Canada’s Waterloo University threatening to shut down IYSSE meeting opposing Ukraine war

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The Waterloo University-affiliated Conrad Grebel University College is threatening to cancel the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) meeting, “The War in Ukraine and How to Stop It,” to be held at the college in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, next Tuesday.

The College sent a letter to the IYSSE late Tuesday afternoon with the sole aim of providing pretexts to justify their arbitrarily shutting down the March 28 meeting and censoring the IYSSE. The letter make false claims, then imposes a series of outrageous conditions for the meeting to proceed. These include that the university be supplied scans of government-issued ID, providing the names, addresses, and phone numbers of all persons involved in organizing the meeting.

The letter suggests the university has come under pressure from far-right Ukrainian Canadian forces and that threats of violence have been made. The Ukrainian Canadian Congress—an organization that enjoys support from the highest levels of the Canadian state—is systematically trying to prevent any meeting or protest against the US-NATO instigated war with Russia over Ukraine.

The IYSSE has rejected the university’s newly imposed conditions and insists that next Tuesday’s meeting must proceed. We call on all students, and youth and workers across Canada and internationally to join us in demanding that the publicly funded Waterloo University desist in its maneuvers and respect our basic democratic right to hold this important antiwar meeting.

Below we are publishing the reply that IYSSE member Matthew Richter sent the university Wednesday. It rebuts the university’s false claims, details the outrageous character of its new “requirements” and exposes the character of the far-right forces the university is bowing to in its maneuvers to censor next Tuesday’s IYSSE meeting.

We urge World Socialist Web Site *readers to send letters of protest demanding the IYSSE meeting proceed to Mr. E. Paul Penner (Director of Operations, Conrad Grebel University College) at eppenner@uwaterloo.ca and copies to the* WSWS *here.*

The meeting is to be held on Tuesday, March 28, at 7 p.m., in Room 1302 of Conrad Grebel University College, 140 Westmount Rd. N, Waterloo, Ontario.

Dear Mr. E. Paul Penner (Director of Operations, Conrad Grebel University College),

This is in reply to your email of yesterday in which you threatened to cancel the International Youth and Students for Social Equality’s room booking at Conrad Grebel University College unless we fulfill a long list of conditions—most of them frankly outrageous—by later today.

I and the IYSSE reject your letter’s suggestion that we in any way misrepresented ourselves or have sought to associate the College with our coming event. Below I respond to these claims and each of the new conditions that you are now trying to attach to our room booking.

Before doing so, however, I want to make it clear that we expect the College will fulfill its contractual obligation to provide Room 1302 for the IYSSE meeting titled “The War in Ukraine and How to Stop It” on the evening of Tuesday, March 28.

The email correspondence surrounding the booking shows that from the beginning we identified it as an anti-war meeting of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality. Had anyone asked if the IYSSE was a recognized club at the University of Waterloo or if I am a student there, I would have answered no. But these questions were never raised by College personnel. That they did not do so is hardly surprising as the College routinely rents rooms to outside groups. In fact, the contract you sent me dated March 13, 2023, specifically refers to “external groups.”

Your claim that we have inappropriately associated Conrad Grebel University College with our meeting is a wilful misrepresentation. Both the poster and leaflet clearly identify the IYSSE as the meeting’s sponsor and organizer. The College’s name is mentioned as the address of the

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meeting, in accordance with the terms of our contract, which states, “Groups or individuals renting the College facilities may use the College’s name in their advertising only to indicate locations of meetings or events.” Our conformity with this rule is further attested by the fact that we have not used the College logo on any of our promotional materials.

You also object to our publicity for the meeting on the spurious grounds that it does not identify me personally as an organizer of the event or provide my contact information. As the poster and the Eventbrite page to which you refer make clear, our March 28 meeting is part of a series of meetings on the same theme being organized by the IYSSE in countries around the world. In highlighting the organization sponsoring the event and not providing the name of the individual who booked the meeting room, we are following what is the accepted practice for meetings and events around the world. To suggest otherwise is an act of bad faith.

Given this, there is absolutely no basis for you to “require” that we take down all our meeting posters by the end of today and modify all our meeting publicity.

As for the other newly-introduced conditions, they are similarly outrageous and clearly designed to provide a pretext for canceling our meeting booking.

You “require” that “no later than Wednesday, March 22,” we supply the “full contact information (name, address and phone number)” for any persons “involved in organizing this event,” “supported by a scan” of their “driver’s license, health card or passport.” You have my name and banking information, as I paid for the room via Interac. To ensure there is no confusion, I am appending the requisite information in full for myself. To demand more is a gross invasion of privacy. Indeed, it smacks of a police state.

Your event contract makes no mention of any such condition. When else, if ever, have you demanded it?

You further require us to provide a plan for what we will do in the event that more than 65 people—the room’s capacity—show up for the meeting. The answer is simple: attendance will be on a first come, first served basis.

The contract that I signed makes clear that the “College will hold rental groups responsible for all damage or loss to any person or property arising out of or during use of the College’s facilities.” Why the insistence I restate my acceptance of the terms of the contract?

Is it because there have been threats made against the meeting? In your letter you state that the meeting is “likely” to “attract opposition” and that “crowd control and security measures may be required.”

If the meeting has come under threat, it is surely the responsibility of Conrad Grebel University College and Waterloo University to inform the IYSSE of the nature of these threats and to publicly speak out against them.

Everything suggests that you are bowing to political pressure—most likely from elements associated with the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. The UCC is systematically seeking to shut down, and failing that to disrupt, any and all anti-war meetings and to malign them as “pro-Russian.” The UCC espouses a far-right form of Ukrainian nationalism and celebrates Stepan Bandera, a fascist and Nazi collaborator whose Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) was complicit in the mass murder of Jews and Poles. John-Paul Himka, arguably the most eminent Canadian historian of 20th century Ukraine, has publicly charged that the UCC are “keepers of the (OUN) flame,” who have “put the glorification of these radical right nationalists at the very center of the Ukrainian national identity project.”

It is disturbing that rather than encouraging discussion and debate about the Ukraine war—a war in which Canada is intimately involved, has already led to hundreds of thousands of casualties and given rise to public discussion about the possible use of nuclear weapons—your College and by extension Waterloo University are bowing to those who want to shut it down.

In conclusion, the meeting should go forward as planned. There are no grounds for it not to. If it doesn’t, it will be seen by the university community and general public as the result of a blatant act of political censorship, aimed at foreclosing public discussion of the origins and consequences of a war into which Canada is increasingly being drawn.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Matthew Richter

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