

Build the International Youth and Students for Social Equality!

By the Socialist Equality Party (Australia)
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The following resolution was unanimously adopted by the Fifth National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) held on August 14–16, 2020. The main Congress resolution was published on Wednesday. A resolution defending Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden was posted on the WSWS yesterday.

This congress resolves to build the International Youth and Students for Social Equality as a central component of the fight for the revolutionary, internationalist program of the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world Trotskyist movement.

The global breakdown of capitalism, triggered by the coronavirus, is propelling students and young people into major social and political struggles. The younger generation is coming of age politically, as the irrationality of capitalism and a society dominated by a corporate oligarchy is being witnessed in the deaths of hundreds of thousands, and the serious illness of millions more.

In addition to being exposed to the dangers posed by the virus as a result of the criminally negligent policies of governments, young people are among the hardest hit victims of the social counter-revolution that is accompanying the pandemic. They are also central targets of an escalating assault on democratic rights, demonstrated by the build-up of police and military powers in every country, and are imperiled by the stepped-up imperialist war drive, including threats of a US-led war against nuclear-armed China or Russia.

The reality of capitalism has already politically radicalised millions of students and young people. Over the past several years, polls internationally, in the US, Europe and Australia, have shown that the majority of young people favour socialism over capitalism. Mass global youth rallies last year, in opposition to the refusal of governments to address climate change, were attended by as many as 200,000 in Australia. More than 100,000, many of them young people, took part in Australian protests against police violence, called in solidarity with the US demonstrations triggered by the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis last May. Globally, social upheavals over the past two years, from Chile to Lebanon and the US, have been characterised by the participation of younger sections of the working class.

The same social conditions that have triggered those struggles exist in Australia. Even prior to the pandemic, Australian rates of job insecurity were higher than most other advanced economies,

with up to half the workforce employed on a casual or contract basis. Some 75 percent of young people in the labour market under the age of 19 were casuals, along with 42 percent of those aged between 19 and 24. Over the past six months, many of them have been thrown on the scrap heap, as governments provide only a pittance in relief to the unemployed and tens of billions of dollars to the largest corporations. Youth joblessness has reached levels not seen since the 1930s Great Depression. Last month, real rates of unemployment among the young stood at over 26 percent. If those who were underemployed or had stopped looking for work were counted, it would be a staggering 48 percent.

Rates of poverty, housing insecurity and mental health issues are soaring. More is to come, with the trade unions intensifying their decades-long collaboration with governments and corporations in the destruction of jobs and wages. The unions have signalled that they will spearhead an even more sweeping restructuring of workplace conditions and industrial relations. This is aimed at shoring up corporate profits and condemning young people to a future of mass unemployment and social misery.

The IYSSE must expand its base among young people in working-class suburbs, as well as in the factories, warehouse and retail sectors and the “gig economy.” It must fight for an understanding that the struggles of younger sections of workers can only go forward, on the basis of a turn to the entire working class, and the adoption of a socialist program, aimed at nothing less than the complete re-organisation of society to meet social needs, not private profits.

The IYSSE must build a base among high school students. All of the fundamental issues confronting young people are concentrated in their plight, including the social counter-revolution, the prospect of war and the assault on democratic rights. Already, high school students, along with educators, have been treated as guinea pigs in the pandemic. They have been subjected to the dangers of coronavirus infection, as part of a reckless reopening of the schools, aimed at creating the conditions for workers to be forced back to their places of employment. An orientation must also be made to international students. The most oppressed section of the student body, they have been treated as cash cows by universities, employers and governments for decades. Now, many are stranded in Australia and are facing a social catastrophe of joblessness, homelessness and poverty, with virtually no government assistance.

The turn to these layers is inseparable from the struggle in

defence of public education. Universities, which have already been thoroughly corporatised, are being ever more directly subordinated to the demands of big business. Thousands of job cuts among academics and staff have been enforced by the unions since the pandemic began. The federal Liberal-National government has moved to double course fees for arts degrees and other courses in the humanities. TAFEs are being decimated, with quality vocational training a thing of the past. Instead, so-called “streamlined” courses are being rolled out, to provide young people with the minimal skills they require for menial, casual labour. High schools are subjected to endless funding cuts, and a standardised-testing regime inimical to genuine learning.

