

Political censorship in the name of #MeToo

Oppose union's banning of Fightback from Toronto university strike picketline

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (Canada)
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) unequivocally condemns the Canadian Union of Public Employees' (CUPE) banning of the Fightback group from the picket lines of the ongoing strike by York University contract faculty and graduate assistants.

The ban, engineered by a cabal of union bureaucrats, is a flagrant attack on democratic rights. It underscores the reactionary character of the trade union bureaucracy and of the #MeToo campaign, which is being used to legitimize a frontal assault on basic democratic juridical principles and, in this case, to explicitly silence political debate.

The IYSSE and Socialist Equality Party have long-standing, well-documented, and unbridgeable political differences with Fightback, the Canadian section of the pseudo-left International Marxist Tendency. But this does not lessen our determination to uphold the basic democratic rights of political tendencies to present their programs and policies to workers and young people, especially under conditions in which they are engaged in a bitter struggle against the combined forces of university management and the provincial Liberal government.

CUPE Local 3903 Chair Devin Lefebvre announced the ban on Fightback in a terse March 29 letter. The "immediate ban of Socialist Fightback from CUPE 3903's picket lines and spaces" was justified by Lefebvre as a response to "the pattern of sexual violence, and most shockingly, harassment of survivors' attempts to speak up, that your organization has displayed in the recent past." Lefebvre cited a vote in favour of the ban at a hastily organized "special" membership meeting the day before that had been

attended by just a tiny fraction of the 3,000 strikers; then arrogantly declared, "Our members do not feel comfortable with your organization, as you continue to fail to take the proper steps to take collective accountability for the group's actions."

Lefebvre did not provide a shred of evidence for his inflammatory accusations. Nor was any individual identified as having carried out "sexual violence" or any other illegal or even untoward act. In a style reminiscent of the inquisition, no specific incidents, "victims," or acts were referred to, beyond the vague accusation of "harassment of survivors."

CUPE's resort to political censorship goes hand-in-hand with its determination to isolate and suppress working class struggles whenever they break out. Like the other pro-capitalist unions, it has capitulated, time after time, before employer concession demands and policed anti-strike laws.

There is a growing international rebellion of teachers and education staff against austerity and privatization, with strikes and protests breaking out from Oklahoma and West Virginia in the US to Britain and Latin America. But CUPE, whether at the national, regional or local level, has been determined to isolate the York strike. The well-resourced union apparatus wouldn't even lift a finger to link the York strikers with the strike (now concluded) by education support staff at Carleton University in Ottawa.

From the outset of the York strike, it has been clear that the contract faculty and graduate assistants are in a fight not just with the university administration, but with the Wynne Liberal government, which has slashed education funding as part of sweeping social spending cuts and repeatedly illegalized teachers' strikes,

But CUPE is utterly opposed to making the York strikers' fight against precarious employment and poverty wages a rallying point for the struggle against capitalist austerity and its Liberal enforcers. It has done nothing to prepare strikers and their supporters for the all but inevitable intervention of the Ontario Liberals to end the strike, even though the government of Kathleen Wynne illegalized a strike of college instructors less than six months ago.

CUPE, Unifor, and the rest of the unions are focused on the June 7 provincial election and, in the name of "stopping" Doug Ford and his Progressive Conservatives, their efforts to secure the re-election of the big business Liberals.

Side-by-side with their isolation and smothering of workers' struggles, the union bureaucracy politically subordinates workers to pro-austerity and pro-war parties like Liberals and New Democrats. In Ontario they have staunchly supported the McGuinty-Wynne Liberal government for the past 15 years, as it dismantled public services and slashed taxes for big business and the rich. At the federal level, the unions collaborate closely with the Trudeau Liberals, who plan to hike military spending by 70 percent over the next decade and have further integrated Canada into Washington's military-strategic offensives around the world.

The banning of Fightback underscores the anti-democratic character of the trade union bureaucracy, which resorts to smears, witch hunts, and political censorship to suppress political debate, suppress worker opposition, and protect the privileges of its well-paid executives.

The political implications of CUPE's resort to open political censorship is underscored by the turn of the ruling elite internationally towards authoritarian forms of rule. Governments in the United States, Canada, and Europe have whipped up a furor over so-called "fake news," because they fear the growing alienation of working people from the establishment, including the corporate media, and the increasing use of social media to expose injustices and organize opposition. The *New York Times*, for example, has carried a series of articles in recent weeks expressing dismay about striking teachers' use of social media to coordinate their struggles independently of the trade unions.

As CUPE's ban of Fightback illustrates, the #MeToo

campaign is conducive to witch hunting. It is being used to legitimize the trashing of vital democratic juridical principles like the right to be duly informed of any charges of misconduct and to present a defence. Vague and unsubstantiated allegations of sexual misconduct are being wielded to settle scores, end people's careers, and suppress open political debate.

#MeToo was launched on the pages of the pro-war *New York Times* and has been spearheaded by the right-wing Democratic Party, as a means of strengthening identity politics after Hillary Clinton's debacle in 2016 presidential election. Through #MeToo, privileged elements within the top 10 percent of society are conducting a bitter struggle for a more favourable redistribution of wealth and privileges among themselves. Even more importantly, #MeToo is fodder for the ruling elite's drive to divide the working class along lines of race, gender, and sexual orientation at a time when more and more working people around the world are recognizing their common interests in the struggle against social inequality, austerity and war.

The IYSSE urges all striking faculty and their student supporters to demand that CUPE immediately rescind its anti-democratic ban on Fightback. Such action could be an important step in the strikers and their student and faculty supporters taking control of the strike in their own hands and making it a spearhead of the struggle against austerity in Canada and internationally and the fight for the development of an independent political movement of the working class against the capitalist profit system.



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