

International Youth and Students for Social Equality holds anti-war meetings in the UK

Our reporters
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) held five public meetings in the UK between March 18 and March 28 as part of its global anti-war campaign, “The war in Ukraine and how to stop it: The historical and political origins of the US-NATO war against Russia”.

Meeting were held in Leeds, Manchester, London and Sheffield, with an online event organised following a campaign in Scotland. They were addressed by Socialist Equality Party National Secretary Chris Marsden and Assistant National Secretary Tom Scripps.

Marsden and Scripps explained that there was no issue “more pressing and urgent than the mobilisation of every worker, every young person, in Britain, Europe and throughout the world against this war.”

Yet at present there is no sizeable movement against “a war fought on European soil, involving two nuclear powers, with at least 100,000 dead on both sides, likely many more. One that has made millions of Ukrainians into refugees, has devastated the country and is costing hundreds of billions during the worst economic crisis any one of us has ever seen.”

To change this dangerous situation meant not only cutting through the widespread confusion by exposing the lies of the pro-war media, but also challenging “the warmongering capitalist parties and their academic and pseudo-left political advisors and apologists, explaining why past anti-war movements have failed, and what type of anti-war movement must now be built. Because ultimately everything depends on political leadership.”

The report to the meeting explained that “All the justifications given by the imperialist governments prosecuting this war are lies.” This is an imperialist war provoked by the United States, supported by its NATO allies, aimed at reversing “American capitalism’s long-term economic decline and suppressing mounting internal tensions, securing global hegemony in a new carve up of the world’s markets and strategic resources.”

The US saw in the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 an opportunity to establish a unipolar world—its unchallenged global hegemony. “Since 1991, the US has pushed the NATO military alliance to almost every East European state and every state bordering Russia. Bringing Ukraine into NATO’s sphere of influence is the star prize and final piece on the chessboard, paving the way for dismantling Russia and securing direct control of its massive natural assets.

“Securing de facto control of the entire Eurasian landmass then prepares for war with China and the elimination of America’s greatest economic challenger.”

This in no way “either excuses or legitimises the Russian invasion

of Ukraine...

Putin represents the “regime of mafia-like oligarchs” that emerged following the restoration of capitalism, “who seized the USSR’s assets and enriched themselves grotesquely at the expense of the immiseration of the working class.

“These criminals and the representatives of the state apparatus that serves them stupidly believed that the US and other imperialist powers would hand them a seat at the table, a respected place in the world’s markets and even at one point NATO membership! They thought, from their newfound position of fabulous wealth, that they could buy their way in.

“This has proved to be the pursuit of a chimera for which the Russian and Ukrainian working class are paying a bitter price.”

Putin’s answer to “the existential threat from the US and NATO is to mobilise a national war, invoking the history and traditions of Tsarism, and the nationalist anti-communism of the Stalinist bureaucracy, including Great Russian chauvinism towards Ukraine.”

The IYSSE and the SEP, “basing themselves on the traditions of revolutionary Marxism and socialist internationalism, reject all justifications for war based on the obsolete concept of ‘national defense,’ whether invoked by Putin or Zelensky. We are for the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers against the war policies of both.

“This is actively being fought for in Russia and Ukraine, by the Young Guard of Bolshevik Leninists, acting in sympathy with the IYSSE and the International Committee of the Fourth International. This is the cutting edge of the fight for the unification of all workers against imperialist war.”

The speakers explained that no fight against war “can be waged based on what used to be called the ‘left’ of the Labour Party, or on the trade unions—as has long been advocated by the Stop the War Coalition.

“The ability of the Tory government to wage war and Starmer’s pro-war leadership of the Labour Party were both guaranteed by Jeremy Corbyn, who refused to drive out the Blairite right from the party when he led it and betrayed all those millions who looked to him to lead a fight and take on the Tories...

“Today he is expelled from the Parliamentary Labour Party begging to be let back in. And his key allies are either open supporters of NATO’s war, or cowards not prepared to say anything.”

More politically bankrupt still is the recently formed No2Nato campaign led by George Galloway, which “advocates a global alliance with right-wing tendencies and individuals, especially from the Trump milieu, behind capitalism’s ‘rising powers’, including Russia and India, but led by China, which will supposedly inaugurate a new multi-polar world and bring about world peace.

This “articulates the position of a layer of the upper middle class, frightened by the threat of war but hostile to a struggle against that threat by the working class and possessed of a truly boundless belief in the long-term viability of the capitalist system.”

