

Facebook CEO presents plans for mass censorship at Senate hearing

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11 April 2018

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg used his appearance Tuesday before the Senate Judiciary and Commerce Committees to outline a plan for mass censorship on the world's largest social media platform.

Zuckerberg explained how every single statement made by the company's 2.2 billion users is analyzed and vetted by artificial intelligence systems, then reviewed by an army of some 20,000 censors. If the company finds a statement to be "sensational" or "divisive," the user will be flagged as a "bad actor," and either have their posts blocked, be reported to the government, or both.

Since the 2016 election, Zuckerberg said, the company had undergone a transformation. "We are going through a broader philosophical shift in how we approach our responsibility as a company," Zuckerberg said.

It is "not enough to build tools" and let users do what they want with them, Zuckerberg said. "We need to make sure they are used for good" by "policing" the Facebook "ecosystem."

The ability to "police" all the content on Facebook was impossible until the rise of artificial intelligence, Zuckerberg said. "From the beginning of the company in 2004, we didn't have AI technology that could look at content people were sharing." But the rapid development of artificial intelligence now allows Facebook to screen and understand every single post and message on its platform.

"By the end of this year we'll have more than 20,000 people working on security and content review," Zuckerberg said. "So when content gets flagged to us we have those people look at it."

He bragged that Facebook's artificial intelligence tools now succeed in flagging 99 percent of "terrorist propaganda" before users ever see it. By "rolling out AI tools," Facebook can "proactively police and enforce" all content, Zuckerberg said.

These AI tools will be used to identify accounts that

spread "fake news," and they have helped the company "proactively remove tens of thousands of accounts before they could contribute significant harm."

To drive home the company's integration into the military/intelligence/police apparatus, Zuckerberg declared that Facebook is actively involved in an "arms race" with Russia.

Democratic Senator Patrick Leahy demanded that Zuckerberg do more to combat "divisive" Facebook accounts and pages, not just those operated by Russia. The Senator had a staffer hold up a sign with examples of such "divisive" pages, asking why they were allowed to continue operating.

Zuckerberg's appearance came after he announced on Friday that the company would require all "large" Facebook pages and all pages that run political and issue ads to verify their identities. He clarified what this would mean in his appearance Tuesday, saying he would require anyone operating "large" pages to have a "valid government identity," and to "verify their location" by receiving a confirmation code by mail.

Asked by Republican Senator John Cornyn whether Facebook took responsibility for its users' statements, Zuckerberg declared, "we're responsible for the content." He added that its artificial intelligence tools would be able to tell whether a post was "you know...something bad."

The vast and sweeping dangers to democratic rights posed by Facebook's censorship measures were ignored by all of the Democratic Congressmen, who universally cheered the crackdown by the social media giant. The same went for nearly all the Republicans, with the exception of Senator Ted Cruz, who sought to burnish his credentials with the extreme right by criticizing Facebook's censorship of far-right political organizations.

Cruz accused Facebook and other technology giants of engaging "in a pervasive pattern of bias and political censorship" against the far right, in order to promote what

he called “left-wing” political views. Cruz asked Zuckerberg whether he knew the “political orientation “of Facebook’s “content evaluators.”

Zuckerberg replied with the standard line worked out between the Democrats, leading Republicans, and the intelligence agencies. “There are a number of things that we would all agree are clearly bad. Foreign interference in our elections, terrorism... that...is clearly bad activity that we want to get down.”

In fact, the real target of the mass censorship regime implemented by the technology giants is left-wing political opposition, most importantly workers’ use of Facebook to organize strikes and protests. Over the past two months, numerous stories in major US newspapers warned that teachers throughout the country were using Facebook groups to organize strikes independently of the unions.

Cruz’s claims that Facebook was spreading “left-wing” viewpoints constituted the entirety of the criticism within the hearing of Facebook’s efforts to rip up the First Amendment and institute mass censorship.

Indeed, despite weeks of negative press stories and efforts to demonize Zuckerberg for being insufficiently deferential to claims about Russian “meddling” in the 2016 election, the hearing was notable for the remarkable unanimity within the ruling class for the creation of a mass censorship regime, as part of a transition to openly dictatorial forms of rule.

Amid a deepening political crisis at the highest levels of the state, mounting opposition within the working class, and the growing threat of world war, the ruling elite sees in censorship the only way to prop up its beleaguered domination over society.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is leading the struggle to oppose internet censorship through the building of a mass socialist movement of the working class. We call on all workers and youth seeking to oppose censorship to contact us and join the struggle for socialism.



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