

Facebook blocks Socialist Equality Group in New Zealand from advertising

Tom Peters
5 May 2023

In a thoroughly anti-democratic decision, Facebook has blocked the ability of the Socialist Equality Group (SEG) in New Zealand to run any ads.

The SEG is fighting to build a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in New Zealand. Like other political parties and organisations, the SEG has run dozens of paid advertisements for more than seven years via Facebook, to promote public meetings and “boost” important articles and statements published on the *World Socialist Web Site*.

On April 26, however, Meta Business Suite informed the SEG Facebook page administrator that they are no longer allowed to place advertisements “because you didn’t comply with one or more of our Advertising policies affecting business assets or other standards, such as having too many ads rejected, attempting to circumvent our ad review process, participating in fraudulent behaviour or associating with untrustworthy accounts.”

No justification for the ban was given beyond this extremely vague statement. The claims of “fraudulent behaviour” or failure to comply with Facebook’s policies are totally unsubstantiated. The SEG’s “page quality” status shows that there have been zero violations of Facebook’s Community Standards by the page.

In an apparent attempt to give itself some semblance of justification, Facebook has retrospectively labelled as “rejected” a number of ads that it, in fact, approved at the time. These include five advertisements during 2021 that were part of the SEG’s campaign for justice for the families of the 2010 Pike River mine disaster victims; and two event notices that were boosted before and after the 2020 election, for public meetings that sought to mobilise socialist opposition to the Ardern Labour government.

The SEG page administrator requested a review of the decision, and the following day received a new message: “After a requested review of your Facebook account, we confirmed that it didn’t comply with our Advertising

Policies or other standards. You can no longer advertise using Facebook Products. This is our final decision.”

Asked to clarify the reason for the ban, a Meta Business Support employee informed the administrator (via Messenger): “I see that the account is disabled but we do not have [a] specific reason.” They added: “my hands are tied and I have no option to file an appeal since our system is blocking me [from doing] so for your account since our Specialized Team has made their final decision.” It is impossible to contact this “Specialized Team.”

Facebook’s action against the SEG is blatant political censorship against the Trotskyist movement in New Zealand. It comes at a time when there is growing opposition to capitalism and imperialist war and increasing interest and support for socialism among workers and young people.

It is obvious who stands to benefit. With an election scheduled for October 14, every capitalist party will be advertising heavily on Facebook and other social media. The last thing they want is anything resembling a level playing field in which socialists can make their material widely available to the public.

The Labour Party-Greens government is increasingly unpopular and particularly vulnerable to political exposures from the SEG—the only organisation that has consistently opposed Labour from the socialist left. The government has no fundamental differences with the right-wing National Party; Labour is imposing drastic austerity measures in health and education while aligning New Zealand with the US-NATO imperialist war against Russia and the war drive against China.

The timing of Facebook’s advertising ban suggests that it might have been prompted by the SEG’s campaign against the war in Ukraine. The most recent advertisement run by the SEG was for a public meeting held in Wellington on April 4 by its youth organisation, the

International Youth and Students for Social Equality, titled “The War in Ukraine and How to Stop It.”

Facebook allowed the SEG page to run advertisements for the meeting, but on April 8 suspended its ability to run any more ads. After the page’s administrator requested a review of the decision, their ability to advertise was quickly reinstated. Meta for Business said in an email: “This review has determined that access to advertising features was incorrectly disabled.”

Eighteen days later, however, the ban was reimposed without explanation.

In the lead-up to the April 4 meeting, the right-wing NAFO (North Atlantic Fellas Organisation) launched a campaign to try to get it cancelled (along with an anti-war meeting held by the IYSSE in Sydney on the same day). This mostly anonymous internet-based group is heavily promoted by the corporate media in the US and Europe. NAFO members agitate on Twitter against anti-war groups and spread propaganda on behalf of the Ukrainian regime and military.

NAFO supporters made hundreds of fake online bookings for the New Zealand meeting, and at least one individual contacted Victoria University of Wellington to try to get it cancelled.

This raises the question: did Facebook receive any messages from supporters of the US-NATO war demanding that it take action against the SEG?

This is not the first time the social media giant has targeted the ICFI. In January 2021, Facebook carried out a sweeping purge of left-wing, anti-war and progressive pages and accounts, including leading members of the Socialist Equality Party in the United States, and the page of the University of Michigan chapter of the IYSSE (UM IYSSE). Facebook reinstated the UM IYSSE account, without explanation, following widespread protests on social media.

In March last year, Facebook took down a popular video created by the Socialist Equality Party in Germany, titled “No Third World War! Against the Ukraine war, NATO aggression and German rearmament!” After thousands of people protested against the video’s deletion, it was restored by Facebook a week later.

Twitter has engaged in similar actions, last year blocking the account of the SEP in Australia. The ban was reversed after a week, following a campaign by the party and its supporters.

The censorship of social media has been heavily promoted by the New Zealand government, especially former Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, supposedly to stop

“violent extremism” and “hate speech.” Ardern’s Christchurch Call initiative was set up in 2019 to coordinate online censorship efforts internationally with governments and companies, including Meta/Facebook and Twitter.

In reality, as the repeated moves against the Trotskyist movement show, the main target of online censorship is socialist and anti-war views. At the United Nations last year, Ardern advocated censoring “mis- and disinformation” about the war with Russia, i.e., anyone who opposes the US-NATO propaganda campaign aimed at escalating the war.

The Socialist Equality Group demands that Facebook immediately lift its unjustified ban on the administrator’s advertising account.

We urge readers to:

1. Send statements demanding an immediate reversal of Facebook’s actions against the Socialist Equality Group to info@support.facebook.com and zuckerberg@fb.com. Send copies of your letters to sep.wellington@gmail.com for publication on the *World Socialist Web Site*.

2. Share this statement as widely as possible with your friends and co-workers and on social media, including Facebook, Twitter and other platforms. Include the hashtag #StopCensoringSocialism.

3. Send us any information that you have on the censorship of left-wing individuals and publications by Facebook or other social media companies so that we can publicise and oppose these attacks.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)