Socialist Equality Party holds meeting on Google censorship at Manchester Metropolitan University

Our reporters
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Last Thursday morning, an engaged audience of students from the Manchester Metropolitan University listened attentively to a presentation given on "fake news" and Internet censorship.

Joe Mount, representing the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), addressed the blacklisting of socialist, anti-war and left-wing web sites by Internet-giant Google, which is abusing its monopolistic power to attack freedom of speech.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has been hardest hit by the new Google censorship protocols, with traffic to the site from Google falling by a massive 75 percent since April.

The lecture was one of a series at the university given by outside speakers on the theme, "Fake News and Post Truth," to Politics, Philosophy, English, History and Information and Communications students from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

Mount outlined the political context in which the term "fake news" is used to justify censorship "as part of a McCarthyite witch hunt in Washington aimed at cracking down on political opposition. The term filled headlines after last American presidential elections, which ended in the surprise victory of the Donald Trump over Clinton, the favoured candidate of Wall Street. US intelligence agencies claimed that Russian propaganda and hacking swung the election, claims that have never been backed up."

Mount invited students to "compare the billions of dollars spent on American election campaigns with the tiny amounts allegedly spent online by Russian sources, which reveals how bogus is the claim that Hilary was the victim of Russian disinformation."

Clinton lost the election because Trump was able to exploit the indifference of the Democrats to the growing poverty of the working class to channel anger in a right-wing, nationalist direction.

Pointing to the raging internecine struggle in the US ruling class, he said, "Both factions are equally pro-war, and paying for war means social cuts on a massive scale that must be paid for by the mass of working people... anti-war voices must be silenced."

The source of censorship is to be found in "these war preparations [which] are the fundamental cause of the attacks on democratic rights in every country."

Mount quoted former US Army officer and FBI agent Clint Watts, at a recent Senate hearing: "Civil wars don't start with gunshots, they start with words. America's war with itself has already begun. We all must act now on the social media battlefield to quell information rebellions."

Or, Mount said, "the first casualty in war is the truth."

Mount demonstrated the scale of the censorship with the use of video, statistics and graphs. He explained that "Google begun the censorship program by changing the algorithms that determine its search results," citing a statement by Ben Gomes, the company's head of engineering, that Google's search update would block access to "offensive" sites, while promoting more "authoritative content."

"This is Google-speak for views that confirm to the outlook of the mainstream media", Mount explained.

Key words such as "socialism," "Marxism" or "Trotskyism" will no longer lead a reader to the WSWS. "*All* of the 45 most popular search terms that previously linked to the WSWS no longer do so," said Mount.

Other organisations experiencing massive drops in their Google-directed readership include *Truthout* by 35 percent since April; *The Real News* by 37 percent; *Common Dreams* by up to 50 percent; and WikiLeaks 30 percent.

Mount stressed that the ruling classes the world over are resorting to censorship not from a position of strength but because they fear an upsurge of the class struggle against increasing impoverishment, inequality and war. This was leading to growing scepticism towards the traditional news outlets and the working class to search out other, socialist sources of information.

A question and answer session followed the presentation. One student asked how Google had responded to the open letter sent by David North on behalf of the WSWS that was circulated to students attending. The student suggested that people could use other search engines to avoid censorship.

Mount explained that Google had not answered. "The censorship of the WSWS was reported in the *New York Times,* So Google has no excuse to plead ignorance. The fact that they are not answering the criticisms is an indirect admission of guilt…

"There are different search engines, but we are not encouraging people to approach censorship on this basis because it has a much broader political significance... Political censorship by the biggest search engine in the world, where billions of people get their information, is an attempt to expel all elements critical of capitalist policies from the consciousness of workers. To blindfold them, so that the ruling class can continue with its austerity and continuous war policies."

Another student questioned whether it was hypocritical of socialists to complain about being censored, given the censorship and repression that took place in the Soviet Union.

Mount explained that this attributed to socialism the actions of its mortal enemy, the Stalinist bureaucracy. The Stalinist regime had committed political genocide against its opponents, led above all by Leon Trotsky, co-leader of the Russian Revolution, who founded the Left Opposition and then in 1938 founded the Fourth International.

There followed a discussion around the "no platform" and "safe spaces" policy of a number of student unions in which the pseudo-left groups play a key role.

Mount explained that the WSWS has posted articles exposing the anti-democratic content of the policies, which "permits right-wing elements to claim the moral and political high ground, confusing and disorienting the working class." Political censorship, even when momentarily directed against right wing groups, facilitates the suppression of the political freedom of the working class, as proved by the present Google censorship of left-wing, oppositional and anti-war sites.

MMU lecturer Chris Porter expressed his thanks to the WSWS, saying, "I'm sure the presentation made the students think differently about Google and the fake news issue, as well as hearing a rare socialist perspective on world affairs."

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