

Australia: Student pseudo-left group slanders the SEP and the IYSSE

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The University of Newcastle (UoN) Socialist Club, a pseudo-left campus group, has been spreading slanders against the Socialist Equality Party and its youth wing, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE). The lies are contained in an article published on the organisation's blog last December, entitled "What's the deal with the Socialist Equality Party?"

The Socialist Club is active at the University of Newcastle, in the working-class city of the same name several hours north of Sydney.

The IYSSE is well known at the university, having had a club on campus for over a decade. During that time it has held dozens of meetings on major political and historical issues and has played a prominent role in the struggle against cuts to courses and sackings on campus.

The posting, by Max Brown, a Socialist Club member and undergraduate student, is written in an unserious and sophomoric manner. The blog on which it was posted has a very small audience. The claims advanced in Brown's article, nevertheless, should be refuted, to counter his attempts to spread confusion. The Socialist Club, moreover, was previously associated with Socialist Alliance, one of the main pseudo-left parties in Australia.

The article is an attempt to slander the IYSSE and to prevent students from discussing the IYSSE's socialist and internationalist perspective.

While claiming to be left-wing and even socialist, the pseudo-left internationally seeks to subordinate workers and young people to the official political establishment. The fight against this tendency is thus critical to the development of a genuine socialist movement of the working class.

Brown's article centres on two of the key themes of pseudo-left politics: Firstly, support for identity politics, which is aimed at dividing the working class and promoting the interests of an affluent upper middle class; secondly, the defence of the corporatised, anti-working-class trade union bureaucracy.

On the first issue, Brown draws attention to the IYSSE's opposition to the #MeToo movement. Like all political liars, Brown's argument is based on a deliberate falsification of the IYSSE's position. At no point does he directly quote from the hundreds of articles on the WSWs exposing the reactionary character of this movement. The obvious question is why?

At one point, Brown writes that the SEP/IYSSE "promote victim-blaming mentalities that attack female victims of male sexual predation." At another, "the WSWs seems to present Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby and Kevin Spacey as the faces of the revolution, those who we must all learn from."

This, of course, is nonsense. The WSWs has never expressed support for the politics of Weinstein and other prominent #MeToo targets. Instead, we defend fundamental democratic rights, irrespective of the politics of those targeted, because history shows that the erosion of civil liberties is always ultimately directed against the working class.

The WSWs, the SEP and the IYSSE have not once defended sexual

predation or abuse, as Brown doubtless knows. Instead, it has warned that the #MeToo movement is based upon attacks on core democratic rights.

Since it was launched in 2017, numerous careers and lives have been destroyed based on unsubstantiated accusations and even mere innuendo. Proponents of #MeToo have openly attacked the presumption of innocence and the right to a trial before a jury of one's peers, key civil liberties established in centuries of struggle against feudal despotism. The maxim of the movement is, instead, "guilty because accused."

To the extent that #MeToo allegations have resulted in court proceedings, they have generally failed. The US criminal trial against Spacey collapsed after the accuser deleted evidence and withdrew cooperation with the prosecutors. Weinstein was convicted, but as the WSWs extensively documented, the trial was a travesty of justice. The jury had been tarnished by years of lurid media coverage, which the judge did nothing to prevent, and evidence that would normally be excluded in such proceedings was allowed.

In Australia, there has not been a single successful #MeToo prosecution. Instead, in several legal cases and defamation hearings, prominent individuals accused of misconduct have been proven innocent of the sexual charges for which they were accused or won their cases against the publications that slandered them.

Notwithstanding their legal victories, the situation remains that the actors targeted, such as John Jarratt, Geoffrey Rush and others, have never worked again in their field. This underscores how #MeToo can be used to destroy individuals, and even organisations, outside of any due process.

Brown writes that in WSWs articles, "There is a tangential attempt to connect these cases of harassment to the efforts to deport and detain Julian Assange for his misconduct, which is seen by many as a cynical attempt at the US to get him."

In fact, there is nothing tangential about it. The Assange case was, in many respects, the prototype of #MeToo. In 2010, as WikiLeaks was publishing historic exposures of US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, dubious allegations of sexual misconduct were levelled against Assange in Sweden. In over a decade, Assange was never charged with a crime. The case was riddled with holes, including falsified evidence and transparent political interference.

More than a decade on and the content of the Swedish frame-up is crystal clear. The Swedish investigation has been dropped because of the paucity of evidence, but also because it served its purpose of maligning the WikiLeaks founder and undermining his fundamental rights. Now, all that remains are Espionage Act charges in the US, which is seeking to imprison Assange for 175 years for his exposure of war crimes. Based on Brown's flippant one-liner, it is not even clear that he is aware of these extradition proceedings.

Elsewhere, Brown implies that the WSWs analysis of #MeToo is somehow a "conspiracy theory." But it is hardly a secret that #MeToo was launched by the *New York Times*, one of the most powerful outlets of the American ruling class and the Democratic Party. Its purpose, in addition

to assaulting civil liberties, was to divert attention away from the fundamental class issues of war, soaring social inequality and authoritarianism. This was not an aberration. For the past 40 years, identity politics have been aggressively promoted, especially at the universities, to counter Marxism and any understanding that class is the fundamental division in society. The pseudo-left has played an integral role in this ideological offensive, not as a result of misunderstandings.

