

Mark Zuckerberg testifies in Brussels as European Union and Facebook intensify internet censorship

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25 May 2018

Tuesday's appearance by Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg before European Parliament deputies revealed the close collaboration between European governments and intelligence agencies, and the American internet giant in censoring and monitoring the internet.

In his introductory statement, Zuckerberg noted, "We are working with governments and other technology companies to share information about threats in real time so for example in Germany before the 2017 elections we worked directly with the German Federal Office for information security. We are also using new technology including AI to remove fake accounts that are responsible for much of the false news, misinformation and bad ads that people can see on Facebook."

Facebook's intervention in the French presidential election of 2017 was likewise as vast. In the lead-up to the election "our systems found and took down more than 30,000 fake accounts," Zuckerberg said.

"In the next 18 months, there are important elections globally including many here in Europe as well as for the European parliament, the United States, Brazil, India and Indonesia," added Zuckerberg. "In 2016, we were too slow to identify Russian interference on Facebook in the US in the US presidential election... We were not prepared enough for the kind of coordinated misinformation operations that we are now aware of." Zuckerberg continued, "since then we've made significant operation investments to protect the integrity of elections by making these kind of attacks much harder to do on Facebook."

Under the guise of combatting alleged "fake news" and the entirely concocted claim of Russian interference in elections, Facebook is conducting a vast censorship operation.

"We took down in the first quarter of this year around 580 million fake accounts, the vast majority within

minutes of being registered as our systems are able to identify that," added Zuckerberg. "I think the question here is not whether or not there should be regulation," he said, but "what the right regulation is."

In the future, Facebook will work with "tens of thousands of independent fact checkers in every country and every language" to filter out "problematic content" and "false information" as it is posted, he stated. "Our goal over the coming years is going to get developing the AI systems and hiring the staff necessary to be able to proactively review more of the content as it's coming into the system," added Zuckerberg. It is an "arms race," but "significant progress" is being made.

Facebook is currently expanding centres in Europe responsible for deleting users' comments. In the centre in Essen, Germany, 1,000 workers will be employed by the end of the year instead of the current 750. This was announced at a press briefing by Facebook managers and representatives from the operator, Competence Call Centre, on Tuesday. A further staff increase is already in the works. The 10,000 square metre rented building could accommodate many more than 1,000 workers.

In their statements and questions to Zuckerberg, the representatives of all groups in the European Parliament made clear that, notwithstanding their criticism of the US company, they are in fundamental agreement with Facebook's undemocratic machinations.

Udo Bullman, the spokesman for the Progressive Alliance of Social Democrats, said, "You mentioned experiences in France and in Germany which came into existence under the pressure of the respective governments. How can you and will you guarantee that no foreign and hostile interference into the democratic process will take place on your platform ahead of the forthcoming vote. Are you ready to guarantee that for the

whole European Union?"

The leader of the United European Left, Gabi Zimmer, outdid everyone else with her call for censorship. "I can only echo what my colleagues have already said," she said. There is "a growing amount of information based on 'fake news,'" and this can "be deadly." For her, the question of whether the online platform should be shut down entirely is posed: "Is it time to pull the plug on Facebook?"

Manfred Weber, leader of the European People's Party, began by thanking Zuckerberg not only for respecting the European Union's new data protection law, but also for using it as its "global standard."

He then made clear that the EU's criticism of Facebook's use of data is related to the desire of the EU states to play a greater role in censoring the internet. He urged Zuckerberg to "make those algorithms public. Because if you have so much power in social media about who is visible and who is not visible that cannot be any longer a decision of a company, that is I think a decision for our societies."

Representatives of the far-right criticised the targeting of right-wing content by Facebook's censorship measures. Nigel Farage, leader of Europe for Freedom and Direct Democracy, stated, "You've changed your algorithms and it has led very directly to a very substantial drop in views and engagements for those that have got right-of-center political opinions."

Nicolas Bay from France's fascist National Front struck a similar tone. Facebook "decided to close a number of false accounts," but this also included the French group "Génération Identitaire." This is "very concerning" and has "totalitarian implications," he said.

The far-right's attempt to pose as fighters against totalitarianism and for democratic rights is absurd. Their methods are well known. While the right-wing extremists spread their inhumane propaganda in the name of freedom of expression, they cooperate closely with the established parties and the state when it comes to shutting down left-wing and progressive viewpoints. In Germany, the parliamentary justice committee—which has responsibility for the notorious Network Enforcement Law for internet censorship—is now led by a member of the extreme-right AfD.

In his defence, Zuckerberg claimed Facebook is "a platform for all ideas, that means we want to make it so that people can come to our service and share any idea across the political spectrum. It's very important to me that we are a service that allows for a wide variety of

political discourse, we view that as a big part of our political responsibility and I can commit to you here today that we have never and will not make a decision about what content is allowed or how we do ranking on the basis of a political orientation."

This is a blatant lie. Only recently, Facebook banned the group "Arizona Educators Rank and File Committee." It was founded by the *WSWS Teacher Newsletter* and aimed to provide a forum for teachers in the state and across the country to exchange views and to fight on the basis of a socialist programme against the trade unions' betrayals. In its justification for the censorship, Facebook declared that "the content of Arizona Educators Rank and File Committee violates our community standards on false information and spam."

In reality, across the internet as a whole, claims about the need to combat "fake news," "hate speech" and "spam" are being used above all to censor left-wing and socialist groups. Google has been censoring the *World Socialist Web Site* on a large scale for over a year. Under the Network Enforcement Law, which has been in full force in Germany since 1 January, left-wing content, including Twitter comments and YouTube videos against the AfD, have been censored.

The meeting of Zuckerberg with EU parliamentary deputies is a warning. It underscores the tremendous significance of the struggle by the *WSWS* for the defence of freedom of expression on the internet. An alliance between the entire political establishment and multi-billion-dollar corporations cannot be permitted to eliminate freedom of speech on the internet and establish a modern-day police state. We urge all workers and young people seeking to fight this sweeping attack on democratic rights to contact us and get involved in the struggle against censorship.



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