The IYSSE, along with the SEP and the Committee for Public Education, fights for the unity of all educators, students and staff, in a common struggle for free, high-quality public education for all, from kindergarten to the tertiary level. This requires a political offensive against those parties responsible for the assault on education, including Labor, the Greens and the trade unions.

The war against the social rights of the working class is being accompanied by stepped up preparations for war abroad. Australia is on the frontlines of a US-led offensive against Beijing, aimed at ensuring American imperialist hegemony in the Asia-Pacific and internationally. It is fully integrated into a massive US build up in the region and backs all of Washington’s diplomatic, political and military provocations.

The IYSSE must alert students and young people to the immense dangers posed: a nuclear war that would threaten the very existence of human civilisation. It will develop its exposure of the central role being played by the universities in the war drive, including the cultivation of pro-war think tanks on campuses across the country, and the development of partnerships between the universities and US arms manufacturers, such as Lockheed Martin.

The IYSSE must combat the promotion of nationalism and xenophobia, aimed at lining up young people with the plans for war. It opposes the xenophobic anti-China campaign being waged by the political and media establishment, and defends the rights of all migrants, including Chinese international students, who have been particularly targeted.

In its fight against war and climate change, two of the existential dangers threatening young people, the IYSSE insists on the need for young people to act on a scientific Marxist analysis. Just as warnings of the horrors of a nuclear war have failed to halt the dramatic escalation of imperialist militarism, so appeals to capitalist politicians to enact policies that would reverse climate change have fallen on deaf ears. Both developments are systemic: they are the product of the social relations of capitalism, based on the private ownership of the means of production and the irrational division of a globally-integrated world into antagonistic nation-states, each advancing the interests of their own ruling elite. The struggle to end war and to safeguard the planet, therefore, requires the fight for socialism.

This understanding is incompatible with the protest politics promoted by the pseudo-left organisations, such as Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance. Their claims that governments can be pressured to enact reforms are a fraud and a cover for a

political establishment that is hurtling to the right on every question. The bankruptcy of a reformist perspective has been demonstrated by the ignominious end of Jeremy Corbyn’s claims that the British Labor Party could be transformed into an instrument for socialism, and the conclusion of Bernie Sanders’ fraudulent “political revolution” within the US Democratic Party. Both have been complicit in intensifying social attacks on the working class and the drive to war, and have endorsed openly right-wing figures as their party leaders. They were promoted, by sections of the capitalist media and the pseudo-left, to divert the leftward movement of young people behind parties of big business on the basis of phony left-populist rhetoric.

The struggle against postmodernism is central to the exposure of the pseudo-left and the development of a socialist movement among students and youth. The rampant subjective idealism of postmodernism is directed against the Marxist insistence on the revolutionary role of the working class, and the possibility of revolutionary practice based on the cognition of objective social relations and the laws of history. Amid a major crisis of world capitalism, the postmodernists insist that students cannot understand the world or fight to change it.

The official promotion of postmodernism has gone in hand with the cultivation of identity politics, based on race, gender and sexual orientation. Its central purpose is to divide the working class, while advancing the interests of a privileged layer of the upper-middle class in the unions, academia and the top echelons of the public sector. The role of identity politics, in seeking to divert social opposition along reactionary racial-communist lines has been demonstrated in the US, where the Democrats and the media have asserted that protests against police violence involve a struggle between “white and black people,” rather than between the working class and the ruling elite. This has served to cover over the class character of state violence, which is aimed at defending social inequality and the rule of a corporate oligarchy, as well as subordinating the demonstrations to the very political forces responsible for police killings, including the Democrats. The promotion of Aboriginal nationalism in Australia, by Labor, the unions, the Greens and the media, has played the same reactionary role.

In this period, which has been defined by the ICFI as the decade of socialist revolution, the IYSSE will fight to win students and young people to the revolutionary traditions of Marxism, embodied in the Russian Revolution and the fight against its Stalinist betrayal by Leon Trotsky and the Fourth International. Its task is to build a mass socialist youth movement, train students as fighters for a revolutionary perspective, and build the SEP as the party of the working class.

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