Instead, these groups speak for an affluent layer of the upper middle class that uses issues such as race, gender and sexuality to advance their selfish interests within the framework of the capitalist system. And they deploy identity politics to try and block a socialist movement of the working class which would threaten the social order upon which their privileges depend.

The other key instrument in such efforts is the pseudo-left's complete defence of the trade union bureaucracy. Brown again falsifies the IYSSE's position on this question, claiming incorrectly that the IYSSE calls solely for workers to leave the unions.

This lie is connected to a fulsome support for the union bureaucracy. "The point of a union is to gain higher wages and better working conditions, which is something that most if not all of us want," Brown writes.

But this is precisely what the unions have not done for at least four decades. Instead, they have presided over one sell-out agreement after another, enforcing the dictates of the corporate and financial elite for continuous attacks on workers' jobs, wages and conditions.

Brown, in passing, references the fact that "a few [unions] openly collaborate with the bosses," but in fact, this is a universal tendency, involving literally every established trade union in this country and internationally.

The unions have taken the nationalist and pro-capitalist program they were founded on to its logical conclusion. Their previous program, of seeking limited reforms within capitalism to ultimately defend the profit system, has been rendered completely unviable by the globalisation of production. The unions have responded by becoming the chief advocates of ensuring that "their" national industry remains competitive on the international market. This, they achieve by enforcing a continuous race to the bottom, as capital scours the globe looking for the highest returns and the lowest labour costs.

At the same time, the union bureaucracy has developed material privileges that place it within the political and corporate elite. Union officials receive six-figure salaries, sit on the boards of major superannuation funds, and collaborate with corporations on a daily basis. The basis of their privileges is their role as an industrial and political police force of management and governments.

The IYSSE does not call for workers to "leave the unions." Instead, it raises the necessity for genuine organisations of struggle democratically controlled by workers themselves. Such rank-and-file committees have been established by workers in a host of industries, in this country and around the world. The IYSSE, moreover, seeks to link these committees up in a global movement against the nationalism of the unions.

This principled fight, for the independent interests of the working class, is anathema to the pseudo-left. Brown writes: "You can be an active union member and have even more radical politics in your personal/political life." In other words, you can accept the dictatorship of the bureaucracy over workers and not challenge its reactionary nationalism, while posturing as "left-wing" and even "socialist" in your "personal life."

The Socialist Club was previously associated with Socialist Alliance and helped organise its events at the University of Newcastle.

Socialist Alliance is one of the main pseudo-left parties in Australia. Throughout a decades-long evolution, which began with an explicit rejection of genuine Marxism and Trotskyism, this outfit has shifted ever further to the right.

Domestically, Socialist Alliance scarcely even maintains the pretence of being socialist. In elections it advances a program indistinguishable from the Greens, largely refraining from any attacks on capitalism or socialist demands. It invariably calls for workers and young people to support the big business Labor Party. It promotes the same right-wing identity politics contained in Brown's article.

Internationally, Socialist Alliance, like much of the pseudo-left, has openly joined the camp of imperialist war. It has functioned as a fullsome defender of the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, falsely branding it as a war for "democracy" and "sovereignty," even as the US pours vast resources into the conflict to further its longstanding preparations for a direct war against Russia. Socialist Alliance supported the Australian imperialist intervention into East Timor in 1999 and lent credence to the CIA-led regime change operations in Syria and Libya last decade.

The Socialist Club appears to have fallen out with Socialist Alliance. Instead, the Socialist Club has oriented towards Maoism, the Chinese variant of Stalinism. It, together with Socialist Alliance, has given no public accounting of the differences, demonstrating the opportunism of both. Socialist Alliance, which once falsely claimed an association with Trotskyism, has, it appears, been in a relationship with students who identify with Stalinism.

Stalinism was responsible for the greatest betrayals of the working class in history. Within the Soviet Union, Stalinism was the usurpation of political power from the working class by a privileged bureaucracy that emerged on the basis of the isolation of the revolution and the material backwardness of Russian society. The bureaucracy would, in the 1930s, murder the entire generation that had led the revolution, culminating in the assassination of its co-leader Leon Trotsky in 1940. At the same time, it betrayed innumerable revolutionary struggles based on the nationalist and anti-Marxist program of "socialism in one country."

Mao defended this entire heritage. His sole theoretical "contribution" was an even more explicit rejection of the revolutionary role of the working class than that put forward by Stalin and an open defence of class collaboration with elements of the ruling elite. Maoism has led to disasters throughout Asia and internationally.

Moreover, just as the globalisation of production rendered the nationalist program of the unions unviable, so too did it undercut the autarkic program of the Stalinist states. In its final betrayal, the Soviet bureaucracy restored capitalism in 1991, while the Chinese Communist Party regime now presides over the country that boasts the fastest growing number of billionaires.

The attraction to Maoism, among middle-class layers, has always been based on its rejection of the revolutionary role of the working class and its claim that other social forces, whether peasants, students or other non-proletarian social elements, instead represent the way forward.

The IYSSE urges students who are interested in a genuine socialist perspective to contact us. Our movement is based on the whole heritage of the Marxist movement, from the 1917 Russian Revolution to the struggle against its Stalinist betrayal led by Trotsky and the Fourth International. This socialist and internationalist perspective must be taken up and fought for in the working class amid the current breakdown of capitalism.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact