

Socialism and the struggle against Internet censorship

Andre Damon
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The following speech was delivered by Andre Damon, a leader of the Socialist Equality Party in the US.

One year ago, the *World Socialist Web Site* held its annual commemoration of May Day during the most successful period in its 19-year history.

Over the previous year, our site had received nearly 10 million visits. The month before, over 900,000 individual users visited the WSWs, reflecting a 25 percent increase in just four months. Within a matter of days, we would go on to publish our first video that received more than one million views.

The reports to that year's May Day celebration reflected this growth. "Without succumbing to immodesty," we noted, "the International Committee and its sections have every right, in this centennial year of the Russian Revolution, to look to the future with confidence. The influence of the *World Socialist Web Site*, the voice of the International Committee, is growing rapidly."

This sober assessment of the mounting influence of the WSWs, reflecting the growth of socialist sentiment within the working class, was mirrored in the proverbial smoke-filled rooms in which the leading representatives of the financial oligarchy conduct their deliberations.

Alarmed by the growth of socialist sentiment, the ruling class determined to take action. Facing a restive working class, hostile to war and to social inequality, and increasingly propelled into action after a decade of wage cuts and social austerity, the strategists of the ruling class determined that their only hope in stemming the tide of social opposition was to go after what every police regime in history believed was its source: critical news outlets.

The source of "information rebellions" are "outlets distributing bogus stories," said one prominent advocate of this view. "Silence the guns and the barrage will end."

These individuals, in other words, adopted views shared by every other ruling class in history that had been overthrown by revolution: that popular social grievances

can be resolved with police batons.

As we celebrated the last May Day, we did not know that less than one week before, Google had taken the first step in what would, subsequently, lead to a historic transformation of the leading American technology companies: from the disseminators of information, they would be transformed into its censors.

That giant step was announced in a discreetly-worded blog post, claiming Google had taken measures to "improve" its search system, in order to "help people find what they were looking for." These measures would be taken, as the company subsequently told a reporter, in such a way as not to "reflect political... bias."

Over the next year, all of these pretensions fell away. Rather than seeking to "help people find what they were looking for," Google's aim was the literal opposite. As Congressman Adam Schiff declared in a congressional hearing, Google had a "societal obligation" to change the fact that "What ends up percolating to the top of our feeds tends to be things we were looking for."

And this is exactly what Google did. The company carried out a far-reaching revision of the way it evaluated every one of its millions of search terms, severing connections between popular topics—such as inequality, war, democratic rights, and socialism—and leading left-wing web sites.

In both the empirical and political sense, the main target of this censorship was the *World Socialist Web Site*. Within three months of Google's announcement, every single one of the WSWs' top 45 search terms no longer linked users to the site. As a result, the *World Socialist Web Site's* search traffic from Google fell by more than three quarters, far more than any of the numerous other left-wing, anti-war, and progressive web sites affected by the company's measures.

The targeting of the *World Socialist Web Site* was a recognition, in the negative, of the fact that it represents

the most coherent expression of the social interests of the working class and the political strategy of proletarian socialism, posing an existential threat to the capitalist class.

And, true to its historic mission, the *World Socialist Web Site*, alone among all of the sites that had been gagged, launched a struggle against internet censorship.

On August 25, the WSWS published an open letter, declaring that “Google is manipulating its Internet searches to restrict public awareness of and access to socialist, anti-war and left-wing websites,” adding “Censorship on this scale is political blacklisting.”

We exposed the alliance of the technology monopolies with the US military and intelligence apparatus, revealing that Google and Facebook were acting as the agents of the state in its efforts to destroy the first amendment.

Rather than being the exception, Google set the pattern for Facebook, Twitter, and others. In announcing its plans to censor “fake news,” Facebook made clear that it was proceeding exactly as the *World Socialist Web Site* had alleged. Since “stifling” the “public discourse” was a “sensitive issue,” the company announced it would “significantly reduce” the distribution of targeted content “by showing” it “lower in the News Feed,” without notifying users that they were being censored.

In other words, every word of the *World Socialist Web Site’s* open letter has been confirmed.

The turn to censorship, today as ever, is an act of fear and desperation, a recognition that the ruling elite not only has nothing to offer society, but sees itself surrounded and besieged by the great mass of the population.

But censorship is an effort to bar the stable doors after the horse has bolted. No bankrupt social order has ever succeeded in preserving itself through police means.

There has never been so wide an audience for revolutionary socialist politics. Over the past quarter century, the ranks of the international working class have swelled, with the entry of fresh battalions from India, China, Latin America, and the Middle East.

Like never before in human history, the masses are interconnected, not only by the productive process, but by the world wide web, which celebrated its 29th anniversary this year, under conditions when more than half the population is connected to the internet—and through it to the great achievements of human culture—at the forefront of which stands the scientific socialist tradition, brought into the world 200 years ago with the birth of Karl Marx.

The *World Socialist Web Site*, the first genuinely

international newspaper of the socialist movement, now in its 20th year of continuous publication, is itself the expression of both the growing objective strength of the international working class and its interconnectedness.

We hold no illusions. The ruling elite will pay any price, including attempting to bring down the vast edifice of international communications that underpins the world economy, in an effort to stifle the political awakening of the masses.

But let them do their worst; we will do our best!

Eighty years ago, in announcing the formation of the Fourth International amid the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Bolsheviks by Stalin’s murderers, Leon Trotsky declared: “The hangmen think in their obtuseness and cynicism that it is possible to frighten us. They err! Under blows we become stronger. The bestial politics of Stalin are only politics of despair. It is possible to kill individual soldiers of our army, but not to frighten them. Friends, we will repeat again in this day of celebration ... IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO FRIGHTEN US.”

Likewise, today we declare, “It is not possible to censor us!” Despite the most draconian censorship regime in the history of the Internet, the readership of the *World Socialist Web Site* is again growing, as workers and youth enter into struggle.

The long-awaited upsurge of the working class has already begun. From rail workers in France, to airline workers in Germany, to the teachers of America and the masses of North Africa, a wave of working-class militancy is sweeping the globe. What the forces of reaction fear most is exactly what is on the agenda: the intersection of this upsurge of the masses with the conscious struggle for Marxism.

As Marx, to the bicentenary of whose birth we dedicate this celebration, proclaimed, “theory becomes a material force when it grips the masses.”

Comrades, it is with confidence that the proud legacy of Karl Marx *will* grip the masses, that the International Committee embarks upon its 20th year of publication of the *World Socialist Web Site*, and with it, to a new era of socialist revolution.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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