Australia: Despite opposition, IYSSE at University of Newcastle proceeds with speakout

Our reporters
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) held a speakout last Friday at the University of Newcastle, in the regional city north of Sydney, Australia. Despite efforts from management and the University of Newcastle Students Association (UNSA) to prevent the event from going ahead, IYSSE members spoke in support of the Socialist Equality Party's campaign for an active boycott of the Voice Referendum against the pro-business racialism of the official Yes and No campaigns.

The day after the speakout, the Voice was overwhelmingly defeated. The result was extremely polarised along class lines, and expressed growing hostility among working people to the Labor government and the whole political establishment.

The IYSSE speakers also condemned Israel's genocidal onslaught on the Palestinians, and urged students to mobilise against it.

Julia, a member of the IYSSE, spoke on the conditions facing Aboriginal people.

"Working people confront the biggest cost of living crisis in decades. Labor falsely presents the Voice as a means of improving the appalling and deteriorating conditions of Aboriginal people which is but the sharpest expression of the assault on the entire working class.

"Both the official Yes and No campaigns have pledged to cut money to indigenous services, but the government knows full well that the way to improve conditions for Aboriginal people is in education, healthcare and other social necessities.

"In reality new expenditure in indigenous health is only $125 million, or the equivalent of $127 per Aboriginal person. The slashing of social spending is reflected in the budget more broadly; Jobseeker payments have increased by just $20 a week from 41 percent to 44 percent of the poverty line. What are they cutting this money to pay for? Stage 3 tax cuts for the rich, record levels of military spending, nuclear submarines totalling $368 billion. No vote or referendum was taken for any of these!"

Robert, the president of the IYSSE, stated, "we are warning to students that if passed through, the Voice will be used to attack conditions facing aboriginal people. This is part and parcel of a Labor government hostile to the working class as a whole.

"Are we really expected to believe that the same government attacking healthcare, education and presiding over the slashing of jobs is to be the saving grace for the problems facing the most oppressed sections of the working class? The same government that prior to the federal election promised a 'better future' for all Australians and then afterwards told them they had to make 'sacrifices'?

"The same government siding with Israel in a genocidal war against its own indigenous people? At the same time as it claims to give Aboriginal people a 'voice' it threatens to the full force of the law to shut down the Free Palestine protests taking place in Sydney this Sunday."

Youp, the treasurer of the IYSSE said, "The Voice is a struggle by two rival camps of the ruling class ultimately aligned behind the same program of war and austerity. The Labor Party was founded on the racist White Australia policy and presided over the stolen generation. Most workers voting No have a healthy skepticism that Labor will do nothing to improve the living standards for the mass of indigenous people. A

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win for the No camp, on the other hand, will be falsely framed as a win for the far-right politics of the Liberal Party."

IYSSE members also denounced the sudden decision by management and the University of Newcastle Student Association (UNSA) to revoke the student club's rights to be able to use PA Systems.

The IYSSE had initially intended to hold a speakout on Wednesday, which was given approval by UNSA. On Tuesday, the IYSSE received an email from "Venues and Events," a management body, advising that "unless otherwise specified by UNSA" using a PA system would be "counterproductive" to UNSA's antidemocratic club guidelines which "doesn't allow clubs to solicit audiences." "Venues and Events" advised the speakout to not go ahead.

On Wednesday, the power for the Auchmuty courtyard was inexplicably turned off. The courtyard has been the location for numerous student speakouts and events. The IYSSE has hosted rallies and speakouts there opposing the 2014 fascist coup in Ukraine, the wars in Iraq, Libya, Syria and Afghanistan, the persecution of Julian Assange, and cuts to jobs and courses at the university.

The IYSSE postponed the speakout to Friday hoping to resolve the apparent technical issue. It was informed on Friday by UNSA, however, that no clubs and societies were allowed to use a microphone or speaker in the courtyard. The blatant censorship was carried out on the absurd claim of keeping things "equitable" and "respectful" for students and other clubs.

The IYSSE proceeded to conduct the speakout without a PA system.

John, an IYSSE member, said, "this decree to silence the IYSSE and other clubs comes from university management and has been allowed and enacted by UNSA. It occurs amid attempts internationally to ban and shut down popular protests in support of the Palestinian uprising against occupation by the Israeli Zionist regime.

"Already supporting the war in Ukraine, Australia is also preparing to play a key role as a southern anchor in a US-led war against China. Capitalism threatens a nuclear catastrophe. It is under these conditions that UoN and UNSA are seeking to prevent an anti-war and socialist club on campus from speaking to the student body. They cannot prepare for war abroad without an attack on the democratic rights of students and young people at home. We are mobilising students in opposition to this."

The IYSSE is holding its Annual General Meeting on Friday 27th October at 12pm. It encourages all students and youth in the area to attend and continue the SEP's call for an active boycott campaign in the working class for a socialist program to build a socialist movement in the working class to confront the social crisis facing, not only indigenous workers, but the working class as a whole and oppose imperialist wars abroad.

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