The central element of the IYSSE’s perspective for a new anti-war movement “is an understanding that the same contradictions that drive the capitalist class to war—the need to overcome the crisis of the profit system by securing their own global hegemony—also drives forward an explosion of working-class struggle that creates the basis for the fight for socialism.”

The assault on the working class demanded by capitalism’s crisis and then need to militarise the economy is already “fuelling an eruption of mass strikes and demonstrations internationally”—including the strike wave in the UK:

In the fightback against government attacks “being waged by the French and Sri Lankan working class, we see the beginnings of an open revolutionary confrontation with the capitalist state that will expand and ultimately decide the fate of humanity, determine which is it to be: socialism or barbarism.”

Building a genuine anti-war movement must be based on the international working class: “A genuinely anti-war movement must intervene in all the struggles of the working class, to unify workers and young people in every country in a struggle for socialism against the capitalist class, all its governments, parties and the state apparatus.”

Discussion at the meetings was wide-ranging.

In Leeds, a young Ukrainian academic asked whether ending the war must be conditional on a victory over Russia. Marsden replied by asking what a Ukrainian “victory” would look like, given that the NATO powers are intent on regime change in Moscow with both sides planning for a nuclear response.

The Ukrainian workers were being used as cannon fodder by the US and NATO and Ukraine was being destroyed, with mass deaths on both sides. The only answer was to fight for working class unity. The young academic explained in response that he had returned to Ukraine recently and knew that the casualty rate was much higher than was officially acknowledged.

In Manchester, an attendee from Colombia asked whether the Ukrainian people had not chosen the “lesser evil” of US and European domination over Russian and Chinese dictatorship?

Marsden answered that the historic and ongoing crimes of US and European imperialism refuted any claim that they were the “lesser evil” and that this stand only disarms the working class against the threat of a new world war. Victory for either side would be won to the terrible cost of the Ukrainian working class and would at best be a staging ground for a re-eruption of conflict at an even more ferocious intensity.

Asked what perspective the IYSSE offered the Ukrainian working class, Marsden replied that the main task was to rebuild a socialist movement in all the former territories of the Soviet Union—to re-establish the connection of the Russian and Ukrainian working class with the political traditions they once embodied and that were destroyed by Stalinism.

A member of the audience from Vietnam bitterly rejected the claim that the US was a “lesser evil”, citing the crimes committed in his own country.

In Glasgow, the discussion centred on how socialists could intervene in the working class to raise awareness of the war and its political and historical origins.

Scripps argued that a fight had to be taken up against any demoralised response to the limited opposition to the war at this stage. He explained that the prevailing level of political and historical consciousness was the product of conditions—the prolonged suppression of the working class and genuine Marxism—now being rapidly overturned by an upsurge in the global class struggle only just beginning, creating the objective basis for a political struggle to educate millions of workers and young people.

The SEP and the IYSSE, he continued, intervened in these struggles to broaden workers’ political horizons and help them to understand the origins of the attacks they confront in the drive for ramped-up exploitation to underwrite corporate and financial bailouts and, increasingly, the war effort.

This work had to be done, Scripps concluded, in a political struggle against pseudo-left tendencies openly backing NATO’s war and/or tying the working class to a trade union and Labour Party bureaucracy which supports it.

In London, questions were asked about threats to the US dollar, whether anti-NATO blocs and alliances were being formed among other countries like Russia China and Iran and what the consequences were.

Scripps answered that there would undoubtedly be all sorts of tactical manoeuvres by their governments but stressed the reactionary nature of any orientation to these states as a potential counterweight to US imperialism and its allies. Their governments, he said, do not represent their own people, much less all those oppressed by imperialism around the world.

The undeniable growth of other economies and declining relative position of America’s does not weaken but intensifies the aggression of US imperialism as it seeks to use its enormous military strength to dominate its rivals and secure its hegemony—threatening a Third World War

Putin’s actions, he continued, were proving that the ruling classes of those rival countries have no progressive answer to this threat, only military action based on the most divisive, backward, nationalist politics; the polar opposite of the necessary socialist internationalist struggle against imperialism and war.

In Sheffield, an A-level student noted that in five years’ time, they and their friends would have finished all their education and be ready to join the workforce. The student asked, in the context of the escalating war plans, what would the future look like for young people. Marsden replied that this was a very serious question. The future of this generation, whether it even had one, would be determined by their taking a decision to fight for one. Imperialism was dragging humanity toward a catastrophe. The younger generation must respond by taking up the fight for socialism. The key task was for young people to join this movement and build the anti-war opposition.



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