

NYU's corporate leadership bars socialist student group from campus

By Eric London
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On November 29, student supporters of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at New York University (NYU) received a letter from the university's Student Activities Board (SAB) reaffirming their earlier decision denying the application for club status.

The SAB letter is in reply to the IYSSE's November 19 open letter "Reverse the rejection of club status for the International Youth and Students for Social Equality," which was published on the *World Socialist Web Site* and distributed at NYU. The IYSSE's open letter called the decision "an attack on the democratic rights of students and the entire campus community" and demanded that it be reversed.

The IYSSE rejects the lies put forward by the SAB to justify its anti-democratic decision barring the IYSSE club status. We oppose the political discrimination against socialists and assert our right to participate in the cultural, political, and intellectual life of one of the most important universities in the largest urban center in the Western Hemisphere. The IYSSE will not be bullied by a school administration made up of corporate raiders and war mongers, and we call on all NYU students to support the IYSSE's petition for club status.

The SAB reply reiterates several baseless reasons for denying students the right to form an IYSSE club. It states that the IYSSE is too much "aligned" with existing campus groups, and that there are "concerns for the sustainability of IYSSE" because some supporters of the club will graduate in 2018. It also claims that "non-NYU members" will attend meetings and drain the university budget. The SAB claimed its decision was based "not only out of consideration of physical space, but in consideration of financial resources available."

All of these reasons were answered in detail in the IYSSE's new club application, its appeal to the initial decision to reject club status and in the open letter of November 19. They are all baseless, subjective and beside the point.

The IYSSE has a different political program and

perspective than all clubs on campus, and the support of NYU students was clearly demonstrated in the more than 200 signatures submitted as part of the club application—students who responded to the IYSSE's campaign against war and its socialist opposition to the Democratic and Republican Parties.

In its reply, the SAB makes one striking admission: Of the 46 groups who applied for club status this semester, only six were approved—a mere 14 percent. The "Student Activities Board" serves less to *promote* student activities than to *prevent* them.

The SAB does not have the right to censor what opinions and perspectives students should have access to on campus. Students have the right to form whatever clubs they choose. They have the right to hear different political perspectives and to come to their own conclusions based on independent study.

Worst of all is the SAB's claim that it has no money to finance student clubs with the paltry sum of \$1,000 per group. According to university figures, NYU's endowment is roughly \$3.5 billion, a figure that has tripled since 2000. A November 2015 article in the *Washington Square News* noted that 27 percent of last year's club fund budget was not allocated by the Budget Allocations Committee. The student government allocated over \$1 million in 2015-16.

Claims that NYU has "no money" for student speech are betrayed by the facts. The *New York Times* reported in December 2015 that NYU will spend between \$1.1 and \$2.2 million to renovate President Andrew Hamilton's 4,200 square foot Greenwich Village penthouse apartment. In 2013, the *Times* revealed that NYU provided loans at "extremely favorable terms" for high-ranking administrators' "vacation homes in the Hamptons." NYU gave Former President John Sexton a favorable \$1 million loan for his Fire Island beach house, a \$2.5 million payout in 2015, and an annual pension of \$800,000.

Meanwhile, student tuition, room, and board is an astronomical \$75,000 per year and most students are burdened with immense amounts of debt.

The perspective of the IYSSE is evidently not welcome to the administration of NYU, which has close ties to Wall Street, the US military and ultra-right wing police states abroad.

The roster of the school's trustees reads like a "who's who" in corporate plunder, war mongering and environmental disaster. Almost all trustees represent an investment bank, hedge fund, oil company, property speculator, corporate law firm, police department, or world government. Here is a non-exhaustive snapshot of five trustees:

* John Paulson, who made \$4 billion by betting against the subprime mortgage market during the 2007-08 crash that led to millions of foreclosures.

* Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair, a multi-billionaire banker and former speaker of the parliament of the United Arab Emirates.

* Khaldoon Al Mubarak, multi-billionaire oil magnate, member of the Abu Dhabi royal family and co-chair of the US Chamber of Commerce's US-UAE Business Council.

* Ralph Alexander, former CEO of British Petroleum's gas department who also oversaw gas drilling, refining and exploration.

* Laurence Fink, CEO of BlackRock, the company that contracted with the US government to implement the bank bailout of 2008, widely believed to have violated conflict of interest rules due to his close ties to senior government officials.

These wealthy figures dominate the life of the university. This is exemplified by the corrupt practice of building naming rights. To list two examples: NYU renamed its School of Education after billionaire hedge fund manager Michael Steinhardt and his wife gave the school \$20 million. In 2015, NYU named its School of Engineering after Chandrika and Ranjan Tandon when the couple gave the school \$100 million.

The school also has very close ties to the US military and intelligence apparatus. Peter Henry, Dean of NYU's Stern Business School, acknowledged a recent \$15 million donation gift by noting that one of the school's goals is to "ease the transition from military to business school and eventually the business world" and to "offer the best and brightest military talent in their future career pursuits." The gift came from Lorenzo Fertitta, a casino mogul worth \$2 billion who was the CEO of the Ultimate Fighting Championship and gave \$500,000 to the Republican Party's Senate Leadership Fund in 2016.

NYU's campus in Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) epitomizes the marriage between the NYU administration, Wall Street, the US military and gulf sheikdoms. The campus was constructed for \$1 billion in 2007 with the backing of the

Abu Dhabi government and the Al Nayhan royal family.

The campus was built on "Happiness Island," which was converted out of uninhabitable desert by tens of thousands of migrant workers stranded in the UAE. According to a 2013 report in the *Guardian*, the workers toiled under slave-like conditions building luxury buildings in the hot desert sun. Ten workers slept together in small windowless rooms, drank polluted water, and were poisoned by open sewers and rotting piles of garbage. When workers went on strike in 2013 against unbearable conditions and low wages, police and strikebreakers arrested hundreds, beat dozens and incited violent riots between migrants from different home countries.

Hillary Clinton's former chief of staff Cheryl Mills played a key role in negotiating NYUAD, and Ambassador Susan Rice makes regular visits to the campus. The university hired former President Bill Clinton to help cover-over the bad publicity that resulted from revelations surrounding working conditions at NYUAD. Former NYU President John Sexton defended the Abu Dhabi government's efforts to jail journalists and accused its critics of cultural insensitivity.

The fight for freedom of speech on campus is more urgent than ever. President-Elect Donald Trump has threatened to incarcerate and take away the citizenship of individuals who practice First Amendment-protected speech. He has slandered protesters and appointed advisors like Steven Bannon who have ties to fascist movements. His cabinet is shaping up to be the most right wing in US history, promising mass deportations, military build-up, increased police powers, and corporate giveaways.

The defense of democratic rights must be taken up by workers, youth, and students through the building of a mass movement against capitalism.

The IYSSE demands:

* Revoke the SAB's denial of the IYSSE's application for student club status! Oppose the corporate administration's censorship!

* Students must not let NYU suppress opposition to the status quo! Call a public forum of students, faculty, and staff to democratize the club approval process!

To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>