

Facebook restores service to socialist pages, claiming the purge was an “automation error”

Andre Damon
26 January 2021

On Monday, following widespread protests, Facebook restored the page of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at the University of Michigan, along with the accounts of leading members of the IYSSE and the Socialist Equality Party (SEP).

In response to inquiries made by the *Financial Times* in Britain, Facebook claimed the removals were the result of an “automation error,” adding, “We apologise for the error.”

The restoration of service came two days after Facebook disabled these pages without any explanation and without providing any recourse. Among the individual pages deleted were those of IYSSE National Secretary Genevieve Leigh and *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) US Managing Editor Niles Niemuth.

Statements on the WSWS denouncing the political purge were shared thousands of times on social media, in addition to a flood of letters and statements of support from workers, young people, journalists and professionals.

The FT reported the controversy in a front-page article titled, “Facebook sparks anger after shutting socialist pages.” The newspaper interviewed both David North, the chairman of the WSWS International Editorial Board, and Chris Marsden, the national secretary of the SEP (UK).

“Even though this particular ban has been [reversed], it’s a warning we don’t know what might come next,” the article quoted North as saying. “Social media... is privately owned but to all intents and purposes it’s [become] what used to be the market square,” Marsden said. “They’re using their power in a way that’s completely undemocratic.”

Facebook’s claim that its disabling of the accounts was merely the product of a technical glitch lacks all credibility and is patently dishonest. The social media company had clearly invested time and resources to identifying leading members of the SEP, IYSSE and WSWS.

The claim is belied by the repeated statements of Facebook officials, both in congressional hearings and before military audiences, that Facebook deliberately seeks to combat what it calls “radical” political viewpoints.

Speaking before an audience of generals and intelligence officials at a NATO conference in 2018, Facebook Chief Security Officer Alex Stamos declared, “Our societies overall are going to have to start to adapt to the idea that not all information is created equal.” He warned that millions of “people who feel they have been ignored or oppressed” are using Facebook to “push for radical politics.” He called these individuals and organizations “domestic influence operators.”

In order to police speech on its platform, Facebook has hired more than 20,000 people to man its security and enforcement team, many of whom have police and intelligence backgrounds, or, like Stamos, work at intelligence-linked think tanks.

The *World Socialist Web Site* demands that Facebook explain why the company purged the accounts of the UM IYSSE and the accounts of leading SEP members.

What individuals were involved in making this decision to remove the pages of members of the SEP? What was the involvement of US government agencies in Facebook’s decision? Did Facebook ever discuss the activities of the SEP or any of its members with the US government? Did Facebook come under pressure from

the US government to take actions against the SEP?

Without such an explanation, there can be no assurance that further arbitrary and politically motivated actions will not be taken. And Facebook's apology has no meaning unless it can provide assurances that it will not do it again.

The *World Socialist Web Site* thanks the many readers, supporters and principled journalists who publicized Facebook's act of censorship against the IYSSE and SEP and helped overturn it. But the fight is far from over.

We urge our readers to:

1. Send statements demanding an explanation 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 with your friends and co-workers and on social media, including Facebook, Twitter and other platforms. Include the hashtag [#StopCensoringSocialism](#).
3. Send to the WWSWS 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 WWSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact