

As social opposition mounts, Silicon Valley and Washington step up internet censorship

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As executives from Facebook and Twitter prepare to testify Wednesday on Capitol Hill, the social media monopolies are scrambling to demonstrate how far they have gone to implement censorship measures demanded by the intelligence agencies and dominant sections of the political establishment.

These actions are inevitably couched in the language of combatting “foreign interference” and “meddling” in “American democracy” via the promotion of “fake news.” However, the real target is the growth of social opposition among millions of workers and young people.

Throughout the United States, hundreds of thousands of workers are entering into struggle against low wages, the attack on social programs and the decay of social infrastructure. As the school year begins, teachers in the state of Washington have launched strike action, as the unions seek desperately to contain the anger of educators. There is overwhelming opposition among 230,000 US-based UPS workers to a new concessions contract demanded by their employers and the Teamsters union. The ruling class knows that any eruption of class struggle, in any sector, could set off a social explosion.

At the same time, popular support for socialism is growing. A recent Gallup poll showed that, for the first time, fewer than half of young people aged 18-29 have a positive view of capitalism, while more than half have a positive view of socialism.

To combat what they call “extreme” political views, the major technology companies have massively accelerated their efforts to monitor, police and control the flow of information online.

Samidh Chakrabarti, Facebook’s product manager of Civic Engagement, told NBC News Monday that the company is building a “war room” to monitor its users’

statements on the 2018 US elections, allowing the social media monopoly to “take quick and decisive action.”

“We’ve been building this war room, a physical war room,” Chakrabarti said. Continuing the military metaphor, Chakrabarti told NBC, “Every single corner of this company has mobilized” to remove what he called “fake accounts” and to stop the “spread of misinformation and fake news.”

What the company means by “fake news” and “misinformation” is shown in practice. Among the pages removed by Facebook was the official event page for last month’s anniversary protest against a neo-Nazi march in Charlottesville, Virginia. The most recent batch of “fake” pages taken down by the company all expressed left-wing political views, including opposition to US and Israeli foreign policy and police violence.

The scope of the company’s enforcement actions is vast. The executive boasted that, over a six-month period, Facebook “detected, blocked and removed, over a billion fake accounts before they could do anything like spread fake news or misinformation.”

The company has doubled its security and enforcement team, from 10,000 people a year ago to 20,000 today, meaning that the majority of the company’s employees work to “police” its users’ statements. These include thousands of individuals with police and intelligence backgrounds. “We basically have some of the best intelligence analysts from around the world,” Chakrabarti said.

Facebook is far from the only organization to use the analogy of “war” to describe the future of the internet. The cover story of this month’s edition of *Foreign Affairs*, the influential foreign policy magazine, is entitled “World War Web.” Its lead editorial argues

that the “Internet open to all” is being transformed into something “different from, and in many ways worse than, what we have now.” The internet, as one article argues, “has turned into an active battlefield.”

By allowing “propagandists and extremists” to “push misleading or outright false content,” the internet is “robbing citizens of a basic understanding of reality,” claims Karen Kornbluh, a senior fellow for digital policy at the Council on Foreign Relations and US ambassador to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development under Obama. “It is hard to escape the conclusion that the technology that promised to give power to the powerless has ended up also hurting the very people it was supposed to help,” she writes.

The conclusion is clear. If the internet is “robbing citizens of a basic understanding of reality,” and “hurting the very people it was supposed to help,” wouldn’t they be better without it? Or, at the very least, aggressive measures must be taken by the state to enforce its own “basic understanding of reality”—that is, censorship.

The fundamental concern of the American ruling elite is not supposed campaigns originating in St. Petersburg or Tehran, but the growing political opposition by the working class, which is increasingly hungry for socialist politics.

And it is precisely left-wing, anti-war, and socialist organizations that have been the central targets of censorship by the technology giants.

In April of last year, Google announced measures to promote “authoritative content” over “alternative viewpoints,” leading to a massive drop in search traffic to left-wing websites. Search traffic to the *World Socialist Web Site* dropped 75 percent in the months following the changes, and has continued to trend downwards.

The US media has maintained almost total silence on Google’s censorship of left-wing political viewpoints. However, US President Trump’s claims last month that conservative news outlets were being silenced by Google has been met with a series of denials by Google, the print and broadcast media, and large sections of the US political establishment.

In responding to Trump’s claims, however, Senator Mark Warner, the leading figure in the Democrats’ drive to censor the internet, gave a *Wired* reporter a

revealing response regarding how Google treats “extreme periodicals.”

“There are genuine concerns about some of the algorithms that almost create addiction tendencies, but those are generally about if you have a personal profile of searches, and you search a left-leaning story, they’re going to give you another, usually more extreme story, to keep feeding the beast.”

In other words, if people search for “social inequality” and “strike” on Google, they just might stumble onto “socialism” and the “extreme periodicals” on the left that advocate it.

What Warner is describing, in other words, is the exact method by which Google has targeted the *World Socialist Web Site*: by down-ranking its pages in searches on the topics it principally covers.

The growth of working class struggle also provides the way forward to defend the freedom of expression on the internet. As workers throughout the United States and internationally enter into struggle against the employers and their union lackeys they must take up the fight against internet censorship as a central political demand.



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