

Oxford Union panel speaker Heather Marsh confirms debate was censored to protect CIA

By Zach Reed
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On May 25, the *World Socialist Web Site* reported on an anonymous email it had received that alleged that a debate held in February at the Oxford Union: “Whistleblowing: exposing injustices or undermining institutions?” had been censored.

The censorship was said to have been carried out to suppress remarks made by panellist Heather Marsh against David Shedd, a former CIA operative. The WSWS had no way of independently verifying this, other than the lack of any trace of transcripts or audio/video recordings. It is normal practice for the Oxford Union to upload recordings of all debates to YouTube.

Marsh, a human rights activist and administrator of WikiLeaks Central between 2010 and 2012, has now responded to an inquiry sent by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), confirming that the entire debate was censored.

In her email, Marsh states, “You are correct that the panel was censored, in breach of the contract Oxford Union offered to its speakers and despite YouTube release forms being signed by all involved.”

Marsh continues: “Journalists were also ignored and given a very disrespectful and inconsiderate runaround by the Oxford Union committee, despite journalists’ labour being the exchange they are offering as their part of the contractual agreement.”

She also sent the WSWS a transcript of her contribution.

Marsh began the February debate by declaring, “My focus has always been human rights and horizontal governance. Of the human rights atrocities I have worked to expose, a very large number are associated with David Shedd and the organizations and allies he represents.”

She told the audience of Canadian citizen, “Omar

Khadr who was abducted at 15 years old, subjected to the most horrific torture at the CIA black site Bagram, then trafficked and tortured for another decade at Guantanamo before enduring a show trial of invented court, invented evidence, invented experts and retroactively applied, invented crimes ...

“The hell this Canadian child went through for 12 years was conducted by the organizations represented by David Shedd.

“It is deeply uncomfortable for me to be here today, on the same panel as someone whose work has established and worked to normalize ever-increasing drone murders, black site disappearances and torture and I hope it is uncomfortable for all of you as well, and for him,” Marsh explained. “Beware of your contribution to the growing banality of evil lest you yourself become a cog in the machinery of terror.”

Marsh said that Shedd “wants to crush whistleblowers.” Warning against laws being passed against whistleblowers, that she defined as anyone who challenges and speaks out against or exposes the powerful, she said these would eventually be used against anyone seeking to bring those in power to justice for crimes committed.

Referencing the torture and detention camp run by the US, she explained “[I]t is the people in Guantanamo and every other prison who we should never have allowed to be silenced in the first place and those are the voices we need to make sure we hear ... we already have so many international laws protecting our human rights, our rights to freedom of expression, our right to knowledge, our rights to not be *tortured and murdered, our right to a fair trial*, and these are all being ignored” (emphasis in original source).

Responding to a comment by Shedd that “our men and women in uniform” are heroic, Marsh presented a

devastating summation of the antidemocratic and unaccountable CIA:

“David Shedd belonged to the most powerful, well-funded, weaponized, international, organized crime syndicate the world has ever seen. Not even counting the other organizations he is affiliated with or those he calls his allies—just looking at the CIA by itself—they are in the business of assassinations, they manage black sites for torture, they work with local mafias, cartels and militias all over the world, they run operations trafficking weapons, drugs and people all over the world, they have ongoing programs of human experimentation ... these are just a few of the things the CIA itself has done, not counting their network of allies. They are part of a vast criminal network that is now planning even greater expansion, more torture, far more disappearances, far more murder. So, when these men talk about whistleblowers threatening national security, we need to ask three obvious questions: what is security to them, who is their nation and who are the whistleblowers?”

“So, given that we are dealing with criminals and members of criminal organizations, what they mean by security is immunity from criminal prosecution. And we have seen that. They do not keep us safe, we have plenty of evidence of that, but they certainly do keep themselves safe. The US military bombed an MSF [Médecins Sans Frontières] hospital. Can we investigate? No, we cannot, they have bulldozed the evidence. They ‘tortured some folks’ and they plan on torturing a lot more, but that’s classified.”

During the debate, Marsh asked Shedd why, given his professed concern for Latin Americans, “are you not doing anything about ICE internment camps in the United States ...”

Shedd replied by asking Marsh what camps she was referring to. When he described US security and military personnel as “our brave men and women,” Marsh interrupted to call them “torturers.” Shedd asked what torture, to which Marsh replied, “Have you not read the Torture Report? Obama declassified part of it, didn’t you know?”

Shedd then told Marsh to stop interrupting him and returned to his theme of “our brave men and women, devoting their lives.”

Marsh again interrupted to state that they were “torturing people.”

Shedd reiterated, “I asked you to stop,” to which Marsh replied, “I asked you for twelve years to stop torturing my friend and you didn’t stop.”

On Mike Pompeo, the former CIA director and now Trump’s secretary of state, Marsh said he is a man who “talks about a bureaucracy that slows down the CIA—that ‘bureaucracy’ is our human rights and that is how they see our lives—as bureaucracy. If they kill too many of us at once they have to fill out a form. And that slows them down. Pompeo wants agile assassins.”

Marsh referred to Erik Prince, a former US Navy SEAL and founder of the Blackwater firm providing security and military services for the US military and State Department, who had spoken at the Oxford Union prior to this debate, as “the crown prince of military contractors.” She weighed in against other powerful figures, noting that there is “impunity for anyone above a certain social strata,” protected by “official secrets and taxpayer funded NDAs [Non-Disclosure Agreements]” justified by claims of maintaining security.

The IYSSE reiterates its demand to the Oxford Union and in particular the president at the time, Laali Vadlamani, and the current president, Gui Cavalcanti, to comment on this matter and to answer the question, on whose authority and on what grounds was reporting of the “whistleblowers” panel was censored?

The WSWWS will continue to pursue this matter as part of its broader campaign against censorship, the assault on democratic rights and the drive to war.

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