

Evergreen College professor harassed, slandered as racist for opposing “exclusion day” on campus

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Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington has become the site of a reactionary, racist campaign against biology professor Bret Weinstein, after he spoke out against a college-sponsored event that called for all white students and faculty to leave the school grounds for a day.

The event was a twist on a school tradition known as “A Day of Absence,” in which minority students and faculty are given the option to leave campus for two days of organized events and workshops focused on issues of racial justice and oppression. This year, organizers chose to reverse the formula. Instead, they “invited” all white students, staff and faculty to stay off the campus for the day’s activities.

Rashida Love, the Director of First Peoples Multicultural Advising Services—the main organizer—wrote in an email to college staff that the event would “[reaffirm] the value of having POC [people of color] in higher education.”

Professor Bret Weinstein voiced his opposition in March, in an email reply to all the faculty and staff, which has now been widely publicized.

The email became a focus during demonstrations on May 23, called to protest alleged racism on the Evergreen campus. A group of about 50 students disrupted Weinstein’s class over the email, which they falsely claimed was racist. The protesters shouted obscenities at the professor yelling, “You’re supporting white supremacy!” and “Stop telling people of color they are f**king useless. You are useless, get the f**k out”.

A video of the event shows Weinstein calmly trying to explain his position to the students. At one point, he tries to respond to a question from the barrage of

students asking, “Do you want to hear the answer or not?” The group of students shouts back, “No!” The students then assert that he has lost his right to speak, citing specifically his “white privilege.”

Professor Weinstein is not a right-wing professor. His views are, broadly, left-wing. He opposed the campaign of Hillary Clinton in favor of Bernie Sanders in the 2016 election. Many of Weinstein’s students, and students at other schools who have only heard of the events, defended him and have since spoken out against the protests.

In the email which the students have used to call for his resignation, Weinstein stresses certain basic democratic conceptions:

“[T]here is a huge difference between a group or coalition deciding to voluntarily absent themselves from a shared space in order to highlight their vital and under-appreciated roles... and a group or coalition encouraging another group to go away. The first is a forceful call to consciousness.... the second is a show of force and an act of oppression in and of itself.”

He added, “On a college campus, one’s right to speak—or to be—must never be based on skin color.” At the end of the email, Weinstein offers to take part in the event by providing a public presentation on the subject of race from a scientific perspective, to which “everyone would be equally welcomed.”

The second accusation against Weinstein is focused on his criticism of a program introduced by the college president, George Bridges, called the “Equity Agenda,” which among other things requires that every faculty hire has an “equity justification.” What this means in real terms is that the hiring of professors will be based on identity rather than knowledge of their field.

Weinstein opposed the new program because he was concerned that race would take precedence over all other considerations.

There is nothing “left” or progressive in the actions of the students protesting Weinstein. Their racist outlook expresses the interests of privileged sections of the upper middle class, and complements the racism of the far-right. Their claim that the campus is seething with racial tensions is not supported by any concrete evidence. There have been no reports of openly racist events or groups on campus.

None of their demands address the burning issues affecting the millions of working class people of all races and genders. They have nothing to say about the burden of student debt, food insecurity, poverty and unemployment.

The exact composition of the organizations involved in the protests is unclear. There have been reports of “coalitions” of different organizations. In many of the pictures circulating online, students can be seen wearing shirts with “Socialistworker.org” on the backs, indicating they are with the International Socialist Organization (ISO). There is also a chapter of Socialist Alternative (SA) on the campus. The involvement of the ISO and SA in this event would come as no surprise. Both organizations heavily promote identity politics. The ISO and the SA have remained silent on the Evergreen State events. Neither organization has responded to WSWs requests for a statement as of this writing.

The school administration has played a predictably cowardly role. In his first address to the protesting students on May 26, Bridges opposed the demand that Weinstein be fired, but praised the student action, “We are grateful to the courageous students who have voiced their concerns.” The extent of his “defense” of the accused staff was one line assuring that their jobs were safe.

In a commentary published in the *Wall Street Journal*, Weinstein pointed to the ideological roots of the protests and their connection to postmodernism. “The protests resulted from a tension that has existed throughout the entire American academy for decades: The button-down empirical and deductive fields, including all the hard sciences, have lived side by side with ‘critical theory,’ postmodernism and its perception-based relatives.” He adds later, “Mr.

Bridges tampered with the delicate balance between the sciences and humanities by, in effect, arming the postmoderns.”

The protests at Evergreen are part of a broader trend. Racist politics is systematically promoted by the media and the political establishment, particularly the Democratic Party, as part of an effort to divide workers of different races against each other, while subordinating the working class to the competition of factions of the upper middle class for access to privilege and power.

Just this week, the *New York Times* praised Harvard University’s new practice of holding separate graduation ceremonies for different “identities,” specifically sexual orientation and race. These ceremonies, writes the *Times*, allow the commencement speakers to concentrate on more personal issues such as “the struggle to be black at Harvard.”

In 2015, there was a wave of protests starting at University of Missouri, later spreading to Yale University, Ithaca College, and Amherst College, focused on allegations of racism and racial insensitivity on the part of college administrators. The protests, which fit comfortably within the presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton, made similar demands that certain professors and administrators be fired, some of which were met.

The protests at Yale were particularly reactionary, focused on calls for the resignation of professor Erika Christakis, a lecturer in early childhood development, who questioned a memo sent by the university on “culturally unaware and insensitive” Halloween costumes. Christakis ultimately decided not to continue teaching courses at the university.



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