

Facebook purges left-wing pages and individuals

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On Friday, Facebook carried out a purge of left-wing, antiwar and progressive pages and accounts, including leading members of the Socialist Equality Party. Facebook gave no explanation why the accounts were disabled or even a public acknowledgement that the deletions had occurred.

At least a half dozen leading members of the Socialist Equality Party had their Facebook accounts permanently disabled. This included the public account of Genevieve Leigh, the national secretary of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, and the personal account of Niles Niemuth, the US managing editor of the *World Socialist Web Site*. In 2016, Niemuth was the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for US Vice President.

Facebook also disabled the London Bus Drivers Rank-and-File Committee Facebook page, which was set up with the support of the Socialist Equality Party (UK) to organize opposition among bus drivers. This follows a widely discussed call for a walkout by bus drivers to demand elementary protections against the COVID-19 pandemic.

None of the individuals whose accounts were disabled had violated Facebook's policies. Upon attempting to appeal the deletion of their account, they received an error message stating, "We cannot review the decision to disable your account."

With no explanation or warning, Facebook has effectively seized the intellectual property of those it has targeted, cutting them off from years of their photos, writings and online discussions.

Also targeted was the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the UK. Its main national Facebook account was disabled, with approximately 20,000 followers, together with its student group, the Socialist Workers' Student Society, with approximately 5,000 followers,

as well as its annual Marxism festival, with 12,000 followers.

Additionally, entire branches of the organization were disabled on Facebook, particularly in Scotland, as well as the Facebook accounts of individual members, according to SWP representative Lewis Nielsen. "This has been a concerted attack on us," Nielsen told the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Following widespread protests on Twitter and other social media networks, Facebook reversed the ban of the SWP's main page, although the pages of a number of local branches and members remain offline.

The attack on leading members of the SEP and other left-wing organizations is a calculated act of censorship, at the behest of the state and the ruling class, to silence opposition. These actions are part of a yearslong campaign to create the framework for censorship in the United States and internationally.

Such acts of censorship are a desperate response to the growth of popular opposition to inequality, social misery and the ruling class's disastrous response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has put profits above the protection of human lives.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has for years warned about the crackdown on left-wing political organizations by Facebook, Twitter and Google.

Since the 2016 election, the US intelligence agencies have advocated internet censorship in the name of fighting "fake news." While these actions have been presented as targeting far-right conspiracy theories, they have, in fact, disproportionately affected left-wing, antiwar and socialist organizations.

In 2017, Google announced that it would promote "authoritative" news sources over "alternative viewpoints," leading to a massive drop in search traffic to left-wing sites.

World Socialist Web Site Editorial Board Chairman David North published an open letter to Google on August 25, 2017 demanding that it stop the censorship of socialist, antiwar and progressive sites. “Censorship on this scale is political blacklisting,” North wrote. “The obvious intent of Google’s censorship algorithm is to block news that your company does not want reported and to suppress opinions with which you do not agree.”

In congressional testimony this past November, Google CEO Sundar Pichai was asked, “Can you name for me one high profile person or entity from a liberal ideology who you have censored?” In response, he acknowledged that there had been “compliance issues” with the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Facebook and Twitter followed Google’s example, removing left-wing accounts and pages with millions of followers. Friday was a new milestone in this campaign, with Facebook systematically removing the entire social media presence of a left-wing organization on the same day that it erased dozens of other accounts.

Notwithstanding our differences with the Socialist Workers Party, we unconditionally defend its right and the right of its members to have unfettered access to social media, and demand the immediate restoration of all their accounts.

It is essential for all left-wing organizations to be able to freely express themselves in order to clarify the differences between them and to allow workers and young people to make up their own minds.

There must be a unified response by all left-wing organizations against this type of censorship. It is precisely in this situation that the historic slogan of the labor movement must be brought forward: “An injury to one is an injury to all!”

We urge all supporters of the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* to vigorously protest all those targeted by Facebook. We urge our readers to make public statements on every platform available to them protesting the censorship of both members of the SEP and SWP. We call on workers at Facebook and other technology companies to register their protest against this action and demand that it be reversed.

In order to coordinate and take forward their struggles, workers must have unfettered access to information. As they enter into struggle against the corporations and the financial oligarchy, workers must

take up the demand for the defense of freedom of expression and opposition to internet censorship.



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