

Oppose political censorship of antiwar views at Howard University!

International Youth and Students for Social Equality
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In March, the administration of Howard University in Washington D.C. rejected without explanation an International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) request to hold a public antiwar meeting on its campus.

The decision is an act of censorship directed not only against the IYSSE but the democratic rights of all students and workers at Howard University. It sets a chilling precedent for freedom of speech at the university and beyond. We call on all students, faculty and staff members at Howard University to oppose this censorship and demand that the IYSSE be allowed to hold its planned meeting on campus!

The planned meeting is part of an international meeting series, The War in Ukraine and How to Stop it. The IYSSE has already held successful meetings in the US, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Sri Lanka, the UK and Canada. The meetings focus on providing a historical background to the war and explaining the socialist perspective on how to fight it.

Howard University initially gave the IYSSE a “tentative” approval to host a meeting as part of this series on campus in an email dated March 14. Just one week later, on March 21, an official from Howard University’s office of central scheduling rejected the event. “Unfortunately,” the official’s email states, “after reviewing this event with the appropriate personnel, we are unable to host this proposed event. Please know that this decision is not a reflection on yourself, your program, or your organization. Please let me know if there are any questions.”

The IYSSE responded to this email by asking for the specific reasons for the rejection. The university has failed to provide an answer.

There are two fundamental questions that all students should ask:

First: Why are students and workers at Howard University deprived of the opportunity to hear about the historical background to the war in Ukraine and the socialist opposition to it?

It has been over a year since the beginning of the war in Ukraine. Already, it is the bloodiest war in Europe since the end of World War II, with hundreds of thousands of casualties.

The dangers of this war cannot be overstated. It has the world’s most heavily armed nuclear powers on a collision course that threatens a planet-wide conflagration. This is not

hyperbole. Without any democratic mandate or discussion, the US and NATO have armed the Ukrainian government to the teeth. In the past year, NATO has given more than \$100 billion in weapons and war planning to the Ukrainian military. This includes budget-busting spending on the US’s own military. The US and NATO are at war with Russia, in all but name.

The IYSSE, the student and youth organization of the International Committee of the Fourth International, opposes the Putin government’s war in Ukraine. The IYSSE in the US works in solidarity with the Young Guard of Bolshevik Leninists in the former Soviet Union, who are fighting to mobilize workers and youth against this war, and oppose both the Putin government and the Zelensky government from a socialist standpoint.

But our opposition to the Putin regime and its invasion of Ukraine comes from the socialist left, not the imperialist right. The fact is that the war in Ukraine was instigated by Washington and NATO. The official narrative given by the Biden administration about this war, that the Putin government is engaged in “unprovoked” aggression against its neighbor, is a self-serving lie. The US has not only invaded multiple countries and been at a constant state of war over the past 30 years. It has also systematically encircled Russia through the expansion of NATO and has been arming the Ukrainian regime for war since it coordinated the toppling of the pro-Russian Yanukovich government in the Maidan coup of 2014.

Washington’s real aim in this war is to assert US imperialism’s domination over the vast resources of Russia and the former Soviet Union as part of a new imperialist redivision of the world. This insane operation has been intensified by the crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and the growth of class struggle internationally.

The IYSSE insists that students and workers have a basic democratic right to learn about this war, which has the greatest implications for their own lives and future. It is on Howard University’s administration to explain why they refused to allow for a political discussion of these fundamental questions on their campus.

Second: Who were “the appropriate personnel” that rejected the IYSSE request to hold an antiwar meeting?

Howard University, a historically black college (HBCU), was

founded after the American Civil War with the democratic goal to improve “the education and advancement of disadvantaged persons in American society and throughout the world.” Yet in its decision to reject, without any explanation, the IYSSE’s request to hold an antiwar meeting on campus, Howard University repudiates the most elementary democratic rights of its students.

Students have a right to know who made this decision.

Was the university board of trustees involved? The board’s leadership includes venture capitalists, along with representatives of Citigroup, ExxonMobil, and other corporations. Democratic Party congressional aides, media analysts and the cabinet officials of former Democratic presidents also sit on the board. In other words, Howard University’s Board of Trustees represents the key “shareholders” of this war and the capitalist system as a whole: finance capital, big business, the media and the Democratic Party political establishment. These are the same forces that have helped instigate this war and have every interest in its continuation.

Students should also ask whether the university’s direct ties to the Pentagon played any role in this decision. In January, Howard University announced that it was forming a \$90 million partnership with the US military to become the nation’s first HBCU-based University Affiliated Research Center. Announced to great fanfare, the director of Howard’s Data Science and Cybersecurity Center told *The Dig* that this initiative would “provide operational advantages to our war fighters.”

The Pentagon has already delivered tens of billions worth of weapons, including tanks and sophisticated weapons systems, to the Ukrainian army. It is, hence, an interested party in this war.

Oppose political censorship at Howard University! Build the IYSSE!

The act of censorship by Howard University comes amid a dangerous escalation of the war against both Russia and China, and growing effort to suppress discussion of revolutionary socialism as the genuine opposition to both capitalism and imperialist war. In Canada, Australia and New Zealand, IYSSE meetings have been threatened with censorship and its participants subjected to right wing threats by far-right Ukrainian nationalist and pro-NATO forces. Thuggish threats have also been launched against our comrades in Sri Lanka.

The IYSSE refuses to be intimidated by these attacks. We have held successful meetings in spite of these attacks and call upon Howard University students to fight for their right to hear the socialist perspective on the war in Ukraine.

This fight raises fundamental questions of political perspective. Howard University is at the center of a filthy nexus of the Democratic Party, big business, militarism and the promotion of identity politics.

At Howard, millions of dollars for ceremonial positions and

lavish speaking fees have been showered on racist ideologues such as Nikole Hannah-Jones and Ta-Nahesi Coates. Hannah-Jones, the multimillionaire author of the *New York Times*’ 1619 Project, a mythological, racial “re-envisioning” of American history as a nonstop war between “whites” and “blacks,” was given \$20 million in seed money to establish a so-called “Center for Democracy and Journalism” at Howard.

This has occurred while the low-paid workforce is denied basic job protections and living wages. Meanwhile, the students live in dangerously unsanitary dorm rooms on the campus.

Nikole Hannah-Jones’s purported “first-of-its-kind academic center committed to strengthening historically-informed, pro-democracy journalism” has printed nothing about the plight of the staff, or its students, or the creeping hand of US militarism, for that matter.

The role of ideologues like Hannah-Jones is to cover up the basic class issues in society, while promoting the interests of the wealthy upper-middle class that is closely tied to the US capitalist system and war machine.

In opposition to these forces, the IYSSE and the *World Socialist Web Site* have exploded the racial myths of society and exposed the reality of the class struggle, both at Howard and more broadly in our refutation of the 1619 Project.

It is for this reason, above all, that the university’s “appropriate personnel” have sought to ban us. But in resorting to this attempt at censorship, Howard University has only revealed that it knows our views will find support at its institution among students and university workers.

We call on all Howard University students, lecturers and staff to oppose this antidemocratic ban on the IYSSE’s antiwar meeting! Students and workers have a democratic right to learn about the war in Ukraine! Fight to build the IYSSE at Howard University! Get in touch with the IYSSE today to join our campaign against censorship at Howard and against the war in Ukraine!



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