

Attack on Carnegie Mellon professor over criticism of British imperialism

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The uproar over the tweet posted by Carnegie Mellon University professor Uju Anya has revealed the hypocrisy of the democratic pretensions of the ruling establishment, and its readiness to resort to censorship to silence dissenting or unpopular voices.

The Nigerian-born Anya, an associate professor in the linguistics department at CMU in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, tweeted last week, upon hearing that Queen Elizabeth II was near death, “I heard the chief monarch of a thieving raping genocidal empire is finally dying. May her pain be excruciating.”

Among those quickly responding to the tweet was Amazon founder and Washington Post owner Jeff Bezos, currently listed as the third-wealthiest billionaire in the world. “This is someone supposedly working to make the world better,” tweeted Bezos. “I don’t think so. Wow.”

Anya’s post was quickly deleted by Twitter, which claimed that it violated the social media company’s guidelines.

Anya’s employer also responded, with the following statement: “We do not condone the offensive and objectionable messages posted by Uju Anya today on her personal social media account. Free expression is core to the mission of higher education, however, the views she shared absolutely do not represent the values of the institution, nor the standards of discourse we seek to foster.”

In the typical two-faced style perfected in such circles, the university pledged its commitment to free expression and attacked it at the same time. Anya was using her personal account and was not speaking for the university. If free speech is “core,” why was the statement necessary, not simply dissociating the university from Anya’s views, but also denouncing them?

Multi-billionaire Bezos, it turns out, donated \$2 million to Carnegie Mellon in the last few years. The Chief Financial Officer of Amazon, Brian Olsavsky, is the recipient of an MBA degree from the same institution. The statement from CMU was issued quickly after Bezos’ tweet. It is hard to imagine a more direct expression of the way in which today’s institutions of “higher learning” are tied to their wealthy donors. CMU was evidently concerned about its “image,” but this means above all its reputation within the ruling elite.

The professor refused to back down. “If anyone expects me to express anything but disdain for the monarch who supervised a government that sponsored the genocide that massacred and displaced half my family and the consequences of which those alive today are still trying to overcome, you can keep wishing upon a star,” she said in a further tweet. She later sent an email to the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* declaring, “I stand by my tweet and do not have any regrets ... I am the child and sibling of survivors of genocide. From 1967-1970, more than 3 million civilians were massacred when the Igbo people of Nigeria tried to form the independent nation of Biafra. Those slaughtered included members of my family. I was born in the immediate aftermath of this genocide.”

British imperialism, under the Labour government headed by Harold Wilson, secretly supplied arms, and ammunition to the Nigerian government during the civil war of the late 1960s. Nigeria had been granted formal independence only at the beginning of that decade, after a period of British colonial rule spanning three-quarters of a century.

Anya’s tweets and other statements reflect a pan-Africanist outlook, one that separates the history of colonialism and imperialist exploitation from the

international class struggle as a whole. In any case, billions of people around the world, the descendants of those ruled by the British overlords on almost every continent, in Ireland, Kenya, India and elsewhere, have no reason to mourn the passing of the Queen. The current social media storm has brought to the fore the issue of the history and legacy of colonial rule, and the justifiable hatred it engendered.

Nor, for that matter, should the working class in any country, including Britain itself, shed tears over the passing of the aged titular head of the British state. Elizabeth II and now Charles III, and the kings and queens that preceded them, have provided long and faithful “service”—the watchword of countless editorials and commentaries in the last few days—not to the British people, but to the British ruling class, particularly in times of crisis and imperialist war.

Anya also pointed out that Bezos’ tweet had helped to set off a cascade of obscene attacks and physical threats against her on social media. Her Twitter account had been blocked, but these came into her email inbox. “Jeff Bezos incited violence against me,” she said. “He rarely tweets in his own voice, but he took the time to single me out ... I can’t ignore the racism and misogyny—the emails I’ve been getting all start with the N-word, bitch, genetically inferior, all kinds of things. I don’t open them, but I see the subject lines.”

The attacks on Anya, and especially the action of Twitter in deleting her tweets, highlight the hypocrisy of the endless official media and government propaganda, in the US and the European Union, against infringements on democratic rights in Russia and in other nations targeted by imperialism.

In the broadest sense, the attacks on the CMU professor reflect the fact that her statements come into conflict with the current imperialist war drive. This requires that the Queen, as the symbol of British imperialism, its role within NATO and its “special relationship” with Washington, be treated with unquestioned reverence, especially at a time when the end of her 70-year reign coincides with a period of intense crisis for British capitalism.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has already been the victim of Internet censorship. Twitter’s action in this case is only a foretaste of what is in store from all the social media giants as the class struggle intensifies around the world.



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