

Far-right Ukrainian nationalists force cancellation of Montreal antiwar meeting—this brazen act of censorship must not go unchallenged

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The *World Socialist Web Site* unequivocally condemns the reactionary decision of Montreal's Centre St. Pierre to cancel a public meeting against the US-NATO war on Russia in Ukraine organized by the Mouvement Québécois pour la Paix, le Parti Vert (Green Party) du Québec, and other anti-war groups.

The cancellation of the meeting is anti-democratic, sets a dangerous precedent, and serves to strengthen Canadian imperialism in its predatory war against Russia.

In cancelling the meeting, the directors of the Centre St. Pierre—a venue long used by trade unions, community and left-wing groups—capitulated to the campaign that the far-right Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) is mounting, with the support of the Justin Trudeau-led federal Liberal government, to censor and suppress all antiwar voices and actions.

The April 15 meeting, “What is the truth about the war in Ukraine,” was to have featured radical journalist Yves Engler as a panelist, as well as Université de Montréal History Professor Samir Saul.

A long-standing critic of Canadian foreign policy, including its participation in an uninterrupted series of US-led wars over recent decades, Engler has become a prime target of the virulently nationalist UCC. Its supporters have smeared him as being pro-Russian, a mouthpiece for Russian President Vladimir Putin, and violent.

In fact Engler is a leading member of the Canadian Foreign Policy Institute, which argues the Canadian government and state can be pressured into playing a “progressive” or altruistic role in world affairs, including by pushing for peace talks with Russia to end the current conflict. He has spoken at several antiwar events, including one at Ottawa's Carleton University earlier this year alongside former Green Party leadership candidate Dmitri Lascaris that UCC supporters urged the university to cancel and subsequently disrupted.

In attempting to justify its arbitrary decision to cancel the April 15 meeting, the Roman Catholic Church-affiliated Centre St. Pierre said it had received complaints about the “comments

and behaviour” of several of the meeting's panelists and sponsors, especially those of Engler. It also cited a threatened counter-protest, which given the UCC's politics would no doubt have involved far-right forces capable of acts of violence.

In its brief letter announcing the meeting's cancellation, the Centre St. Pierre made the outrageous claim that this blatant act of censorship was in accordance with its “mission (and) values—notably respect and democracy.” Adding insult to injury, it further declared that if the Centre were to proceed with the rental of a room for the antiwar meeting it would “damage its reputation.”

It has since refused to provide any further explanation of its decision to shut down the meeting or any substantiation of its accusations against meeting panelists and sponsors. When contacted by a WSWs reporter, the Centre's director-general, Charles Fillion, claimed the Centre had researched the complaints and found them warranted. But when asked, he refused to detail what they were or provide any substantiation of them, although he claimed that they were part of the public record.

“The Centre St. Pierre has made insinuations about the Mouvement Québécois pour la Paix (MQP), which has consistently opposed war and favors free debate at all our meetings,” MQP executive board member John Philpot told the WSWs. “And it has made allusions about the behaviour of some of our speakers.

“The Centre has a long history of encouraging free speech, supporting unions, social justice and religious freedom. But it has succumbed to pressure and veiled threats and in so doing failed to defend the right of free speech and its own mission.”

Workers and young people across Canada and internationally must oppose this outrageous acts of censorship. Notwithstanding our well-documented political differences with Engler and the MQP, who argue that it is possible to pressure imperialist powers like Canada to peacefully settle a war that is rooted in the irresolvable contradictions of the

capitalist profit system, the WSWs unreservedly supports their right to hold public meetings to develop opposition to the war in Ukraine.

The censoring of the April 15 meeting must not be allowed to pass unchallenged. It sets a dangerous precedent whereby any anti-war meeting can be shut down by smearing panelists or organizers, or making threats of violence.

