Australia: IYSSE club at VU holds successful affiliation meeting opposing Gaza genocide

Our reporters
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) club at Victoria University (VU) in Melbourne, Australia held a successful Inaugural General Meeting (IGM) on Thursday to reaffiliate the only anti-war club on campus.

Attended by more than 20 students and young people, the event surpassed the quorum of 10 VU student members of the club in attendance required by VU management. It elected a new club executive and passed the IYSSE's constitution and aims as the youth and student wing of the Socialist Equality Party, the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International—the world Trotskyist movement.

Following the formal proceedings of the meeting, the IYSSE held a political discussion under the banner, "Stop Israel's genocide against Gaza!"

Last week, VU management attempted to have the IYSSE's meeting shut down. This was done based of false assertions that the IYSSE's event would cause some students to feel "unsafe." VU security tore down IYSSE posters and the IYSSE was informed that its meeting would not be allowed to discuss Gaza, its campaigners would not be able to distribute leaflets about it, and the club must cease all activities on campus related to the Israeli bombardment.

The IYSSE launched a powerful campaign against this brazen political censorship.

VU management were sent letters of protest from other IYSSE clubs in the city, at University of Melbourne and La Trobe University. IYSSE clubs from around Australia and New Zealand (Western Sydney University, the University of Newcastle, Victoria University Wellington in New Zealand) also sent letters of objection.

The Committee For Public Education, academics and young people in Melbourne and Brisbane protested.

The IYSSE also alerted other clubs of the attack on freedom of speech on campus. The Victoria University Psychology Society (VUPS) replied with a powerful letter of support to the IYSSE. Its president wrote:

> Thank you for reaching out, it is a shame to see that VU management is actively oppressing efforts to advocate and campaign against the genocide. VUPS stands with Palestine, and we would love to show our support in helping you proceed with your meeting. We will write a letter to protest their censorship.

The VUPS committee sent members to the IYSSE IGM.

The campaign mobilising VU students in defence of the democratic right to freedom of speech on campus compelled management to allow the event to proceed unhindered.

An opening report was delivered by Morgan Peach, president of the IYSSE's club at the University of Melbourne.

Meeting attendees enthusiastically engaged in the discussion about Israel's genocide against Palestinians in Gaza and the IYSSE's socialist perspective to end war and oppression.

Many of those attending the meeting are from regions of the world devastated by imperialist aggression.

VU has a large proportion of students with Middle Eastern and African backgrounds. Based in Melbourne's working-class and migrant-rich western suburbs, 47 percent of its higher education students are the first in their families go to university. More than 30 percent of the university's domestic students were born in another country.

In the course of the discussion, students expressed their gratitude to the IYSSE for holding the event. They asked questions about the extent of political censorship in Australian universities, what other initiatives the IYSSE will be carrying out on campus, and how to take forward the fight against the Gaza genocide and the global eruption of imperialist militarism.

IYSSE members spoke with students who attended after the meeting.

Samya, a psychology student with an Ethiopian background and president-elect of the club, said "it is so important" that the only anti-war club is reaffiliated on

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campus. “I found the meeting very effective. It was nice to speak with people on the same wavelength considering how much controversy is being whipped up about this matter. But to me, it’s very simple. … It’s genocide. It’s so nice to be with people who want to make a difference.”

“I’ve cried so many nights because of how horrifying the situation is in Gaza,” Samya said. “A genocide is genocide, and 10,000 lives are lives. It’s not a light subject. … There are lots of people at the university who aren’t aware of the details of what’s going on. We have to spread information.”

In response to the mass protests that have erupted internationally, Samya said it was encouraging to see huge numbers of people prepared to fight against the Israeli bombardment.

“It’s amazing. The situation is so sad that it’s hard to look at anything in a positive light. But, at the same time, it’s so crucial for the numbers to be shown. It feels very unifying. And the media doesn’t want to show this.”

The student said that the support shown by the imperialist powers to Israel is “not surprising” and was based on “money-hungry governments looking to get more power.”

At Thursday’s meeting, the IYSSE emphasised that youth and students have to turn to the working class as the only social force which can end war and oppression.

“It’s very important for young people to be involved. It’s our future, right? If we don’t get involved, who are we leaving our future in the hands of? We can change the narrative and change the perspective in the working class. I think that is deeply related,” Samya said.

“I’ve been seeing videos of the blockades on ships and people refusing to work. It’s so important and so progressive.”

An exercise science student, **Jesse**, said the situation is “horrifying, but really not surprising given the increased tension in the Middle East over decades.”

On the claim promoted in the media and political establishment that opposition to the Zionist state’s genocide in Gaza is antisemitic, the student said, “honestly, that’s ridiculous. There are Jewish people who support Palestinians. It’s not antisemitic to despise the act of genocide, it doesn’t matter who’s doing it.”

“The meeting was interesting,” Jesse said. “It’s nice to feel like I’m not alone on this subject. With the mass media calling people who support Palestine antisemites, I was afraid to even mention it outside my immediate family.”

Tam studies law and works at the VU library. She came to the meeting after seeing the IYSSE’s posters on campus. “I was immediately attracted to this, just like we all should be,” she said.

“In the past, I never experienced any racism or discrimination on the streets of Melbourne. To be honest, it was very new to me, in the recent times that this is happening, with Gaza. If anyone saw me with a Palestinian head scarf, they might swear at me out of nowhere, that happened to me two weeks ago when I was going to the pro-Palestine rally.”

“I feel like the majority of Australians are pro-Palestine,” Tam said. “They see what is happening in Palestine. Nobody supports genocide. It is the media and the politicians who push the idea that Israel can defend itself, even when they are killing innocent civilians, even when they are killing children. That’s not self-defence, that’s genocide. That’s what I think all Australians believe. The media and the politicians, they have their own political interests, therefore they are pushing the pro-Israeli side.”

Asked why the imperialist powers including the US and Australia are supporting the Israeli bombardment, Tam said: “There is free gas, free oil that they can take, like they did in Iraq, for their own interests. They don’t even care about the Israelis.”

The IYSSE member related the genocide in Gaza to the imperialist redivision of the world, including the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine.

“I agree with that. Before the war in Ukraine, the US kept pushing that we are going to support Ukraine if anything happened. We are going to be backing them up. But once the war starts, it’s the civilians again who are suffering. It is civilians losing their houses, becoming refugees, it’s not the politicians. It’s the working class, as you say.”

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