

FCC plan to repeal “net neutrality” gives telecom giants control of public access to Internet

Kevin Reed
23 November 2017

Donald Trump’s appointed Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Ajit Pai released a final draft on Wednesday of an order that will enable privately-owned US broadband Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to control public access to online content.

The blatantly anti-democratic plan to deregulate the US Internet infrastructure will be voted on at a December 14 open FCC hearing. It is expected to be adopted by a 3-to-2 majority.

Following Pai’s appointment in January, the overturning of Obama-era net neutrality rules has been a top priority of the White House and Republican Party in cooperation with the giant telecom monopolies such as AT&T, Verizon, TimeWarner and Comcast.

The concept of net neutrality means that all content on the Internet is treated equally, that the ISPs cannot adjust or prioritize the kind of data or the website content that individuals or organizations access online based on business considerations.

Net neutrality “Open Internet Rules” that became effective on June 15, 2015 prohibited high-speed ISPs from stopping or slowing down the delivery of websites to customers or charging different rates for the quality of high-volume data content such as streaming video over the Internet to homes and businesses.

Although denied by representatives of the broadband companies, the terms of the FCC plan make it possible for access to certain information or data to be blocked entirely or made subject to additional fees or service charges depending on what is in the profit interests of the Internet carrier being used.

With characteristic hypocrisy, Pai released the final draft of his “Restoring Internet Freedom” plan, which

has been in the works since April, declaring, “Under my proposal, the federal government will stop micromanaging the Internet.” As is widely acknowledged by tech industry experts and online access advocates, the FCC proposal has nothing to do with freedom and everything to do with controlling content and throttling broadband data delivery based on service tiers paid for by customers.

A primary false premise of the repeal of net neutrality rules is that government regulation of the big ISPs is “burdensome and unnecessary” and stifling investment and innovation in Internet infrastructure. However, the reality is that telephone and cable corporations are leveraging their Washington influence to regenerate Wall Street interest in their “legacy” Internet corporations. In comparison to the investment in content giants like Google, Amazon, Netflix and Facebook, the broadband industry has stagnated and been devalued on Wall Street.

One of the objectives of the ISP monopolies is to enter the content business themselves either by developing their own programming or through acquisition of TV networks or other media organizations. By lifting net neutrality regulations, the broadband providers can enhance access to their “own” content and throttle, i.e. restrict, the performance or block the content of their competitors.

Under Obama, the net neutrality rules for regulating Internet infrastructure companies as utilities or “common carriers” is based on Title II of the Telecommunications Act signed into law by Franklin D. Roosevelt on June 19, 1934. Since the election of Donald Trump, the Republican-led offensive has been exploiting the limitations of the antiquated “utility”

framework of the landline telephone era to abolish entirely any government regulation of the privately-owned aspects of US Internet infrastructure.

The timing of the announcement by FCC Chairman Pai that he is moving forward aggressively with the new plan is significant. Despite mass public opposition to the repeal of net neutrality—the overwhelming majority of 22 million responses on the FCC website were opposed to the order—the FCC is moving ahead now for transparently political reasons.

Opening up the ability of ISPs to control the flow of Internet content to the public is being implemented as part of the expanding campaign by the state—with the full cooperation of the major telecom, Internet and social media corporations—to censor access to socialist political opposition within the US. Providing the ISPs with carte blanche control over the flow of content takes this censorship to the most fundamental level of Internet technology.

These same ISPs—AT&T and Verizon in particular—have a long history of collaboration with the military-intelligence establishment in spying on the public and gathering data on the online activity of the global population.

No one should accept as good coin the nominal opposition of Google, Amazon and Facebook to the attack on net neutrality by the Trump administration and their competitors in the Internet infrastructure industries. These same corporations have been working hand-in-glove with the state over the past year to block and censor access by the public to socialist and left-wing Internet content under the guise of the fight against “fake news” and unsubstantiated claims of Russian interference in the 2016 US elections. The campaign has been spearheaded by the Democratic Party.

Left-wing sites, and the *World Socialist Web Site* in particular, have been the primary targets of this censorship campaign. The latest changes to the FCC’s regulatory policies are being lined up to intensify this censorship and prepare further attacks on the democratic rights of the entire working class.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit: