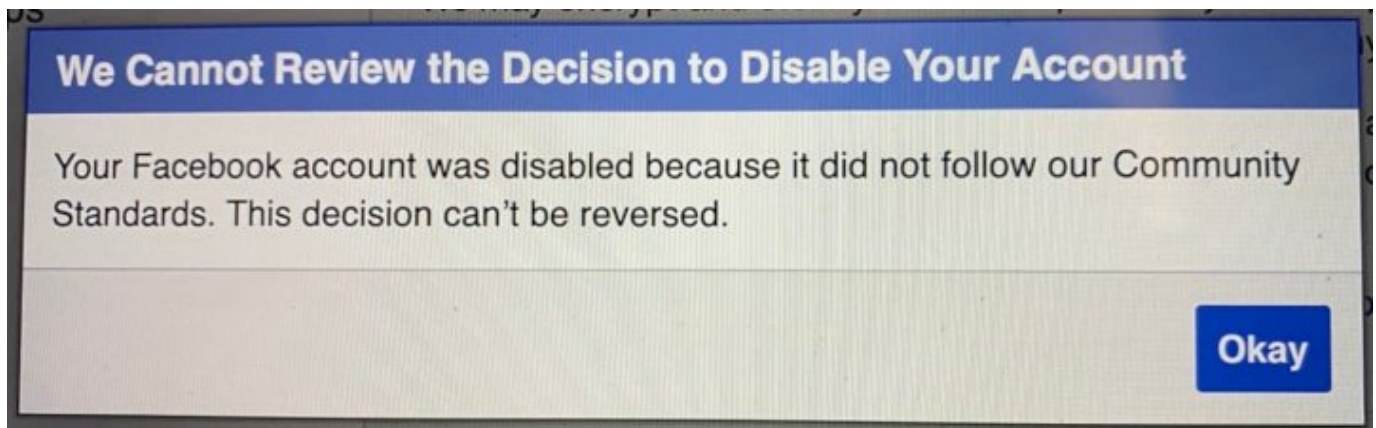




Struggle-La-Lucha.org

Solidarity pushes back Facebook ban on community and women's groups

written by Greg Butterfield
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Social media network Facebook is relied upon by millions of people around the globe for communication. But under billionaire CEO Mark Zuckerberg and his fellow owners, Facebook serves the interests of profit, not people. Facebook launched its latest attack on leftists and people's organizations shortly after the inauguration of President Joe Biden.

Pages of several left organizations in the U.S. and Britain were summarily removed

on Jan. 21-22. Hundreds of activists affiliated with those pages had their Facebook profiles “disabled” — that is, banned. When activists tried to appeal the decision, they were all notified that the ban was permanent and could not be appealed due to alleged, unspecified “violations of community standards.”

In the U.S., the pages of the [Peoples Power Assembly](#), a leading anti-police brutality group based in Baltimore, and [Women In Struggle/Mujeres En Lucha](#), a nationwide women’s organization affiliated with the Women’s International Democratic Federation, [were removed by Facebook](#).

Sixteen activists who perform administrative duties on those pages — many of them contributors to Struggle-La Lucha newspaper and members of the Socialist Unity Party across the U.S. — were banned. As a result, several other pages administered by these activists were silenced, including the Atlanta Peoples Power Assembly, Prisoners Solidarity Committee, Solidarity with Antifascists in Novorossiia and Ukraine, and Youth Against War & Racism.

The [Socialist Workers Party of Britain](#), one of that country’s largest left parties, was similarly hit. Not only the party’s main page but many of its local branch pages were removed, along with activists’ profiles. This was just days before the Jan. 25 International Day of Solidarity with Yemen, an effort against the U.S.-Saudi war in which the British SWP had a significant organizational role.

Also banned were anti-fascist networks and individuals targeted as “antifa,” and pages affiliated with the World Socialist Web Site in the U.S. and in Britain, where the group has been a vocal part of the movement to prevent the extradition of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange.

These organizations quickly took legal actions to challenge the Facebook bans, carried out media campaigns, and urged supporters and movement allies to bombard Facebook with protests.

As a result, by Jan. 27 most of the disabled pages had been restored. Many of the affected activists learned of the reversal only by word-of-mouth — Facebook offered no explanation for the bans or notification of the sudden reversal.

According to a report in the [Financial Times](#) — the British equivalent of the Wall Street Journal — “Facebook said it had mistakenly removed a number of far-left political accounts, citing an ‘automation error,’ triggering uproar from socialists who accused the social media platform of censorship.

“Facebook did not respond to requests to clarify how the error had occurred and why it had affected the personal accounts of socialist figures.”

Power concedes nothing without demand

“It was solidarity that won the reversal,” said Sharon Black of the Peoples Power Assembly. She pointed out that there was no avenue to restore the pages until the targeted groups alerted supporters and media and threatened legal action.

“We began to hear from many other activists about unfair censorship and arbitrary Facebook decisions, without a clear appeals process. Most of those impacted have been Black, Latinx, Palestinian, BIPOC [Black, Indigenous and People of Color], women and other communities whose voices have too often been marginalized.”

For years, Facebook and other U.S.-based social media monopolies have frequently silenced left organizations and activists fighting for national liberation and opposing U.S. wars and racism, while ultraright groups allied with U.S. imperialism and police agencies were given free rein. Only in the wake of mass outrage following the Jan. 6 coup attempt at the Capitol have hatemonger Donald Trump and some of his racist allies faced restrictions.

Media outlets based in other countries that present critical views of U.S. actions are also frequently silenced. Latin America-based teleSUR, Iran’s Press TV and the

Korean Central News Agency are among those routinely suppressed.

While Facebook was shutting down activists' accounts in the U.S. and Britain, its counterpart Twitter was targeting Latin American socialists.

The official Twitter account of the Venezuelan National Assembly, which recently elected a pro-socialist majority, [was shut down Jan. 22](#). But the account of the previous National Assembly headed by U.S.-backed coup leader Juan Guaidó is still active. "Double standards," declared Venezuela's democratically elected president, Nicolás Maduro.

Meanwhile, the Twitter accounts of the Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia and the [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army \(FARC-EP Second Marquetalia\)](#) were also shut down, along with the groups' pages on YouTube (owned by Google).

Berta Joubert-Ceci, organizer of the International Tribunal on U.S. Colonial Crimes in Puerto Rico and founder of Women In Struggle, had her profile banned. "It is appalling — the cowardice of Facebook in silencing the voices of women and progressive people who struggle for justice and a better life for all," she said.

Solidarity turns the tide

Within hours of Facebook removing the pages of the PPA, Women In Struggle and affiliated activists, the groups had issued a statement alerting the progressive movement and the media to the attack. People's attorney Alec Summerfield wrote a letter to Facebook threatening legal action.

The groups' statement in English and Spanish spread across email and social networks like wildfire. It was reprinted by numerous websites, including FightBack News in the U.S., Insisto-Resisto in Venezuela and the French anarchist site Info Libertaire.

In Puerto Rico, the Union of Electrical Industry and Irrigation Workers (UTIER) took up the case. A union representative went on the radio to read the statement and denounce Facebook's actions.

Staff at the Philadelphia Free Press reached out to their contacts at Facebook and urged workers there to demand a reversal of the company's decision. Labor Against Racist Terror shared the statement with its network of union activists, urging them to call, email and tweet Facebook executives.

"We want to thank everyone who took time to lend their support," said PPA's Sharon Black. She recalled that the PPA's page and many of the same activists were [similarly banned in late October](#) 2020, just days before the presidential election.

Then, too, they had to fight to get the pages and profiles restored. At the time, Facebook collaborated with the Department of Homeland Security and fascists in the Baltimore/Washington, D.C., area to try to sabotage a protest the group was organizing against Donald Trump's threat to overturn the election.

"We're still unsatisfied" with Facebook's response, added Rasika Ruwanpathirana, an immigrant activist and filmmaker who was targeted. He told Struggle-La Lucha that the so-called Oversight Board [recently set up by Facebook bosses](#) is entirely inadequate.

"The PPA and Women In Struggle are advocating for genuine change. This includes an independent people's oversight of this giant monopoly that in this period, particularly with the pandemic, has become a necessity in much the way that power and water utilities are.

"Oversight includes full transparency, decision making on 'community standards,' a speedy appeal procedure and liability for damages on the part of Facebook."

Ruwanpathirana concluded: "If Facebook won't do right, it's time for Facebook to

belong to the people.”

