

Facebook deletes 87 accounts linked to Brazilian right as WhatsApp restricts messaging

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On July 25, Facebook announced it was deleting 87 accounts linked to the Brazilian far-right Movimento Brasil Livre (MBL - Free Brazil Movement) organization, due to violations of the platform's "authenticity" rules, adding, in a remarkably blunt, dystopian language, that the spreading of "fake news" was not the central issue in the removal, but instead it was due to the existence of "a coordinated hidden network with the use of false accounts" used for "the goal of sowing divisions."

Among the deleted accounts were those personally used by some of the organization's most well-known leaders.

Facebook's investigation of the accounts, which would have been analyzed by Mexican, US, Dutch and Indian experts, concluded that their goal was to "manipulate public debate," through "non-authentic, coordinated behavior, in which multiple accounts work together to mislead people."

The news came only five days after the Facebook-owned WhatsApp messaging app announced that, worldwide, it would cut the maximum number of recipients for forwarded messages from 250 to 20, under the pretext of limiting the spread of fake news after the Indian government alerted the company to a series of incidents of mass hysteria and lynchings supposedly coordinated with the use of the app.

Both measures are the most aggressive so far in a back-to-back campaign by the press and the government, first and foremost major conglomerates built with state support that used to exercise a monopoly over public discourse, such as *Globo*, *O Estado de São Paulo* and *Folha de São Paulo*, helped by "experts" in academia, to promote the need for "gatekeepers" to control public debate due to the supposed backwardness of the Brazilian population, and the working class in particular.

According to a Reuters Institute survey from 2016, 72 percent of Brazilians get their news through social media, far outstripping television news.

These measures must be understood by the working class as a direct response to the widespread use of social media,

principally WhatsApp, in the May-June truckers strike. Involving more than 500,000 truckers in opposition to fuel hikes imposed over the last two years, it was largely coordinated by WhatsApp and developed against the open hostility from the unions and the largest part of the pseudo-left.

The strike, which brought the country to a halt and had, even in the face of massive shortages, 87 percent support from the Brazilian population, highlighted the explosive political situation amid persistent economic crisis after an 8 percent GDP drop between 2015 and 2016. These conditions have led to the dismal 3 percent approval rating for the current administration of President Michel Temer, the most widely despised president during any democratic period in Brazil's history.

Under such conditions, there are an ominous political calculations behind the supposed targeting of hate speech and the despicable far-right figures of the MBL who, after making populist appeals to bring down the government of Dilma Rousseff in 2016, have dedicated themselves to stoking the most backward forces. This has included gate-crashing exhibitions containing nudism in name of fighting pedophilia, propping up the "Escola Sem Partido" (No Parties in Schools) campaigns to persecute history, literature and arts teachers and professors all over the country over allegations of spreading "leftist" views and slandering the Rio de Janeiro councilwoman Marielle Franco, who was executed by unknown assailants for her criticism of police violence.

The goal of this political operation by Facebook, in deep coordination with the state and US imperialism, is to erode democratic consciousness and legitimize police-state measures against social unrest and political opposition—i.e., the "sowing of divisions," "manipulation of public debate," "coordinated actions" and "non-authentic behavior" which doesn't conform to the government's view of legitimacy.

Amid a hopeless economic situation generating the highest

levels of internecine warfare, the ruling class in Brazil is ever more rapidly preparing for a dictatorship. This has been evident from former Workers Party (PT) President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's "war on drugs" to the brutal government repression of the 2013 demonstrations against the rising cost of living and the army's operations in Rio's favelas, all of which have been supported by both the PT and the former right-wing opposition parties. This has further extended from the ouster of Rousseff on trumped-up charges of budget manipulations, to the sting operation against Temer by the Federal Police in 2017 and the threats of a military coup on the eve of a Supreme Court ruling on Lula's freedom in April.

Under the pretext of guaranteeing the "fairness" of the October general elections, on June 28, the Brazilian state, through its highest ranking official on the matter, Supreme Court Justice and Electoral Court President Luiz Fux, signed with Facebook and Google an empty and generalized "memorandum" on the spread of "fake news." *O Estado de S. Paulo* reported a day later that the records of the six months of meetings between the state and the two companies, beginning last December, are classified. The action against the far right is the first shot across the bow.

The supposed struggle against "fake news" has also exposed the absence of any democratic constituency within—and the dismally low level of political culture among—the middle class layers obsessed with identity and lifestyle politics united around the pseudo-left PSOL (Socialism and Liberty Party) and much of the "alternative media," including outlets such as *Nexo*, *Agência Pública* and *Piauí* magazine. With social media a primary source of information for Brazilians, it is ever more on the shoulders of the "alternative media" to give a left cover for the machinations of the ruling class, whose traditional outlets have been largely discredited in Brazil, as internationally.

These outlets had already, in early November, built a platform for Google's and Facebook's lies with the "i3 Journalism Festival," which was predictably funded by the CIA front, the Ford Foundation. The festival, in which much was said, predictably, about "black," "feminist" and "green" journalism, paved the way for the adherence of *Piauí* magazine to the Facebook "fact-checking" program designed to flag content not conforming to "authoritative sources"—in Facebook's Orwellian newspeak, CIA mouthpieces such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

Two months later, in his *Nexo* column of January 18, Denis Burgierman, also a writer for HBO Brazil's "Greg News" comedy show, modeled on the conformist US "comic news" genre, offered a rationale for the adherence to the CIA and "democratic imperialism," writing of Russia

that "its agents are in power everywhere," and "they share lies and cheat social media algorithms in favor of Putin's global strategy," concluding that "they won, even here."

Facebook's first notorious right-wing operation was its mid-June flagging as "fake" news the report by *Brasil247* and other Workers Party mouthpieces that Pope Francis had sent the jailed former president Lula a rosary through a Vatican official, Juan Grabois.

Since the PT, which traces its origins in part to the Liberation Theology factions of the Catholic Church, considers the Dirty War Pope a great progressive, it hailed the report as proof of its thesis that Lula is a political prisoner, and the criminal charges against him are unrelated to the generalized corruption of bourgeois rule in Brazil.

Acting as mouthpieces for Brazil's most right-wing layers, for whom the Pope's demagogic relations with "social movements" is both implausible and unacceptable, and the charge of political motivations in Lula's case intolerable, Piauí's "fact-checking" branch, Lupa, flagged the news and prompted Facebook to threaten the *Brasil247* and others with disciplinary action. A series of corrections of official statements by *Vatican News* later settled the matter, with the story that Grabois had asked the Pope for the rosary, a sufficiently ambiguous answer so as to feed the PT's populist appeals and not compromise Vatican diplomacy.

Facebook's announcement of the deletion of MBL's accounts prompted both the Maoist-Stalinist Communist Party of Brazil and the Pabloite-Morenoite consortium of PSOL to fall into line with the intelligence agencies. Their respective presidential candidates, Manuela D'Ávila and Guilherme Boulos, both called for further state action to expose the "financing" of the accounts and called Facebook's actions "belated."

Their endorsement of Facebook's actions—for violation of authenticity rules—is in essence an adoption of the CIA line of delegitimizing any recourse to anonymity in political discussions, a bedrock of oppositional politics in the face of repression, a policy that furthermore allows the far-right to demagogically pose as defenders of democratic rights.



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