

Sydney's Macquarie University refuses to affiliate IYSSE club, despite it meeting all requirements

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In a significant attack on democratic rights, Macquarie University, one of the largest in Sydney, is refusing to affiliate the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) club. It has decreed that the IYSSE cannot be officially registered, despite it having met every one of the stipulated requirements.

That is blatant political discrimination. It serves to bar students and young people from encountering and discussing a socialist perspective, amid a major crisis of the global capitalist system. The ban is thus not only an attack on the IYSSE, but on the most fundamental rights of the student body.

The IYSSE held a successful Annual General Meeting (AGM) on May 3. The quorum requirement was met and a full club executive was voted in. The documents from the AGM, including a student membership list above the requirement, were submitted by the executive on May 12.

On May 25, the Student Engagement, Inclusion & Belonging division sent an email, requesting a meeting with the IYSSE executive, without indicating the topic or purpose. That body is a direct arm of Macquarie University management.

In a reply, the IYSSE executive enquired what the topic of discussion would be and stated that due to scheduling issues it would not be able to meet the following week. It expressed concern that the affiliation had not been confirmed and requested that it be so without delay.

On May 29, Paul McKay, a university manager, responded on behalf of Student Engagement, Inclusion & Belonging. His email stated: "Our team has requested a meeting with you or your group to discuss your application as it has been determined that your group does not meet the requirement of being unique. Another student group with the same aim and purpose is already affiliated, and affiliating multiple groups for the same cohort will limit our team's ability to serve all student groups.

"We appreciate your interest in promoting the socialist perspective and suggest that you consider strengthening our already established MQ Socialists, as it is a requirement for all affiliated clubs to be open and inclusive to all MQ students."

The Macquarie Socialists is a student club associated with the pseudo-left Socialist Alternative. The IYSSE is the youth wing of the Socialist Equality Party and the world Trotskyist movement. They are, in other words, entirely separate organisations, with different affiliations reflecting fundamental political and programmatic issues.

In a reply later on May 29, the IYSSE executive rejected McKay's entirely false assertions. "In fact, we have diametrically opposed

aims," the IYSSE wrote. "Our differences with Socialist Alternative, with which the Macquarie Socialists are affiliated, are a matter of longstanding public record and are well-known to politically-literate individuals. We have opposed aims and purposes, reflecting different political programs, histories and political affiliations."

This issue had been tested at other campuses, where student unions and administrations had previously sought to block the IYSSE from affiliating, based on the very same assertion that it had "overlapping aims" with the student groups of Socialist Alternative.

The letter cited the example of the University of Melbourne, where the IYSSE waged a protracted and successful campaign against an attempt to block its affiliation on precisely those grounds.

At Macquarie University, moreover, the IYSSE was affiliated from 2010 until 2022. Over a substantial portion of that period, the Macquarie Socialists were also a registered club. That was a tacit acknowledgment, by the relevant management bodies, that the two groups did not have the same aims and thus required an independent existence.

In a reply on May 30, McKay ignored these issues. He stated that he could not "provide any comment" on developments at the University of Melbourne. Nor, McKay indicated, could he pass judgment on anything that had occurred at Macquarie University prior to his accession to the role of Manager for 1st Year Experience and Peer Programs. He only started the job in March, 2023.

Most significantly, McKay stated: "We have several groups already affiliated with us, but they have different opinions on the same goal, particularly within the political, cultural, and religious domains." In fact the university currently has two Catholic clubs, separated along racial lines, as well as three clubs representing evangelical Christian denominations.

The IYSSE does not just have conflicting "opinions" with the Macquarie Socialists. Our differences—in fact an unbridgeable gulf—cover the entire gamut of socialist history, strategy and principles spanning more than a century. They are of the most fundamental and irreconcilable character.

Socialist Alternative and its student affiliates are a component of the pseudo-left, which represents not the working class and the fight for socialism, but an affluent layer of the upper middle-class that defends capitalism.

The political aim of the IYSSE is to build a revolutionary socialist youth movement affiliated to the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement, for the mobilisation of youth and workers on a socialist program.

Our opposed class orientations find concrete expression on all of the major political questions of the day.

