

Australia: Pseudo-left seek to block IYSSE's socialist campaigning at Victoria University with provocations, lies

Owen Howell, Oscar Grenfell
13 February 2026

On two occasions over the past week and a half, members of the pseudo-left Socialist Alternative (SAIt) organisation have sought to obstruct campaigns by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at Victoria University in Melbourne.

SAIt's actions go far beyond the bounds of legitimate political discussion or debate. They have been attempts to prevent the IYSSE from discussing a socialist perspective with students at working-class campuses, where it has been an affiliated club for a decade. The *modus operandi* has been provocation, harassment and lies.

Both incidents occurred at orientation events marking the beginning of the academic year, the first at Footscray Nicholson campus on February 5, the second at Footscray Park campus last Thursday.

On the first occasion, three members of SAIt came over to the IYSSE's stall, interrupting discussions with students and hurling false allegations. They repeatedly returned, despite being asked to leave. On the second, two members of SAIt did the same, but desisted when an IYSSE member filmed them and demanded they leave its club alone.

Both obstruction attempts were led by James McVicar, a prominent member of SAIt, who is also the education officer of the National Union of Students. McVicar's role, and the fact that SAIt members staged similar provocations against the IYSSE last year, including at Western Sydney University, indicates a nationally-coordinated attempt to hinder the IYSSE approved by SAIt's leadership.

In each incident, the playbook was the same. McVicar and other SAIt members began shouting that the IYSSE was "pro-sexism" and endorsed "sexual assault," and demanding to know whether students engaged in discussion with the IYSSE held those positions also. The claims are offensive and inflammatory lies. As the youth wing of the Socialist Equality Party, the IYSSE opposes all forms of exploitation and oppression.

In attempting to justify their allegations, all that McVicar and the other SAIt members could state was that the IYSSE "opposes the MeToo movement" as though that were a damning and unanswerable indictment.

In fact the IYSSE has made no secret of its opposition to the discredited and largely defunct MeToo movement, which was a campaign orchestrated by powerful sections of the ruling class to attack core democratic rights and to pollute political consciousness.

SAIt is attempting to take advantage, not only of the politically reactionary atmosphere on university campuses, where anti-Marxist identity politics have been promoted for decades, but also to exploit the fact that most young people beginning university today likely know little or nothing about MeToo, including its origins, class

character and political aims.

MeToo was launched in 2017 by the *New York Times* and the Democratic Party, two ruling-class institutions of American imperialism. Overnight and seemingly apropos nothing, both insisted that the primary issue in society was sexual misconduct by men against women, particularly in Hollywood, the arts and other privileged circles.

That assertion was aimed at deflecting a growing opposition to the fascistic Trump administration into the most reactionary channels. It was based on the fraudulent claim that gender, not class, was the fundamental division in American society and that redress could be found through the public vilification of "powerful" men.

In practice, that involved the *Times* and other corporate outlets publishing lurid and unsubstantiated accusations against individuals, often based on the claims of unidentified sources. Events that supposedly occurred decades before were dredged up, with those accused having no possibility or option of refuting the claims. Many of those targeted were Jewish, and/or had a reputation for cultural non-conformity. A vast gamut of alleged conduct was conflated, ranging from claims of serious sexual assault to such things as sexual propositions and even unsatisfying consensual sexual encounters.

Most significantly, MeToo explicitly opposed the presumption of innocence and the right to a fair trial. These cornerstones of democratic rights, established over centuries of struggle against tyranny and despotism, had to be dispensed with entirely. The criminal burden of proof was to be overturned, on the basis of the fantastical assertion that it was necessary to "believe women" on all occasions and in all circumstances.

MeToo succeeded in destroying careers and even lives. But it resulted in virtually no criminal prosecutions. The attempt by sections of the media to transplant MeToo to Australia was similarly a failure on that front. While highly-talented and significant figures such as Geoffrey Rush were drummed out of their industries and vilified, the legal actions that ensued were successful defamation claims won by those targeted by the MeToo witch hunters.

The anti-democratic *modus operandi* expressed the class essence of MeToo. The defence of democratic rights is vital to workers and the poor, who are the primary targets of state persecution and harassment. But MeToo had nothing to do with the defence of the oppressed. Instead, its social base consisted of a grasping and affluent layer of the upper middle-class, seeking to gain greater privilege, including through the weaponised deployment of gender politics.

SAIt is promoting MeToo years after it entered a state of dormancy.

Under conditions where unsubstantiated accusations were increasingly being refuted, and where they were supporting Joe Biden, himself the subject of sexual assault allegations, as presidential candidate, the Democratic Party, the *New York Times* and their periphery turned off the MeToo tap as abruptly as they had turned it on, demonstrating its conflicted character.

