

PayPal blocks sale of WSWs pamphlet

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The American payment-processing corporation PayPal has blocked sales of the *World Socialist Web Site* pamphlet, *The Struggle Against Imperialism and for Workers' Power in Iran*.

The effective banning of the sale of a book represents a dangerous new stage in the ongoing campaign to criminalize political expression and censor freedom of speech on the Internet.

Mehring Books customers who attempt to purchase the pamphlet using PayPal currently receive the following message: “PayPal gateway has rejected request. This transaction cannot be completed because it violates the PayPal User Agreement (#13122: Transaction refused).”

When a Mehring Books representative contacted PayPal’s customer service team on March 27 to inquire about the error message, a PayPal representative confirmed that the pamphlet’s sale had been deliberately blocked because “the government has given us certain policies that we have to block transactions.”

The staff member’s supervisor stated further, “It is something where we can’t change it. You are not going to be allowed to process [sales of the book], based on compliance reasons.” She said she “can’t provide further information” and that Mehring Books would receive no explanation for the action “except via a subpoena.”

These statements make clear that PayPal is acting as an agent of the United States government to block the sale and distribution of a book. This is an illegal violation of the right to free speech and freedom of expression guaranteed in the First Amendment of the US Constitution.

The WSWs pamphlet, written by Keith Jones, provides an examination of the history of Iran and the international Marxist movement throughout the 20th Century. It addresses basic questions of socialist

perspective for the working class in a country that has been a target of US imperialist aggression for almost four decades. The ban occurs under conditions where the Iranian working class has been engaged in mass demonstrations and strikes since the beginning of the year.

PayPal processes more than \$300 million in sales transactions every day, or approximately 18 percent of total world e-commerce sales. Its market capitalization is approximately \$96.4 billion.

The corporate giant has a long record of using its position to conduct political censorship on behalf of the US state. Most notably, PayPal, along with MasterCard, VISA, American Express, Western Union and Bank of America, collaborated with the Obama administration in 2010 to impose a more than seven-year-long financial blockade on the anti-secrecy organization WikiLeaks, preventing it from receiving donations.

In recent years, PayPal has also blocked the sale of publications and the use of its services by organizations connected to Iran, under the pretext of abiding by the US-led sanctions regime, which has been imposed by the US and European powers with the aim of crippling Iran’s economy and destabilizing its government.

In April 2013, PayPal briefly blocked the sale of a photo book produced by an Italian communications firm, Fabrica, containing a collection of images taken by photographers in Tehran from inside their homes. PayPal staff stated at the time that the book had been automatically banned because its title contained the blacklisted word “Iranian.”

In that case the ban was removed within two days. PayPal issued a public apology via technology blog *Gigaom*, claiming that the ban was a mistake and noting that PayPal’s adherence to US economic sanctions was “never intended to apply to books or written materials and we have worked to ensure that books are not impacted by our compliance with this

policy.”

In 2015, PayPal also placed a financial blockade on Justice for Iran, an organization that exposes human rights abuses inside Iran.

The WSWS demands that PayPal end its illegal financial ban on *The Struggle Against Imperialism and for Workers’ Power in Iran*, and that it explain the basis upon which the decision to block the book was made.

PayPal’s action is a sharp warning of the repressive measures that will be deployed by the state and corporations. It is part of a broader censorship drive by the US technology and social media giants, including Facebook, Google, Amazon and Twitter, in collaboration with the Democratic Party and intelligence agencies.

Under the McCarthyite banner of combating Russian “fake news,” they are seeking to block workers and youth from accessing news outside of the government and its propaganda organs in the corporate-controlled media, and justify the labeling of all political dissent as treasonous.

Since April 2017, Google has modified its search algorithms to restrict search traffic to the *World Socialist Web Site*, along with a range of left-wing and antiwar publications. Facebook has announced a series of changes to its News Feed since last January that reduce users’ access to news and artificially promote so-called “authoritative sources,” including the *New York Times*, at the expense of alternative news outlets.

With the arrest of Catalanian President Carles Puigdemont this week and the cutting off of Internet access and visitation rights for whistleblower Julian Assange by the Ecuadorian Embassy in the UK, moves towards the criminalization and banning of political opposition are accelerating. Now, not content to censor individuals and websites, the major technology corporations are moving to censor books.



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