Socialist Alternative supports the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine; we oppose it and fight to build a socialist anti-war movement of the international working class. Socialist Alternative defends the trade union bureaucracy which acts as a policeman for governments and the corporations; we fight to independently mobilise workers against it through the formation of rank-and-file committees. In elections, Socialist Alternative calls for a vote for Labor and the Greens as “lesser-evils”; we denounce this as a reactionary attempt to tie workers and youth to the capitalist political establishment and support Socialist Equality Party candidates.

The list could go on. But even this small sampling is proof positive that the IYSSE and Socialist Alternative are separated by substantially more than “different opinions on the same goal,” though even if that alone were the case, McKay’s email indicates it would be sufficient for our affiliation to proceed. To demand that the IYSSE “strengthen our already established MQ Socialists” is a demand that we renounce our political views and adopt diametrically opposed positions, something that is incompatible with democracy.

In a final reply on June 1, the IYSSE reviewed all of the proceeding correspondence. It underscored the fact that when the Student Engagement, Inclusion & Belonging first contacted our executive, a decision had already been made, rejecting affiliation.

The IYSSE email stated: “Please inform us when the decision not to proceed with our affiliation was made, who made this decision and outline concretely the basis of this decision.” It went on to “request a copy of any of the meeting minutes detailing the discussion that led to this decision and an outline of how these details were thoroughly reviewed.”

Later, the email asked: “Did you, or anybody in your team, make any attempt to examine if we and the Macquarie Socialists have the same aims? Did you read any of the voluminous material we have published on precisely this issue? Did you contact anybody within the Macquarie Socialists about this claim? You have certainly not spoken to us about this as you have made clear the decision has already been made.”

McKay responded with a two-line email, answering none of those questions, and simply copy-pasting a link to the university’s complaints body that he had already sent the IYSSE.

Several issues emerge.

McKay’s failure to justify the decision, to provide any information on how it was made or to answer the substantive issues raised by the IYSSE indicates that the refusal to affiliate was made at higher levels of university management. Macquarie University, as one of the country’s largest, has innumerable ties to the political establishment, as well as to the military-intelligence apparatuses.

The decision sheds light on the disaffiliation of the IYSSE in May 2022. It, together with 45 percent of student clubs, were disaffiliated after Student Engagement, Inclusion & Belonging changed its rules without prior notification and demanded that all clubs re-register within an 18-day period or be banned. That was a broad cull, associated with the ever-greater corporatisation of the university.

But the latest refusal demonstrates that the IYSSE, a revolutionary, socialist organisation, has been specifically targeted.

Notably, it followed a successful IYSSE meeting at Macquarie University on May 4, opposing the US-NATO war in Ukraine. That was part of a global series, titled “The War in Ukraine and How to Stop It.”

As in multiple other countries, the IYSSE’s Macquarie University meeting was attacked online by far-right Ukrainian nationalists and supporters of American imperialism. The university allowed the meeting to proceed, but it did not take a clear stand in defence of democratic rights. When one individual wrote to management demanding that the room booking be cancelled, the relevant university body simply forwarded the email to the IYSSE and suggested that we reply to it.

In Australia and internationally, there is a growing campaign by governments and their state apparatuses, together with elements of the far-right, to crack down on the expression of anti-war sentiment. That reflects acute fear, within the corridors of power, over mounting hostility to militarism and war among workers, students and young people. Such sentiments coincide with an ongoing rise of the class struggle, fuelled by the criminal “let it rip” policies pursued by governments around the world and the worst cost-of-living crisis in decades.

Capitalism is in crisis, socialism is increasingly popular, governments know they are sitting on a powder keg. In every such period of history, the universities have emerged as hotbeds of social and political opposition. The refusal to affiliate the IYSSE is a preemptive strike to censor this necessary process of political ferment, discussion and clarification.

This is a situation that cannot stand and that the IYSSE will not accept. We call on all defenders of democratic rights to demand that management immediately overturn its decision, and affiliate our club. If the decision is not reversed, it will serve as a precedent and a battering ram against the right of students to politically organise, not only at Macquarie University, but at campuses across the country. We call on all other student clubs at Macquarie University, as well as student groups across the country and internationally to oppose the suppression of the IYSSE and to demand our affiliation, together with academics and staff who defend civil liberties.

The IYSSE will conduct a widespread campaign until its affiliation is confirmed.



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