It should also be noted that in the years since, it has become clear that many of MeToo's promoters in the media and political establishment were either aware of, or even involved in, the network maintained by Jeffrey Epstein, based on the industrial-scale trafficking and sexual exploitation of vulnerable young women and girls. The response of the MeToo champions to the Epstein revelations is largely a shrug or an embarrassed silence.

As early as 2018, the discrediting of the MeToo movement found a notable expression in an article published in SALT's own *Red Flag* newspaper. Its author, Sarah Garnham, then as now a leading member of SALT, began by stating that “#MeToo is sensational, gimmicky and mainly focused on Hollywood and other elite hierarchies...”

Garnham went on to note: “billionaires such as Oprah Winfrey enthusiastically embrace the campaign because they hope to keep it at the level of tokenism and individualism and also because liberal feminism has become a key part of how they justify their privilege.”

In the most significant portion of the article, Garnham obliquely referenced the attempts of MeToo to do away with the presumption of innocence, and responded that “left wing people should strongly oppose calls for all men accused of sexual assault or harassment to be punished without trial. We cannot rely on the authorities, within either our industries or the state, to provide justice.” That was necessary, in part, because otherwise “the most victimised men will be punished under the guise of protecting women.”

Garnham's article was a cynical exercise in double-speak. While criticising elements of MeToo, she promoted it as a positive, as though there could be a “good” and a “bad” side to a ruling-class concoction directed against democratic rights. The article was fundamentally an appeal for MeToo to pay greater attention to the plight of working-class women, lest it be wholly discredited. In the years since Garnham's piece, *Red Flag* has referenced MeToo on only a handful of occasions, each of them peripheral mentions.

In other words, on the basis of the IYSSE's opposition to a movement that SALT now writes nothing about, and that it previously acknowledged was attacking fundamental democratic rights, it is seeking to blacklist us from university campuses! In its attempts to undermine the IYSSE through lies and unsubstantiated accusations, SALT is itself giving a demonstration of the reactionary, anti-democratic and anti-socialist character of MeToo and of the pseudo-left itself.

The other claim made by McVicar makes clear the essentially right-wing character of SALT's attacks on the IYSSE. During the first provocation, he declared that the IYSSE “supports the Putin regime in Russia.”

That is another lie. The IYSSE has a long-documented record of implacable opposition to the Russian government, which represents a corrupt oligarchy spawned by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the final crime of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

McVicar was referring to the fact that the IYSSE opposes, from the standpoint of socialist internationalism, the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. We have exposed American imperialism's role in provoking Russia's reactionary invasion, and the manner in which it has been used by NATO to press ahead with longstanding

plans for a direct assault on the Russian landmass aimed at dismembering it and stealing its resources. The IYSSE has fought for the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers, against the US, NATO and all of the oligarchic regimes, on the basis of a socialist program.

SALT, by contrast, has promoted the imperialist line of support for Ukraine, under conditions where it has been transformed into a garrison state of the US and NATO. The Ukrainian government has annulled elections, ruling as a dictatorship, and is literally dragging young men off the streets to send them to the frontlines to serve as cannon fodder.

McVicar's claim, that the IYSSE “supports Putin,” has been used to persecute our comrades in Ukraine, including the courageous socialist youth leader Bogdan Syriotiuk, who has been imprisoned for over a year for his principled opposition to the war.

On the issue of MeToo, SALT is drawing from the playbook of Joseph McCarthy. On the issue of Ukraine, it is in a de facto alliance with the CIA against anti-war socialists.

Such is the character of the pseudo-left. Whatever its occasional left-wing or socialist phraseology, SALT is a party not of the working class, but of the upper middle-class, seeking to advance its own interests within the framework of capitalist politics, in a similar manner to the proponents of MeToo.

The IYSSE and the SEP have exposed SALT's various reactionary positions, including its support for the CIA regime-change operation in Syria, which has resulted in the installation of a pro-US and pro-Israeli Al Qaeda linked regime, and its backing of the proxy war against Ukraine. We have opposed SALT's attempts to subordinate mass opposition to the genocide in Gaza to endless appeals to the very Labor government that is complicit in the war crimes.

The IYSSE has also detailed the utterly opportunist character of SALT's electoral fronts, such as the Victorian Socialists, which it is expanding nationally. They are political traps, based on a reformist program, in an era where the capitalist class has dispensed with reforms. Their real purpose is to funnel discontent back behind the crisis-ridden parliamentary set-up and to hoist SALT's ambitious leaders into the corridors of political power.

SALT has never answered a single one of our dozens of exposures, which have been read by thousands on the *World Socialist Web Site*. While the IYSSE conducts its struggle against the pseudo-left on the plain of Marxist analysis, citation and objectivity, they are only able to respond with malicious lies and attacks on our democratic rights.

All defenders of democratic rights and socialist-minded youth should insist that SALT immediately desist from obstructing the IYSSE's campaigns. It is doing the work of right-wing university managements, governments and the intelligence agencies for them.



To contact the WWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wws.org/contact