Fillion claimed to be unaware of the UCC campaign to silence those who challenge its and the Canadian government's narrative of an "unprovoked" war being waged by Canada and its NATO allies to defend Ukrainian "democracy" and sovereignty. He said those who brought pressure to bear on the Centre to cancel the meeting had not identified themselves as being connected to the UCC.

This may well be true. It prefers to act in the shadows, in keeping with its anti-democratic aims.

But there is no question that the UCC is spearheading a coordinated campaign, discussed with high-level government representatives, aimed at instituting a regime of state censorship of opponents of Canadian imperialism. In March, the UCC issued a press release accompanied by an 11-page briefing note sent to Minister for Public Safety Marco Mendicino, in which they urged the Liberal government to clamp down on "pro-Russian" messaging. The press release boasted that UCC leaders had previously met on several occasions with Mendicino and other government officials. They issued a series of demands, including that the government make a "public statement" condemning a non-existent "hate campaign" against Ukrainians and create a political blacklist consisting of individuals engaged in spreading "disinformation." One of the incidents cited by the UCC as supposed proof of the existence of a "hate campaign" against Ukrainians was the Carleton University meeting addressed by Engler.

Later in March, UCC supporters attempted but failed to sabotage a public meeting entitled "The war in Ukraine and how to stop it" held at the University of Waterloo by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party. After Ukrainian nationalists applied pressure to the university administration to cancel the room booking, the IYSSE waged a vigorous public campaign, including by issuing an open letter protesting the attempted censorship. The meeting went ahead successfully in spite of efforts by UCC activists to physically prevent attendees from entering the venue.

The UCC feels emboldened to act so provocatively because it enjoys close ties to the highest levels of government. These ties are embodied in Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, who has been associated with the UCC since childhood and whose grandfather was a Nazi collaborator during World War II and published a fascist Ukrainian newspaper. A former UCC chief executive currently serves as the chief of staff to Defence Minister Anita Anand, who has overseen the dispatch of billions of dollars of military equipment to fuel the ongoing

NATO-backed slaughter in Ukraine.

All the opposition parties—from the Conservative Party to the ostensibly left-wing Québec Solidaire—and corporate media outlets also stand fully behind the war in Ukraine and the far-right nationalist forces spearheading the censorship campaign. The New Democratic Party, which together with the trade unions is pledged to support the minority Trudeau government through June 2025, is a full-throated supporter of the war. Foreign affairs spokesperson Heather McPherson has met repeatedly with UCC representatives and solidarized herself with their far-right nationalist positions. The media churns out pro-war propaganda, hailing the far-right regime in Kiev as a champion of "democracy" and "human rights," even as it bans all dissenting voices, lauds the Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera, and sends tens of thousands of young Ukrainians to their deaths in the interests of the imperialist powers.

There is in fact nothing democratic about the major role Canadian imperialism is playing in the US-led war against Russia. After three decades of uninterrupted US imperialist wars and the expansion of NATO up to Russia's borders, Ottawa, Washington, and their European allies conspired to provoke Putin, whose government represents the reactionary interests of the Russian capitalist oligarchy, into invading Ukraine, which the imperialists had armed to the teeth with weaponry and trained in NATO combat standards. In none of the imperialist powers of North America or Western Europe has the population had any say in the waging of the war.

On the contrary, unpopular governments are pouring tens of billions of dollars into waging war and rearming their own militaries in order to secure their share of the spoils in a new imperialist repartition of the world. The pursuit of this policy in every corner of the globe requires censorship and suppression of all dissenting voices at home.

The only way to stop the imperialists plunging humanity into another world war and abrogating democratic rights is through the building of an international anti-war movement in the working class. This movement must be based on a socialist and internationalist program to put an end to war and the capitalist profit system that gives rise to it. We urge all workers and young people who reject the censorship and suppression of opposition to the war to contact the *World Socialist Web Site* and make plans to attend the international May Day rally sponsored by the WSWs, International Youth and Students for Social Equality, and International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees on April 30 at 3pm eastern time.



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