

Canada's Waterloo University backs down on threat to cancel IYSSE anti-war meeting

Keith Jones
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We urge all University of Waterloo students and all WSWWS readers who live in the Kitchener-Waterloo area to attend next week's IYSSE meeting: "The War in Ukraine and How to Stop It." It will be held Tuesday, March 28, at 7 p.m., in Room 1302 of Conrad Grebel University College, 140 Westmount Rd. North, Waterloo, Ontario.

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The University of Waterloo has backed off from its threat to cancel an International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) anti-war meeting to be held next Tuesday, March 28, at its campus in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario.

The IYSSE had vigorously defended its democratic right to hold the meeting, which is part of a series being held by the IYSSE around the world under the title "The war in Ukraine and how to stop it: The historical and political origins of the US-NATO war against Russia."

On Tuesday, the university emailed the IYSSE a letter that was clearly aimed at providing a pretext for canceling the IYSSE's room booking at its Conrad Grebel University College. The letter falsely implied that the IYSSE had misrepresented the character of the meeting and had sought to associate the College with it. The letter then went on to spell out a series of new conditions, above and beyond those stipulated in the room-booking contract, that needed to be fulfilled by the end of the day Wednesday for the meeting to be allowed to proceed.

Many of these conditions were, quite frankly, outrageous. For example, the IYSSE was required to provide the university with "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."

The university's letter referred to telephone calls complaining about the meeting and suggested threats of violence may have been made. In support of its newly introduced requirement calling for the IYSSE to provide details of its "plan for managing attendance," the university claimed that the IYSSE meeting is "likely" to "attract opposition" and "crowd control and security measures may be required."

IYSSE representative Matthew Richter responded the next day with a letter that refuted the university's claims of misrepresentation and rejected its attempt to arbitrarily impose new conditions for the room booking. It suggested the university had come under pressure from the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, a Canadian government-sponsored organization that espouses a far-right strain of Ukrainian nationalism that celebrates the Nazi collaborator and war criminal Stepan Bandera.

Richter's letter concluded by affirming that next Tuesday's "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."

Late Thursday afternoon, several hours after the *World Socialist Web Site* published Richter's letter and called on students and workers in Canada and internationally to oppose Waterloo University's attempt to censor the IYSSE, Richter received a second letter from the university. It rescinded all the new demands and conditions the university had imposed in its Tuesday email.

Thursday's letter from university administrator E.

Paul Penner began by asserting, “We are not interested in cancelling your event, but we do want to ensure that it is managed appropriately.” Much of the letter is given over to trying to justify the now rescinded conditions. Thus Penner continued to claim that the IYSSE’s promotional materials could cause confusion as to who is holding the event, although they clearly state the meeting is “Sponsored by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality” and Conrad Grebel University College is named, in conformity with the booking-room contract, strictly for the purposes of identifying the meeting venue.

In his letter Richter had noted that if the university was aware of any threats against next Tuesday’s meeting it had a responsibility “to inform the IYSSE of the nature of these threats and to publicly speak out against them.” In response the university now states, “We are not aware of any security risk, and will let you know if we become aware of one.”

The university’s Thursday letter also states that no one who has contacted it about the IYSSE meeting has identified themselves as affiliated with the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC). Be that as it may, the UCC and its affiliated student groups, as the WSWS has previously documented, are mounting a systematic campaign to force the cancellation of anti-war meetings, including by smearing their organizers as “pro-Russian,” and failing that to disrupt them.

If they can act with such impunity, it is because they enjoy support from the highest levels of the Canadian state. Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, whose grandfather was a prominent far-right Ukrainian Nazi collaborator, has been associated with the UCC since her childhood and has routinely joined it in paying homage to Bandera and his Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists. Defence Minister Anita Anand’s chief of staff, Taras Zalusky, was the CEO and executive director of the UCC from 2010 until 2016.

Even more importantly, the Liberal government is “standing with Ukraine,” providing the NATO-puppet regime in Kiev with over a billion dollars in weaponry since the war began and supporting the US in escalating the conflict even at the risk of triggering nuclear war, because it serves the predatory interests of Canadian imperialism’s capitalist elite.

Ultimately, the political establishment and corporate

media’s relentless barrage of pro-war propaganda and the effort to censor and silence anti-war voices are an expression of the fear in the ruling class. Not only do they recognize that among working people there is growing apprehension and opposition to the war, albeit as of yet of a politically inchoate character. They fear that the narrative they have constructed to justify the war—that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was entirely “unprovoked” and that the Zelensky regime and NATO are fighting for “democracy” and the “self-determination” of Ukraine—will quickly unravel, if subject to open criticism and debate. That is that their pro-war narrative will be exposed as a pack of lies and half-truths, based on historical falsification.

We thank all WSWS readers who supported us in opposing Waterloo University’s attempt to censor the IYSSE meeting. It is a small but important victory for the democratic rights of working people.

We urge all University of Waterloo students and all WSWS readers who live in Kitchener-Waterloo, Guelph and their environs to attend next week’s IYSSE meeting. It is being held on Tuesday, March 28, at 7 p.m., in Room 1302 of Conrad Grebel University College, 140 Westmount Rd North, Waterloo, Ontario. The principal speaker will be Niles Niemuth, managing editor of the WSWS.



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