

Socialist Equality Group and IYSSE hold successful meeting in New Zealand against Iran war

Our correspondent

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The Socialist Equality Group (SEG) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in New Zealand held an important public meeting on May 19 at Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) to discuss the socialist strategy required to stop the US-Israeli war against Iran. It drew an engaged audience of 35 students and workers from NZ, the US, Australia, Iran and other countries.

It was the first in a series of meetings the Trotskyist movement is holding in NZ and Australia against the war, which includes meetings in Melbourne on May 24, Sydney and Brisbane on May 31 and Newcastle on June 6.

The chair, Clover, a leading member of the IYSSE at VUW, began by emphasising the brazen criminality of the war, calling it a “crime against peace, which was the principal charge brought against the Nazi leaders in the 1945–46 trials in Nuremberg.” She explained that the war against Iran was part of the drive by the US ruling class to dominate the planet, and “an essential stage in its preparation for the coming conflict with China.”

The National Party-led government in New Zealand, she said, “backs these imperialist aims, just as it defended the fascistic Trump regime’s attack on Venezuela and ongoing blockade of Cuba,” Israel’s genocide in Gaza and the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

The government’s move “to double military spending from one to two percent of GDP—spending almost \$13 billion over four years—will be paid for with vast social spending cuts in the upcoming austerity budget, to be presented on May 28.” There are plans to increase university student fees, raise the retirement age, and cut nearly 9,000 jobs from government departments.

Tom Peters, a leader of the SEG and writer for the *World Socialist Web Site*, delivered the main report. He explained that “The Trump administration and Netanyahu’s fascist regime have tried to justify this war with transparent lies. The assault on Iran has nothing to do with liberating its people or with stopping Tehran from developing a nuclear weapon...

“To end this war,” he continued, “the working class must understand what is really behind it.” He refuted the false narrative put forward by pseudo-left publications like *Jacobin*

magazine—affiliated to the Democratic Socialists of America—and US Senator Bernie Sanders, who have joined far-right and antisemitic figures like Tucker Carlson in claiming that Trump was duped into attacking Iran by Netanyahu.

Peters called such statements “a whitewash of the American ruling class. Of course, the Zionist regime and its lobby in Washington pushed aggressively for this war, and is using it to expand Israel’s borders. But to claim that the war is simply the product of Netanyahu and Trump is absurd.”

Successive Democratic and Republican administrations had sought regime change in Iran to reverse the 1979 Iranian revolution, which toppled the US-backed monarchy and prevented direct US access to Iranian oil. Peters noted that there had been “almost uninterrupted war in the Middle East for the past 35 years, including the illegal invasions on Afghanistan and Iraq under President George W. Bush” and the wars against Libya and Syria under President Obama. “All of these were steps towards a direct war against Iran.”

Peters explained: “The source of the war is not Trump’s personality, but the historic crisis of American capitalism. The United States is a country on the brink of bankruptcy. Its national debt stands at \$39 trillion. ... The main fear in US ruling circles is that if they do not act fast, they will lose their dominant position in the world economy and be overtaken by China.”

The SEG leader pointed to widespread opposition to the war, including the vast majority of people in the US and New Zealand. Soaring living costs, accelerated by the disruption of oil supplies through the Strait of Hormuz, was already pushing millions of people into struggles. He quoted Leon Trotsky’s statement in 1940 that war “speeds up enormously the political development,” creating the conditions for socialist demands to gain mass support.

He stressed that opposition to war, by itself, was not enough. Two-and-a-half years of massive global protests against the Gaza genocide had “failed to convince Joe Biden and Trump to stop supporting Israel. Appealing to the capitalist elites to change their minds has proven to be utterly futile.

“What is required is a socialist program and a party capable

of transforming mass opposition into a conscious fight to put an end to the capitalist system which is the cause of war.”

Such a party had to be built through “the political exposure of all the middle-class groups who promote illusions in capitalist parties and the union bureaucracy”—including the pseudo-left International Socialist Organisation and Socialist Aotearoa in New Zealand.

