armed forces. Not a single academic at VUW objected to the display.

The exhibition advanced a right-wing nationalist falsification of Ukraine’s history, which covered up the alliance between the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), led by Stepan Bandera, and Nazi Germany during World War II. The OUN, which is glorified by the Zelensky regime in Ukraine, carried out massacres of Jews and Poles.

Peters pointed to the significance of the fact that four years after the fascist Brenton Tarrant carried out a terrorist attack in Christchurch, “Ukrainian fascist propaganda has been openly displayed at this university and nobody speaks out, no one says a word, apart from us on the *World Socialist Web Site*. That speaks to the fact that there is no anti-war tendency outside of the socialist movement that we represent.”

He pointed to the eruption of class struggle throughout the world, including the largest strike movement in France since 1968 and the mass movement in Sri Lanka against austerity. In New Zealand, tens of thousands of teachers and healthcare workers have recently held significant strikes. Peters called on students and young people to orient towards this growing working-class movement, and to adopt a socialist perspective that links the struggle against war with the fight against the capitalist assault on the working class.

The reports provoked a lively discussion. One attendee questioned whether joining the IYSSE and fighting for world revolution was the only way to end war, asking: “Are there any incremental steps that can be taken along the way to that, or is it just all or nothing?”

In response, Peters asked the audience to consider the fact that no other organisation had held an anti-war event on the subject of the war in Ukraine. The world had entered a period of sharp class polarisation in which the upper-middle class was defending its privileged position by supporting the capitalist state and its drive to war, while the working class was being propelled into revolutionary struggles.

The critical question today, Peters said, was building a revolutionary leadership based on the same socialist and internationalist principles that guided the Russian Revolution to victory, putting an end to the First World War. This could only be done in opposition to all the fake left tendencies which have embraced imperialism.

Another audience member raised that they considered Russia an imperialist power. In response, Yazgin and Peters referred to the analysis made by the International Committee of the Fourth International in its 2016 statement *Socialism and the Fight Against War*, which explains that the pseudo-lefts’ description

of Russia and China as “imperialist” powers is not backed up by any substantial analysis, but serves a definite political purpose: to relativise and downplay the aggressive role of US imperialism and to justify support for imperialist-backed operations to break up Russia and China.

Several of those in attendance expressed appreciation for the meeting. One student, Cody, told the WSWWS that the discussion had covered “a lot of details that I wasn’t aware of” and that the world situation was “worse than I imagined.”

“Nobody wants to believe that they’re going to see a world war,” Cody said, “but if governments feel that it’ll advance their agenda, especially western powers, especially US imperialism, then they’ll do it.” A war against China would be “absolutely insane,” but the US was prepared to start it because the growth of China’s economy “threatens their place in the world, as a world superpower.”

Amara, who intends to study at VUW, said he found the meeting “very direct, easy to understand, and it made really good points,” including the discussion about the expansion of NATO, which debunked the media’s false narrative of “America: good, and China and Russia: bad.”

Amara said the discussion about Australia and New Zealand’s integration into US war plans underscored that militarisation was a global development and “very close to home, very relevant.” The idea that New Zealand was “far away” from war is “not really that true, it’s an illusion,” he said.

David, a journalist, said the meeting was “very informative and well-presented.” He appreciated the discussion of Marxist principles and the Russian Revolution as the basis for a new anti-war movement, in contrast with the lack of principles of other “progressive and leftist movements” that were now supporting the war.

“In New Zealand, there’s almost zero anti-war movement. This is a huge question that has to be addressed,” he said. “I think the fact that in New Zealand the Socialist Equality Group is the only group that has come out with any clarity in regards to the war, speaks volumes for the quality of the group and its philosophy.” He agreed that war had to be opposed “at an international level, because otherwise, all you get is workers pitted against workers in other countries.”



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