

Facebook escalates attack on socialist left

Statement of the Socialist Equality Party
25 January 2021

Update 2:40 PM ET: Due to protests opposing Facebook's purging of the accounts of the University of Michigan chapter of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, the company has backed down. The UM IYSSE's account has been restored, together with accounts of the administrators. Facebook has provided no explanation for its actions. Remain vigilant. This fight is not over. Further information and political analysis will be posted on the World Socialist Web Site. Please continue to circulate this statement.

Facebook is engaged in an escalating campaign of internet censorship targeting the socialist left. Entire Facebook pages are being taken down, and individual accounts permanently disabled, without any explanation given or recourse allowed.

The latest act of censorship is Facebook's deletion of the official page of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at the University of Michigan. The IYSSE is the student and youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP). It has been an official campus student group at UM since 2007, and its Facebook account has been active since 2013.

Both the group's president and faculty advisor have had their accounts disabled, along with the accounts of six other administrators.

Those included in the political purge by Facebook include leading members of the SEP in Michigan, where the headquarters of the party is located along with the national editorial office of the *World Socialist Web Site*. Both Genevieve Leigh, the national secretary of the IYSSE, and Niles Niemuth, the US managing editor of the *World Socialist Web Site*, have had their accounts deleted. Both are members of the national leadership of the SEP.

More information is beginning to come out of other groups targeted. Facebook has also removed pages and more than one dozen individual accounts associated

with Struggle La Lucha and the Socialist Unity Party in the US. Late last week, pages associated with the Socialist Workers Party in the UK were deleted along with the personal accounts of those moderating them. While the main page was restored, many of the pages of local branches and member accounts are still disabled.

These actions by Facebook take place in a definite political context. There is an immense and ongoing political crisis within the US state, a raging pandemic that has killed nearly 430,000 people in the United States, an extreme economic crisis, and growing anger in the working class against the entire policy of the capitalist ruling elite. The ruling class is terrified of the growth of social opposition from below.

Less than three weeks ago, US President Donald Trump incited a fascistic insurrection in Washington DC aimed at overturning the results of the election and abolishing democratic rights. The central targets of Trump's increasingly frenzied and fascistic statements over the past year have been "socialism" and "Marxism."

The Democrats, for their part, have come to office under the Biden administration calling for "unity" with the Republican Party. Biden has insisted on the need for a "strong" Republican Party and is opposed to any examination and exposure of the high-level involvement in and support for the fascistic insurrection.

On Sunday, the *Washington Post* published an article under the headline, "Capitol attack will spur broad crackdown on domestic extremists." While it refers to right-wing violence as "a disease that seems to have taken hold in the nation's nervous system," it is clear from Facebook's actions that the principal target is not the right, which, in any case, can rely on support from the state and sections of the ruling class. Under the catchall category of "domestic extremism," the attack

will be focused on the left.

The aim is to decapitate socialist opposition to the extreme right. Indeed, the last posts by the IYSSE at UM prior to Facebook's actions included links to the WSWS online meeting, "Where is America going? Trump's coup and the rise of fascism," and the WSWS statements, "The pandemic and Trump's coup attempt," "Democrats plead for bipartisanship as the Republicans call for blood," and "What would have happened if Trump's fascist mob had seized hostages?"

Facebook and other social media companies are not acting alone. They work closely with the state and in particular with the Democratic Party, which is extremely sensitive to and opposed to all manifestations of social opposition from below.

Beginning in 2017, the *World Socialist Web Site* has exposed and mobilized opposition to the censorship and blacklisting of left-wing and socialist views. This began with the moves by Google to change its search algorithms to promote "authoritative content" and demote "alternative views." Sundar Pichai, the CEO of Google's parent company, Alphabet, has admitted that the *World Socialist Web Site* was specifically targeted.

Google's actions were followed by a series of measures by Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Reddit and other social media platforms blocking access to and censoring socialist views.

Now, under conditions of unprecedented crisis, the ruling class is escalating its censorship campaign. It is significant that the IYSSE page and SEP leaders first targeted by Facebook are in Michigan, where the SEP and WSWS have a significant influence in the working class. Last March, as the pandemic was beginning its massive spread in the US, autoworkers in Michigan launched wildcat walkouts against being forced to continue working under unsafe conditions.

Articles and statements published by the WSWS calling for a walkout were read by tens of thousands of workers, primarily through Facebook.

The drive toward censorship can be reversed only through the broadest mobilization of opposition among workers, young people and progressive intellectuals and journalists!

The Socialist Equality Party calls for everyone reading this statement to take the following actions:

1. Send statements demanding an immediate reversal of Facebook's actions to info@support.facebook.com

and zuckerberg@fb.com. Send copies of your letters to comments@wsws.org for publication on the *World Socialist Web Site*.

2. Share this statement as widely as possible with your friends and co-workers and on social media, including Facebook, Twitter and other platforms. Include the hashtag #StopCensoringSocialism.

3. Send to the WSWS any information that you have on the censorship of left-wing individuals and publications by Facebook or other social media companies so that we can publicize and oppose these attacks.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact