

The “Peter J. McGuire” Facebook group bans WSWS writers

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Administrators for the “Peter J. McGuire” Washington state carpenters Facebook group have banned *World Socialist Web Site* writers and Socialist Equality Party (SEP) members Kayla Costa and Jerry White from posting or commenting in the group. Shortly after posting an article they co-authored, “Seattle carpenters strike at the crossroads, as union works to suppress rank-and-file rebellion,” White and Costa were first “muted” and unable to comment for 28 days. Hours later, the two were completely banned from the group.

An Australian carpenter and supporter of the WSWS, Michael Collins, has also been banned for voicing his opposition to the anti-democratic measure.

The Facebook group has been a forum for many carpenters opposing the efforts by the Pacific Northwest Carpenters Union (NWCU) to push through a pro-company contract. The NWCU attempted and failed to push through four such agreements before being forced to call a strike on September 16, the first walkout in two decades. And even then, the union kept 10,000 of its 12,000 members on the job, citing no-strike clauses made with the contractors’ association and state and local authorities.

The September 27 WSWS article denounced the strikebreaking efforts of NWCU Treasury Secretary Evelyn Shapiro, United Brotherhood of Carpenters (UBC) General President Douglas McCarron and their witch-hunt against leaders of the Peter J. McGuire Group and militant carpenters seeking to expand the strike. At the same time, the article warned: “While there are many militant carpenters who look to the Peter J. McGuire Group to express their opposition, it must be said that the political outlook of the group’s leaders is fatally flawed. No matter how sharp their rhetoric against the UBC bureaucrats, in the end they

hope to convince Shapiro & Co. to adopt more militant policies and reform the union.”

The article was widely circulated among striking carpenters and no doubt triggered a debate about the call by the WSWS to form rank-and-file strike committees not to appeal to union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party, but to mobilize broader sections of the working class to strengthen the strike. Rather than allow such an important debate, the administrators of the group decided to censor criticism of their false orientation.

The WSWS urges striking carpenters and all workers to oppose these bans and demand that the Peter J. McGuire Group reinstate Costa and White and not censor the WSWS. The effort to prevent a serious discussion over the direction of the strike is not only an attack on the WSWS but on all workers. If allowed to stand, it will seriously weaken the carpenters’ struggle and play into the hands of the NWCU and UBC bureaucrats who have long used such anti-democratic methods to gag the rank-and-file and silence their left-wing opponents.

In the comment section under the WSWS article, administrator Art Francisco cited the passage on the group leaders’ “fatally flawed” outlook, claiming this was among “several false statements” in the article. He did not, however, provide any evidence to support the assertion. Before being banned, Costa replied, asking, “Why is that a false statement? I’ve read your platform and interview with *Jacobin*.”

White then commented how these false and naïve conceptions were being deliberately reinforced by Seattle City Councilwoman and Socialist Alternative leader Kshama Sawant. Appealing to the UBC to adopt more militant policies, White wrote, “is explicitly the position of Sawant with whom the PJM group is

aligned. She has repeatedly asked ‘Sister[s] Shapiro and Grant and Brothers Anderson and McLain’ to support the expansion of picketing, set up of a strike fund and outline a strategy to win the strike.”

He continued, “The WSWS has warned that such conceptions are fatal. The union apparatus has material interests that are thoroughly separate from and hostile to the interests of the working class. We call for the formation of rank-and-file committees not to appeal to the union bureaucracy or non-existent ‘progressive elected officials,’ i.e., Democrats, but to Amazon workers, educators, Boeing workers and other sections of the working class to wage an industrial and political counter-offensive.”

In response, Francisco claimed that while the WSWS is “welcome to write articles about our group...people in the WSWS” should “back off” from posting in the group. A second post announced that “Both of the WSWS members [Costa and White] have been muted for 28 days.” Their comments challenging the alleged “false statements” have been deleted.

Collins subsequently called the “actions of muting Jerry and Kayla as completely anti-democratic.” He has also since been banned from the group.

The banning of the *World Socialist Web Site* is entirely due to our political positions. The Peter J. McGuire Group regularly posts articles from the corporate-controlled media, including the *Seattle Times*, and even statements from union representatives threatening legal sanctions against rank-and-file carpenters for “illegal” or “unsanctioned” job actions. In addition, the Facebook group regularly posts articles from publications and bloggers who describe themselves as socialist and left-wing, including *Jacobin*, the unofficial publication of the Democratic Socialists of America, and Sawant’s *Socialist Alternative* web site. These publications are clearly acceptable to Francisco because they claim workers can advance their interests through pressuring the corporatist trade unions and the Democratic Party.

A recent post in the group confirms Costa’s and White’s warnings about the disastrous orientation of the Peter J. McGuire Group. On September 28, Jason Bartos, a prominent member of the group, wrote a glowing review of a rally called by the NWCU on Monday, which he left with a “pretty optimistic outlook for the future of our union.” Bartos based these

sentiments on the “the reps, council members, and staff” that gave him a “warm reception,” as well as an evening encounter with Evelyn Shapiro that had no “enmity from either her or anyone else.”

Bartos’s evening ended after he went with “my buddy Elias to say goodbye to Evelyn and all the reps and delegates from other parts of the region who were having dinner. We said our goodbyes and shook Evelyn’s hand one last time.”

Bartos’s post was followed by several critical comments warning against being taken in by the “good cop, bad cop” ruse of the NWCU and UBC bureaucrats, which, they said, was aimed at silencing or co-opting their opponents.

For years, workers have suffered from the union bureaucracy’s goon attacks, the ramming through of contracts without information or democratic debate, and the silencing of critics by pulling the plugs from their microphones at union meetings. The Peter J. McGuire Group purports to be a forum for democratic discussion and debate but it is using the same anti-democratic methods against the WSWS, which the NWCU and UBC bureaucrats employ against rank-and-file carpenters.

For carpenters, it is a fundamental issue of workers’ democracy to uphold their right to criticize the perspective of the PJM group leaders, read *World Socialist Web Site* articles, form their own opinions, and debate the critical issues that will determine the course of this important battle. Every rank-and-file carpenter who agrees with these basic democratic rights should demand that the ban on the WSWS be reversed, and that Costa and White be reinstated to the group.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact