

Opposition grows among students and youth to Internet censorship

Our reporters
24 February 2018

There is growing outrage among students and workers throughout the United States to the efforts of social media companies and the US government to censor the Internet under the guise of combatting “fake news” and promoting “authoritative content.”

The International Youth and Student for Social Equality (IYSSE) spoke with students on campuses in the US who denounced censorship and talked about the power of the Internet to organize opposition and disseminate information outside the control of the corporate and state media.

Patrick, an undergraduate student at University of New Mexico, said, “Information is shared online more than in print. The Internet is a really important place. And once one step is taken towards censorship, when will it stop? It’s a slippery slope. Another party will come into office and take that censorship even further. The phrase ‘I disagree with that’ is now being turned into ‘fake news.’ What will news be at that point?”

Many students denounced Facebook’s attempt to suppress news in favor of so-called “personal moments” for the supposed well-being of its users. Rihab, a counseling psychology student at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, said she disagrees with the claim that Facebook’s new policies will make users feel more connected and less lonely.

“Although it’s sad to see these things [police brutality, war crimes, etc.], it’s going to change the world when people understand what’s really going on.” With war on the horizon, she said, freedom of speech becomes more important. “We need to have our voice heard. We don’t feel like this is right. We don’t live in a democracy anymore.”

In Flint, Michigan, which has been without clean drinking water for over four years, students talked about the relationship between war and censorship, and

how the mainstream media has abandoned covering their fight for a basic standard of living.

Alyssa, a student at the University of Michigan Flint, said that the Internet is vital in allowing people to communicate and expose the conditions faced by workers in different parts of the country. “In Flint, we were ground zero in understanding the water quality of places all over the country. When we started talking to people in other cities they said, ‘Wait a minute, well what about our water?’ And it turns out Flint was just the start.”

After the initial media coverage in 2014 and 2015, at the height of Flint’s water crisis, mainstream media outlets stopped covering the ongoing disaster in the city, where residents have been poisoned by lead-contaminated water. Similar conditions exist in communities across the United States. In November, Reuters identified 3,810 neighborhoods where child lead poisoning rates are double those in Flint.

Anthony, a computer science major at the University of Michigan Flint and a lifelong resident of the city, expressed skepticism of the mainstream media: “Most of the mainstream media, Fox News for example, should come with a label, ‘for entertainment purposes only.’ They aren’t really interested in the truth. They want the story they want, and that’s it. They talk about fake news—even though they were the creators of the story of ‘weapons of mass destruction.’ That was a lie. And what did that get us? Years of bloody war.”

The drive by the ruling class to censor the Internet is motivated by the political radicalization of workers and young people and the growing interest in socialism. Many students who spoke to the IYSSE said they are actively searching for news sources that are anti-capitalist, antiwar and socialist.

Harrison and Maddy, both students at San Diego

State University, came to a meeting of the IYSSE on the *Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Among the many topics discussed at the meeting, the underlying theme was the need to introduce Marxism and socialist consciousness to the working class. Both agreed that the *World Socialist Web Site* is an important tool for bringing socialist ideas to workers and students.

On the call by the WSWs for the formation of an international coalition against Internet censorship, Maddy said, “I think forming a coalition is a good way to raise awareness and bring in other groups who agree. The whole issue of ‘fake news,’ which is being used to justify censorship and prepare for war, also has a divisive effect when talking about politics in general.”

Harrison said, “The Internet is widely viewed as an open and unrestricted way to receive news outside of the mainstream sources. Many people use Facebook, for example. No one would ever say that there should be censorship on the Internet.”

In New York City, students expressed their desire for information outside the control of the mainstream media and the established parties.

Eoin, a high school student from New York City, said, “I think there’s censorship because the people who control Facebook are of the same opinions politically as the people on CNN and NBC. They want to promote a point of view, and it’s not socialist. They want everything on the Internet to be uniformly antisocialist, anti-free-thinking.

“It’s collaboration between the private industries of news media and social media selling a product to the mainstream audience.”

Rebecca, a freshman at New York University, believes that Internet censorship will not hamper the leftward movement of students and workers: “I think it’s obviously really dangerous for them to be censoring these sites, but I don’t think that it’s going to put an end to interest in socialism.”

“It’s inevitable that the government is going to try to keep issues of social inequality under close watch. They don’t want the American people to know about these issues. I don’t think the censorship is going to have that much of a long-lasting effect—or at least I hope not—because of the work your organization and other left-wing people are doing to make sure the truth is told.”

The IYSSE is holding meetings throughout the US to oppose Internet censorship. For details and information on organizing a meeting in your area, click [here](#).



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