

IYSSE (Australia) meeting against war provokes lively discussion

Our reporters
15 March 2022

A meeting last Saturday called by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Australia provoked considerable discussion on the Ukraine crisis. The questions focused on the underlying forces driving the eruption of militarism, how the danger of a disastrous world war can be fought, and the relationship between these issues and the intensifying onslaught against working class conditions in every country.

The meeting was entitled “As the pandemic rages on, the threat of world war looms: Take up the fight against imperialism and for international socialism!” Its timeliness was underscored by the war in Ukraine, raising the prospect of a far broader conflict.

Attendees included first-year university students, met during orientation week events, including from Sydney’s Macquarie University and Western Sydney University, the University of Newcastle and several campuses in the Victorian state capital of Melbourne.

A high school student participated in the discussion, as did young workers. Attendees joined from across Australia, as well as New Zealand, Germany, Sri Lanka and the Middle East. More than a hundred people logged on.

A video of the meeting can be viewed below.

Socialist Equality Party (SEP) national secretary Cheryl Crisp chaired the event. She explained that the war threat could not be understood outside of the immense crisis of global capitalism, greatly intensified by the pandemic. The COVID crisis had accelerated a longstanding war drive by the major powers. The criminal pandemic policies of governments, subordinating health to profits, had demonstrated that the basic interests of working people were incompatible with capitalism.

Crisp briefly outlined the analysis of the Ukrainian conflict made by the world Trotskyist movement. The war had been provoked by the US and NATO, in line with protracted plans for a direct confrontation with Russia. Crisp explained that socialists opposed the Russian government’s invasion of Ukraine, which reflected the interests of a capitalist oligarchy in that country, and fought for a unified movement

of the international working class against war.

Evrin Yazgin, the president of the IYSSE club at the University of Melbourne, warned that “war abroad means war against the working class at home.”

Days before the meeting, the Australian government, with the full support of Labor, had announced the largest increase to military personnel since the Vietnam War, at a cost of \$38 billion. Meanwhile, flood victims who had lost everything were being provided with a pittance. The two processes—Australia’s frontline role in the US war drive against Russia and China, and the criminal indifference to the plight of working people—were inextricably linked, Yazgin explained.

Gregor Link, a leading member of the IYSSE in Germany, gave a detailed analysis of the way in which the German ruling elite was exploiting the Ukrainian crisis to intensify remilitarisation. This was supported by the entire political establishment, including the Green Party, which is in the government.

Link issued a sharp warning. The German bourgeoisie was pursuing the same imperialist war aims that had led to the horrors of World War II, including the Holocaust and the invasion of the Soviet Union that claimed 20 million lives. The IYSSE and the SEP in Germany were alone in sounding the alarm and providing a political perspective for the widespread anti-war sentiment.

Oscar Grenfell, national organiser of the IYSSE in Australia, placed the conflict in the broader context of the eruption of American imperialism over the past 30 years.

He detailed decade-long plans by the US establishment for conflict with Russia and China aimed at ensuring the hegemony of American imperialism on the geo-strategically crucial Eurasian landmass. The US had backed a fascist coup in Ukraine in 2014 and issued a public statement with that country’s right-wing government last November, clearly aimed at provoking war with Russia.

As in the 1930s, capitalism was tobogganing toward disaster, Grenfell said. A central driving force of the militarism was the attempt by governments to divert

immense class tensions and social opposition outward. It was necessary, he said, to follow “the map of the class struggle,” not “the war map.” The fight for international socialism by the working class was the only means of averting a catastrophe.

Scores of comments were posted into the meeting chat, with many questions.

Addressing a query about the causes of war, Yazgin explained that the issue was not one of a bad government policy or the intentions of individuals. The war drive, led by the US, was rooted in the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system, above all, between an integrated global economy and the division of the world into antagonistic nation-states, each representing the interests of rival capitalist groupings.

Grenfell responded to a question about whether it was necessary to “support Ukrainian sovereignty.” He warned that in practice, this meant lining up behind a right-wing proxy of the US and NATO. Grenfell reviewed key points in a WSWS statement, “‘Democracy’ in Ukraine—What is NATO risking a war for?” which outlined the elevation of fascist forces in the Ukrainian establishment and its transformation into a garrison state of NATO.

Nick Beams, a decades-long leader of the Trotskyist movement, explained: “We don’t approach this conflict from the standpoint of this or that nation, because the nations themselves are divided, fundamentally, into two classes, the working class and the capitalist class.” The starting point of socialists was the working class, as a global social force, and the fight to unite it and provide it with a socialist program advancing its common class interests.

In a further contribution, Beams took on the designation by pseudo-left groups of Russia and China as imperialist powers. This description had no scientific content, he said, and was not based on any assessment of the historical evolution of either state or of world capitalism.

The imperialist powers, such as Britain and the US, were the centres of finance capital, Beams explained. Their dominance was demonstrated by the sweeping economic measures they were able to take against the Russian currency and its entire economy. The sole purpose of the designation of Russia and China as “imperialist” was to legitimise the pseudo-lefts’ alignment with the war drive of their “own imperialist powers.”

All the speakers emphasised the need for students and young people to take up the fight for a socialist perspective, by becoming active in the IYSSE and applying to join its parent organisation, the Socialist Equality Party.

After the meeting, Tristan, a Year 12 high school student, said: “I had no idea that Germany was rebuilding up the military so much, or that there was a rehabilitation of

Nazism, so the meeting enlightened me. I have no source of getting this information except the *World Socialist Web Site*. Gregor made a lot of good points and provided a perspective for me.

“I feel that NATO is more like a representation of American influence. Ukraine is in no way, shape or form a nation that has sovereignty, like the ‘freedom’ that the current government claims they enjoyed. It is only a pawn for American imperialism against Russia and ultimately China.

“I think just looking back to history that World War is very possible. To stop the war drive, we the working class need to lead a revolution against this system right now to replace it with a government that is led by the workers, that works for the interests of working class people. So the only alternative to a World War is a social revolution led by the working class. I agree with it 100 per cent and I fully support such action.”

Son, a student at La Trobe University in Melbourne, commented: “The meeting was very informative. I gained a lot of insight into the socialist alternatives and viewpoints, I see myself aligned in large part with those viewpoints.

“The speakers were really critical of the development of the West and NATO, pointing out that it wasn’t just a backseat involvement, but rather a calculated and proactive involvement. That was eye-opening. The role that NATO and the US have played in this conflict has been mostly regarded in Western media as an invalid viewpoint from the Russian government and Russian sympathisers, and downplayed.”

Asked about the way forward, Son stated: “I think the working class is the most capable of taking a leadership role against war, because governments, officials and companies are representatives of the capitalist class, and the capitalist class is driven by profit. So whatever they do, at the end of the day it’s still profit that is being prioritised. And to generate profits there must be exploitation of the working people.”



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