Socialist Aotearoa, Peters explained, “has organised rallies and meetings where they have invited speakers from Labour, the Greens and the [Council of Trade Unions] to portray themselves as opponents of the Iran war. ... This is a fraud. Labour is a party of big business and imperialism. The Labour-Greens coalition government of Jacinda Ardern [2017–2023] strengthened the alliance with Washington.”

Labour and the Public Service Association (PSA), NZ’s largest union, openly backed the government’s historic increase in military spending to prepare to join a US-led war against China. The unions had “refused to call a single industrial action to mobilise workers against the [Gaza] genocide; they did nothing to disrupt New Zealand’s trade with Israel and this country’s military alliance with the US.”

Peters urged those in attendance to join the SEG and fight to build it as the New Zealand section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

The reports were followed by more than an hour of animated discussion, including questions about how a revolution would unfold; the SEG’s position on the Treaty of Waitangi; and what is meant by the fight for the political independence of the working class.

Bahram, an Iranian worker living in Wellington, thanked the SEG and IYSSE for their presentation. He spoke about the growing threat of fascism, in order to suppress the class struggle and justify war. He explained that this included supporters of Reza Pahlavi, the son of Iran’s deposed US-backed Shah, who are threatening and attacking ordinary Iranians in New Zealand, North America and Europe who oppose the US-Israeli war.

Bahram, who participated in the 1979 revolution, made clear that he opposed the present Iranian regime, which he said was using the war to intensify its repression of political opponents.

One student asked for more information about the campaign by auto worker Will Lehman, who is seeking to stand for president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union in the US, on a socialist and anti-war program. He asked: “Is your strategy to take over the existing unions or build something completely independent from the current unions?”

Peters replied that the union bureaucracy functions as a wing of the state and “bears no resemblance to a workers’ organisation.” Lehman’s campaign calls for the UAW bureaucracy to be “dismantled and replaced with rank-and-file committees” democratically controlled by workers themselves, in order to carry out a real struggle against the Trump administration’s war machine and attacks on jobs and

conditions.

John Braddock, a member of the SEG and writer for the WSWs, said the critical task in NZ was “the development of socialist consciousness in the working class [to establish] its political independence from the ideological and organisational weight of capitalism.”

This meant fighting to break workers from illusions in Labour, which the pseudo-left groups are presenting as a “lesser evil” to the right-wing coalition government in the lead-up to the November election. Braddock noted that the last Labour government endorsed Israel’s attack on Gaza in 2023, and that if it was in power now, “it would be doing everything it can to solidify the alliance with Washington,” just like Labour governments in the UK and Australia.

A member of the pseudo-left International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT) criticised the SEG for refusing to support its “broad front” with the unions and middle-class groups around the Green Party, in organising protests over Trump’s attack on Venezuela. She claimed that the IBT was collaborating with such organisations while at the same time “challenging the ideas that they put forward directly.”

In response, Peters encouraged the audience to read the WSWs’s recent article exposing the politics and history of the IBT, an offshoot from the Spartacist tendency that “broke from Trotskyism a very long time ago [in 1966] and repudiated the fight for the political independence of the working class through building the Fourth International.” The Spartacists, like the revisionist Pabloite movement, sought to subordinate workers and socialist-minded youth to illusions in Stalinist and bourgeois nationalist movements and the union bureaucracy.

Peters explained that far from directly challenging the politics of the unions, the IBT’s “broad coalitions” had helped “the unions in Wellington to whitewash their whole record on the issue of war.” He noted that “the Bolshevik Tendency’s website has never exposed the New Zealand unions on these questions and essentially covers up for them.” Peters rejected “the idea that one can rub shoulders with the bureaucracy, the middle-class activists who orbit around it and the Labour Party and the Greens, and in doing that we will somehow win them over or expose them.”

The exchange underscored the gulf that separates principled socialist politics, which is aimed at mobilising the international working class against all capitalist parties and organisations, from the middle-class nationalist politics that passes as “left wing” on the university campuses, and which is oriented towards the union apparatus and sections of the pro-imperialist political establishment.



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