

Facebook censors ThinkProgress

Trévon Austin
14 September 2018

On Monday, a *ThinkProgress* article posted on Facebook was labeled as “false” by right-wing magazine the *Weekly Standard*, a third-party “fact checker” for Facebook, and effectively censored on the site. The *Weekly Standard*, dubbed a ‘redoubt of neoconservatism’ and as ‘the neo-con bible,’ is one of only five organizations approved as fact-checkers by Facebook.

As a result of the *Weekly Standard*’s “fact-checking,” the *ThinkProgress* story, entitled “Brett Kavanaugh said he would kill *Roe v. Wade* last week and almost no one noticed” will be accompanied by a companion article from the *Weekly Standard*: “Fact Check: Has Brett Kavanaugh ‘Stated He’d Overturn’ *Roe v. Wade*?”

The original *ThinkProgress* article notes, “Kavanaugh believes that the way to determine whether the Constitution protects a particular unenumerated right is to apply the test the Supreme Court laid out in *Glucksberg* [a 1997 Supreme Court decision holding that the Constitution does not protect a right to physician-assisted suicide]. And the judge also thinks that ‘even a first-year law student could tell you’ that *Roe* is inconsistent with *Glucksberg*.” *ThinkProgress* continued, “It doesn’t take the brains of a fourth-term United States senator from Maine to figure out what this means if Kavanaugh is confirmed. Judge Kavanaugh will be the fifth vote to kill *Roe* if he joins the nation’s highest Court.”

The *Weekly Standard*, replying to this article, simply declares, “Has Brett Kavanaugh ‘stated he’d overturn #Roe?’ No.” The *Weekly Standard*’s claim hinges on a sophistry: it interprets the word “said” to imply a direct quote, as opposed to the implications of his arguments.

Any article deemed false by Facebook’s “fact-checkers” has its traffic significantly reduced. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg recently wrote in the *Washington Post*, “we demote posts rated as false,

which means they lose 80 percent of future traffic.”

As part of the drive to censor voices critical of the US political establishment, Facebook has partnered with a small group of organizations to label users’ postings as “fake news.” In addition to three fact-checking web sites (Factcheck.org, PolitiFact, and Snopes.com), Facebook also “partners” with the Associated Press and the *Weekly Standard*. Notably, there is not a single left-wing website on Facebook’s list of “fact-checkers.” The *Weekly Standard* was added to Facebook’s list of fact-checkers at the end of last year, prompting widespread outrage. To become a fact-checker, an outlet must pass a verification process and meet standards established by the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) at the Poynter Institute.

However, last November the IFCN determined that the *Weekly Standard* was only in “partial” compliance with its standards. The IFCN said the *Weekly Standard* would eventually meet its standards. The *Weekly Standard* heavily promotes its right-wing ideology above factual reporting. As *ThinkProgress* reported, the site “ran an article in 2017 labeling climate science ‘Dadaist Science,’ and promoted that article with the phrase ‘look under the hood on climate change ‘science’ and what you see isn’t pretty.’”

Facebook’s decision to partner with an outlet that promotes such reactionary talking points reveals the right-wing character of the drive to censor the internet.

A source familiar with Facebook told *Quartz* that Facebook’s partnership with the *Weekly Standard* was part of an effort to “appease all sides.”

Kavanaugh’s anti-abortion stance is a well-known fact. In 2017, he gave a speech to a conservative think tank applauding Justice William Rehnquist’s dissent in *Roe v. Wade*, and wrote an opinion piece arguing that the Trump Administration could temporarily imprison undocumented women seeking an abortion.

In an exchange with Senator Ted Cruz, Kavanaugh

specifically stated that *Washington v. Glucksberg*, a 1997 decision holding that the Constitution does not protect a right to physician-assisted suicide, should determine the scope of enumerated rights, such as abortion, in the Constitution. Chief Justice Rehnquist's opinion in *Glucksberg* claimed that the question of which unenumerated rights are protected by the Constitution should be answered by asking which rights are "deeply rooted in this Nation's history and tradition."

The crusade to excise the free exchange of information on the internet, spearheaded by giant tech and social media corporations, has raged on for two years. The largest technology monopolies, working with the intelligence agencies and the two US big-business parties, have adopted self-imposed roles as judges of "fake news" and "authoritative content," effectively blacklisting any viewpoints outside the pre-circumscribed norm of the US political establishment.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and other left-wing websites have already been heavily targeted in the drive to censor the internet. Traffic to the WSWS from Google dropped by 70 percent after the search engine introduced new algorithms, and material published on Facebook has consistently been demoted by the social media platform.

Allowing any publication to have the power to demote news it does not deem credible is a direct attack on the freedom of speech and press. Over one billion people log in to Facebook daily.

The censorship of the internet represents a serious danger. The power of social media has been confirmed over and over by workers using Facebook to coordinate statewide and nationwide strikes. The ruling class knows the threat posed to it by allowing freedom of expression on the internet and is attempting to destroy this basic democratic right.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact