

IYSSE holds powerful anti-war meeting in Toronto, defeating government-backed censorship campaign, far-right Ukrainian disrupters

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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) held the first anti-war meeting in Toronto since the war in Ukraine began 15 months ago on Sunday, June 4. The meeting—which issued a powerful call for the building of a global working class-led, anti-war movement—proceeded in the face of a state-backed campaign, led by the far-right Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) and supported by Ontario’s Labour Minister Monte McNaughton, to censor it, and the efforts of bellicose Ukrainian nationalists to disrupt it.

A petition opposing the censorship campaign has been signed by nearly 1,000 people from around the globe and former Pink Floyd-frontman Roger Waters tweeted in support of the IYSSE’s right to hold the meeting.

The anti-war meeting was also endorsed by the Young Guard of Bolshevik Leninists in Russia and Ukraine, who expressed their solidarity and support in a letter. “If imperialism is willing to shed blood in war and attack all the basic democratic rights won by the revolutionary struggles of the past, we have an obligation to resist,” they wrote. “Such resistance can create the best impetus for launching a broader international struggle of the working class.”

The meeting was held at the Lillian H. Smith Branch of the Toronto Public Library, just off the University of Toronto campus. It was the latest in an international series of meetings sponsored by the IYSSE, the youth movement of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and its Socialist Equality Parties, to address the historical and political context of the devastating US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and to discuss how to build a movement in the working class to put an end to the conflict. Central to this discussion was the disastrous consequences of the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union and restoration of capitalism, which created the conditions for the present imperialist onslaught aimed at dismembering Russia and plundering its natural resources.

Two previous meetings in the series were held in Canada—in Montreal, Quebec and Waterloo, Ontario. In Waterloo, the IYSSE successfully rebuffed an effort by the UCC to pressure the University of Waterloo to cancel the meeting. Right-wing elements

also sought to cancel IYSSE meetings opposing the war held in Frankfurt, Germany and Wellington, New Zealand, but were similarly unsuccessful.

A contingent of Ukrainian nationalists who attended the meeting in Toronto repeatedly disrupted the speakers by shouting, and sought to intimidate other attendees by filming them, in violation of the guidelines set out by the library. Some stormed out of the meeting during the question-and-answer period, shouting the fascist slogan “Slava Ukraini, Heroiam Slava!” (Glory to Ukraine, Glory to the Heroes), which was popularized by Nazi collaborators during World War II.

Introducing the meeting, IYSSE member Dylan Lubao noted that the campaign to cancel the meeting was motivated by the fear among right-wing forces that any open criticism and scrutiny of their pro-war narrative would explode the lie that NATO is waging war, in all but name, against Russia to defend Ukrainian “democracy” and “sovereignty.” It would also quickly expose the reality that they have little support among the broader population, despite their backing from within the Canadian state and every establishment political party, including the trade union-sponsored New Democratic Party (NDP).

Lubao also outlined the COVID-19 precautions which the IYSSE had taken to protect those attending the meeting, including providing every member of the audience with a high quality mask, along with the use of portable air filtration devices and a far-UVC lamp to disinfect the air. Despite the insistence of the media and the Canadian government that the pandemic is over, the virus continues to sicken thousands across the country every day and hundreds of thousands around the world. Due to the “profits before lives” policy pursued at every level of government, COVID-19 is now the third leading cause of death in Canada, having needlessly killed more than 52,000 Canadians since 2020.

Keith Jones, the national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (Canada), delivered the main lecture. He began by noting the horrific consequences of the war not only for Ukrainians and Russians, but for the entire world. “The war and the economic sanctions imposed by NATO have disrupted economic life around the globe, impoverishing hundreds of millions, including in

Europe, and threatening masses of people in lesser developed countries with hunger and worse.”

He reviewed the massive military buildup in Ukraine, which has seen the US and its allies flood the country with advanced weaponry, including tanks and, soon, F-16 fighter jets, as the imperialist powers press Kiev to go on the offensive against Russia. “Having invested the entire prestige of the United States and NATO in waging this war with Russia, the Biden administration and US imperialism cannot tolerate the failure of their military and geopolitical objectives.”

Jones made clear that the SEP and the IYSSE were not “partisans of either side in this conflict,” adding, “We are irreconcilable opponents of all those responsible for this war, whether they sit in the White House or the Kremlin.” The aim of the meeting series sponsored by the IYSSE is to mobilize working people around the world to put an end to the war.

“To build a genuine mass anti-war movement, it is necessary to oppose the unrelenting propaganda barrage of the political establishment and corporate media,” Jones remarked. “This campaign of lies and disinformation—accompanied by increasingly aggressive acts of political censorship, as in the Ontario government-supported campaign to cancel this meeting—is at full throttle in Canada.” He noted that Canadian imperialism has played a key role in preparing and prosecuting the war in Ukraine, with a goal of “regime-change” in Moscow, as was publicly declared by Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly in March.

As other speakers have done in the series of meetings, Jones then outlined the historical background of the war in Ukraine. “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—the 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 said.

“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,” he explained. Jones reviewed how, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and restoration of capitalism by the Stalinist bureaucracy in 1991, the US has waged a series of illegal wars over wide swathes of the world, while NATO has dramatically expanded right up to Russia’s western border. Jones noted the bitter hostility of the far-right Ukrainian nationalists and their imperialist patrons to discussing this history, since it completely demolishes their pro-war narrative that describes the conflict as “Putin’s unprovoked war.”

When Jones turned to the question of the Canadian state’s role in politically and ideologically preparing the war in Ukraine through its decades-long alliance with Ukrainian far-right nationalists, in particular, veterans of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the 14th Waffen SS Division, UCC-aligned provocateurs in the crowd erupted in snickers and shouts, seeking to break up the meeting. Jones called them out, denouncing as repugnant their indifference to the fact that they promote forces which were Hitler’s henchmen in carrying out the Holocaust.

He concluded his remarks by appealing for the unity of workers and young people in Canada, Ukraine, Russia and every country in the building of a mass movement against war. “Such a movement must be rooted in and led by the working class—the class that produces society’s wealth, and which, as Marx so correctly noted, is an international class whose interests lie not in supporting one national-based rival clique of capitalists in securing advantages over another, but in overthrowing capitalism and securing the democratic rights and freedoms of all peoples in a more advanced global society—socialism.”

During the question-and-answer period, a young audience member raised her skepticism that the perspective outlined by Jones could end the war in Ukraine. “We are told there are only two forces which we have to choose between: NATO and its Ukrainian proxies and Russia. We reject that,” Jones replied. “We look not to the war map but the map of the class struggle. We look to the international working class to intervene in the situation. This is not a utopian perspective; this is in fact how the First World War ended.”

Jones went on to explain how the 1917 Russian Revolution, which brought the working class to power under the leadership of the Bolsheviks, laid the basis for the creation of a Soviet Ukraine and voluntary cooperation among the many peoples previously ruthlessly oppressed under the Tsarist autocracy.

When WSWS writer James Clayton attempted to speak about the series he co-wrote, “Canadian imperialism’s fascist friends,” and to explain the significance of Leon Trotsky’s theory of Permanent Revolution for Ukraine, the contingent of far-right Ukrainian nationalist provocateurs erupted in shouting, including the fascist slogan of the OUN, seeking to shut down any discussion.

The failure of the Ukrainian nationalists to cancel the IYSSE’s Toronto meeting, and barring that to disrupt the anti-war lecture, speaks to their relative isolation and the latent anti-war sentiment among broad layers of workers and youth, despite the unstinting support they receive from the state apparatus and a daily barrage of propaganda in the media.

In Toronto, the largest city in Canada and the headquarters of the Ukrainian World Congress, led by former UCC President Paul Grod, they were able to mobilize fewer than 40 people in their attempt to shut down the IYSSE meeting. Meanwhile, another 40 attendees were keen on hearing Jones’ lecture, and many expressed their appreciation for the IYSSE being the only political organization to hold an anti-war meeting in Toronto since the war in Ukraine began.



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