

London bus workers denounce Facebook censorship: “Hands off the WSWS!”

Our reporters
9 February 2021

The following resolution protesting Facebook censorship of accounts associated with the World Socialist Web Site and Socialist Equality Party has been received by the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee. The motion was adopted by a meeting of the committee on Sunday night. The rank-and-file committee’s own Administrator account was disabled on January 20, with Facebook claiming it failed to meet “community standards”.

One of the last postings by the committee’s Administrator was an advertisement for the WSWS online meeting “Where is America Going?” called to discuss the January 6 fascist coup attempt. Other content included a WSWS article on the pandemic, “London Mayor declares ‘major incident’ as UK capital devastated by COVID-19” and an emergency statement by the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee calling for a walkout at Cricklewood bus garage against the threat to life from COVID-19. The committee is calling on other garages and workplaces in the UK and internationally to pass similar resolutions protesting social media censorship of socialist and left-wing organisations.

RESOLUTION

The London Bus Rank-and-File Committee protests Facebook’s censorship of left-wing and socialist organisations and individuals.

Facebook’s targeting of the WSWS is aimed at curtailing the democratic rights of the entire working class. It goes hand in hand with attempts to muzzle the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee. On January 20, the main Administrator account for the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee was disabled without warning, with Facebook claiming our administrator account failed to meet “community standards”.

At the same time, Facebook accounts associated with

the World Socialist Web Site, Socialist Equality Party and International Youth and Students for Social Equality in the United States were shut down. Among those targeted was IYSSE National Secretary Genevieve Leigh and World Socialist Web Site US Managing Editor Niles Niemuth.

We oppose this attack on the WSWS, whose articles are read by thousands of bus drivers. It was the WSWS which alone spoke the truth about the pandemic, exposing the collusion between the bus companies, Transport for London and Unite the union and giving a conscious voice for workers in London and throughout the world.

No matter what language workers speak, or their nationality, race or gender, the WSWS speaks with one voice, fighting to unite the working class in the fight for socialism. Socialism is not illegal. Our committee demands, “Hands off the WSWS!”

We demand that Facebook explain why our main Admin account was purged. The Account was only established on January 6. How is it against “community standards” to expose the truth about COVID-19 infections at London bus garages? Why is Facebook censoring information exposing major safety breaches by the bus companies that are killing workers?

Due to worldwide protests, the accounts linked to the WSWS, SEP and IYSSE were restored, but serious questions remain. Who made the decision to remove these accounts? What was the involvement of US government agencies in Facebook’s decision? Did Facebook come under pressure from the US government to take actions against the SEP? And was the British government or its intelligence agencies consulted over the censorship of the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee?

We urge all bus workers to oppose this attack on free

speech and to join with us in sending letters of protest to Facebook. An injury to one is an injury to all!

London Bus Rank-and-File Committee

January 31, 2021

Dan, a bus driver from West London and a member of the rank-and-file committee, explained why he voted for the motion: “Facebook is an American company, but its censorship of the SEP and WSWS and other left-wing websites is a clear breach of the First Amendment. It is an attempt to starve the oxygen of publicity from those who are showing up the failures of capitalism worldwide and putting forward their verdict—socialism.

“It is complete hypocrisy. They are deliberately targeting the left. I don't buy the claim by Facebook that it was an ‘administrative error’. It seems okay to have right-wing or moderate views, but not those which are on the left. I agree with the warning that the storming of the Capitol on January 6 was an attempted coup. It was a deliberate attempt to overturn democracy and Trump whipped up sections of the military and police to conduct a violent insurrection. That does not happen in a normal or healthy society. I have been left very disturbed by what took place, and I don't think that threat has ended. Government has become solely about looking after the wealthy elite not the citizens.”

Dan asked, “What does Facebook mean that the London Bus Drivers Rank-and File-Committee violated ‘community standards’—how does it define this? The rank-and-file committee represents the common man and woman, the working class, so they have a collective voice. In collaboration with the WSWS it has highlighted the exploitation by the corporations and fought for measures so workers can stay safe from the pandemic. Bus drivers and all workers are being placed at risk of their lives while those who are rich are sheltered in luxury and can continue to make their profits. They want to keep us down, in our place. I don't think so.

“Since its founding last September, the rank-and-file committee has been opening bus workers’ eyes about the cover-up by Unite [the union] with management over the rates of infections and deaths of our colleagues. When you speak up about this you are met with bully boy tactics and face sanction, censorship and unfair dismissal based on trumped up charges. Unite and the unions serve as the police force for the private

operators. They too are involved in censorship of social media, of bus drivers who criticise the union. This includes the so-called ‘Unite Left’, such as Joanne Harris, Mo Manir and John Murphy and the list could go on. They all feel threatened.”

Leya, a driver from Abellio, said she was not surprised that WSWS was being censored, “To be honest, I see a lot of articles from the WSWS on Facebook and whenever they are posted, everyone reacts.

“It has a lot of support and that’s why it’s being censored. This is a new platform for bus drivers to raise their concerns. If WSWS was a union, it would have a lot of members. The Socialist Party doesn’t get censored by Unite, they are only going after WSWS. From what I see, WSWS is the voice of the people. It should grow bigger because it’s helping people.

“I subscribe to WSWS. The articles talk about a lot of things in the world going on that are important. People can learn from WSWS. I hope everyone reads WSWS and if we all stand together, we will be strong.”

Amir, a Metroline driver in north London, described the actions of Facebook against WSWS as “high censorship and anti-democratic”. He said the closure of accounts owned by leading WSWS, SEP and IYSSE members had, “strongly indicated the government’s influence on Facebook’s decisions”.

He concluded, “Very obviously they are trying to silence any socialist political movement, which could expose more the broken economic system and other social issues. WSWS gives another perspective from all other media.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact