

Facebook's purge of left-wing media: A frontal assault on freedom of speech

Andre Damon
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On Thursday, Facebook carried out a mass purge of left-wing political pages as part of an ongoing conspiracy by the state and the technology monopolies to censor the internet.

Over 800 pages and accounts, with a combined following in the tens of millions, were summarily removed. The banned pages include highly popular postings by groups opposing and publicizing incidents of police violence such as Police the Police, Cop Block and Filming Cops, as well as prominent left-wing news pages such as *Anti-Media*, *Reverb Press*, *Counter Current News* and *Resistance*.

The removal of these pages is an unconstitutional assault on freedom of speech and expression. Facebook, acting in coordination with the US government, is violating the most fundamental rights of the American population.

Facebook's claim that the pages are being removed for "inauthentic behavior" is a transparent fraud. It is a pretext for political censorship. No less shocking than the brazen actions of Facebook is the response of all of the mainstream political news outlets, which have parroted the company's absurd lies, citing "experts" who label constitutionally protected speech as "spam."

Facebook's actions are the latest and to date the most aggressive moves in a systematic campaign aimed at delegitimizing political opposition in preparation for the forcible suppression of oppositional groups and news outlets.

Immediately following the 2016 US elections, in which public hostility to Hillary Clinton, the favored candidate of the US military/intelligence apparatus, was increased by WikiLeaks' exposure of Clinton's corrupt ties to Wall Street, the US media launched a campaign to smear oppositional viewpoints as Russian-inspired "fake news." The *New York Times* and the *Washington*

Post, political figures including Democratic Congressman Adam Schiff and Democratic Senator Mark Warner, and the US intelligence apparatus fabricated a narrative of "Russian meddling" in order to pressure the technology monopolies to shut down and censor political opposition.

The leading role in this campaign was played by Google, which announced in April 2017 that it would promote "authoritative" news sources over "alternative" viewpoints by manipulating search results.

In August of 2017, the *World Socialist Web Site* reported that search traffic to 13 left-wing, socialist and anti-war sites plunged after Google implemented these changes to its search algorithm. A leading target was the *World Socialist Web Site* itself, which saw its Google search traffic fall by 75 percent following the announcement. In response, the *World Socialist Web Site* published an open letter to Google demanding that it "renounce the censorship of all... left-wing, socialist, anti-war and progressive websites."

Over the ensuing months, Facebook and Twitter joined Google in announcing major censorship initiatives. In January, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced that his company would promote "trusted" news sites, such as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, at the expense of "alternative" political viewpoints. In the same speech, Zuckerberg announced that Facebook would hire some 20,000 people, many with backgrounds as cops, prosecutors or intelligence agents, to police and censor what its users do and say online.

The censorship drive intensified after a hearing in Washington last month, in which Senator Warner claimed that the overwhelming majority of "far left" political content was "generated by either foreign

actors or automated accounts.” Facebook Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg declared her intention to replace “bad speech” with “alternative facts.”

There is no longer a question as to whether US technology companies are consciously engaged in political censorship. Their half-hearted denials have been exposed as lies by an internal Google research document published last week. The documents states that the technology monopolies have moved away from “free speech and towards censorship,” rejecting the “American tradition that prioritizes free speech for democracy.”

The censorship drive will not stop with the removal of Facebook accounts. PropOrNot, a shadowy organization whose 2016 blacklist, published by Amazon billionaire Jeff Bezos’ *Washington Post*, helped launch the censorship campaign, hailed Facebook’s purge of accounts. In so doing, it made clear that this was only the beginning.

PropOrNot pointed out that all of the organizations targeted by Facebook still “have websites,” and added, “but one thing at a time.” In other words, after removing targeted publications from search results and shutting down their social media accounts, the next step will be the forcible suppression of the websites themselves.

The forces leading the censorship campaign have been remarkably open about their motivations and aims. The Atlantic Council think tank, one of Facebook’s official “partners,” spelled out the aims of the government’s effort to censor the internet in a document published last month summarizing the proceedings of a US Special Forces conference on “sovereignty.”

The document argues that the growth of political opposition in the United States presents an existential threat to the state. This crisis, it warns, can be resolved only by removing the “virus” of political opposition. The most effective way to do this, it explains, is to recruit US technology corporations to play a “central role” in carrying out censorship on behalf of the state.

The censorship of the internet is a concentrated expression of the breakdown of bourgeois democratic forms of rule. In the United States, the Trump administration is a government of extreme reaction, with authoritarian and fascist tendencies. However,

Trump’s critics within the ruling class, led by the Democrats, are no less hostile to democratic forms of rule. In alliance with the military and intelligence apparatus, the Democrats have taken the leading role in attacking democratic rights, from free speech and expression in the fraudulent campaign against “fake news” to due process and the presumption of innocence in the #MeToo witch hunt.

All factions of the ruling class are terrified of the growth of opposition in the working class and the mounting interest in socialism. There is an increasing divergence between the demands of the working population for improvements in wages and working conditions and the policies of the ruling elite, which is accelerating the upward redistribution of wealth and carrying out a new military build-up.

Facing an upsurge in the class struggle, including the rejection of a concessions contract by hundreds of thousands of UPS workers and a strike by hotel workers in a number of cities across the country, the ruling elite is accelerating its plans for censorship and, ultimately, dictatorship.

The growth of the class struggle provides the social basis for the fight against political censorship. Workers must take up the struggle to defend freedom of expression as an inseparable component of the defense of their social and democratic rights and the struggle for socialism.



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