

Silicon Valley's corrupt nexus: War, censorship and inequality

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On Wednesday, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, the world's richest man, will give the keynote address to the US Air Force Association's annual conference. Bezos will discuss "how industry can better partner" with the US military.

Bezos' speech comes amid his Seattle-based firm's lobbying to win a \$10 billion contract, known as "Project JEDI," to host large sections of the Pentagon's operations infrastructure on the internet cloud. In a move that will likely win him points with the military brass awarding the contract, Bezos recently donated \$10 million to a Virginia-based super PAC seeking to elect veterans to office and create a "less polarized government."

The Amazon CEO will appear as the representative of the world's second-largest company by market capitalization, the second-largest employer in the United States, the world's biggest provider of cloud computing services, and America's largest e-commerce retailer, with twice the sales of the next nine competitors.

Bezos, who also owns the *Washington Post*, is among America's most powerful oligarchs. His speech to the Air Force Association embodies the corrupt nexus between the military, the financial oligarchy, the media and the high-tech companies, all of which are working to create a regime of censorship targeting left-wing, anti-war and socialist viewpoints.

This partnership expresses, in practice, the vision laid out in the Pentagon's latest National Security Strategy, which calls for "the seamless integration of multiple elements of national power—diplomacy, information, economics, finance, intelligence, law enforcement and military."

This is a formula for a society in which all of the mechanisms of social control are jointly harnessed to defend and expand the wealth and power of America's financial oligarchy. Toward this authoritarian end, Bezos and company are mobilizing one of the critical

mechanisms—the media.

Bezos' *Washington Post* has prepared its owner's appearance at the Air Force event with a series of op-eds and editorials calling for a closer partnership between the Pentagon and Silicon Valley. More than any other major US newspaper, the *Post* has argued for the fusion of America's high-tech sector with its military, in line with the Pentagon's so-called "third offset" strategy, which aims to regain America's "military edge" by "harnessing a range of technologies, including robotics, autonomous systems and big data," in the words of the *Economist*.

The *Post's* campaign for a further integration of technology corporations with the military has been combined with attacks on tech workers who oppose the alliance of the firms for which they work with the US war machine.

Over the past two decades, hundreds of thousands of America's brightest minds have gone to work in Northern California's Silicon Valley and its offshoot in Seattle, lured by promises that "people with passion can change the world for the better," in the words of former Apple CEO Steve Jobs, and the promise that they would help "organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful," in the words of Google's mission statement.

But each year, more and more technology workers have found themselves involved in developing the means to carry out mass murder, censorship and political repression, prompting protests by workers at Google, Amazon and Microsoft.

In June, Amazon workers issued an open letter opposing the company's provision of facial recognition technology to police forces as well as its cloud computing contracts with the agencies carrying out Trump's Gestapo-style attacks on immigrants.

That same month, Google announced that it would end its involvement in a Pentagon program to build artificial

intelligence capabilities for military drones after more than a thousand Google employees signed a letter demanding that Google swear off building “weapons of war.”

The *Washington Post* has opposed these protests. In an August 8 op-ed, two executives from Anduril Industries, a military defense contractor seeking to sell virtual reality systems to the Pentagon, condemned the protesting workers. “We understand that tech workers want to build things used to help, not harm,” the executives wrote. “We feel the same way,” they continued. “But ostracizing the US military could have the opposite effect of what these protesters intend: If tech companies want to promote peace, they should stand with, not against, the United States’ defense community.”

The authors added: “The world is safer and more peaceful with strong US leadership. That requires the US government to maintain its advantage in critical technologies such as AI. But doing so will be difficult if Silicon Valley’s rising hostility toward working with Washington continues.”

The *Post* reiterated these points in an editorial last week entitled “Silicon Valley should work with the military on AI.” Bezos’s newspaper made the cynical argument that the technology companies should partner with the Pentagon because the result might be technologies with applications outside of mass murder. “DARPA [Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency] contractors will probably develop products with non-lethal applications,” the *Post* declared.

The open secret of Silicon Valley’s collaboration with the Pentagon is that the wars to be fought with the help of artificial intelligence will not take place only beyond America’s borders—they will also include class and civil wars.

America’s financial oligarchy, whose wealth has more than doubled since the 2008 financial crash, is issuing warnings about the dangers posed to its wealth by an increasingly restive and angry working class. In a report published last week, JPMorgan Chase warned about the potential impact of a new financial crisis in fueling political opposition.

The report by the biggest US bank stated: “The next crisis is also likely to result in social tensions similar to those witnessed 50 years ago in 1968”—a year that saw urban rebellions and mass protests against the Vietnam war in the US, the May–June general strike in France, and a global radicalization of the working class.

“In 1968,” the report continued, “TV and investigative

journalism provided a generation of baby boomers access to unfiltered information on social developments such as Vietnam and other proxy wars, civil rights movements, income inequality, etc. Similar to 1968, the internet today (social media, leaked documents, etc.) provides millennials with unrestricted access to information on a surprisingly similar range of issues. In addition to information, the internet provides a platform for various social groups to become more self-aware, polarized and organized.”

Such groups “span various social dimensions based on differences in income/wealth,” warned the bank. In other words, the looming financial crisis will likely spark a mass movement of the working class against social inequality.

Recognizing the immense power of the internet to mobilize opposition to the existing social order, under conditions where a mass audience for socialism is emerging among workers and young people, America’s leading technology companies, working with the state, are scrambling to impose political censorship.

At a congressional hearing last week, Facebook Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg pledged to replace “bad speech” with “alternative facts” in users’ news feeds. She boasted that her company now employs some 20,000 people to censor content.

Google, for its part, has continued and intensified its censorship of left-wing, anti-war and socialist websites. Since the *World Socialist Web Site* first reported last year that changes to Google’s algorithms had led to a sharp fall in the readership of 13 left-wing sites, the search traffic of these sites has plunged even further, hitting a combined decline of 50 percent.

The reactionary nexus between Silicon Valley, the CIA and the Pentagon must be—and will be—opposed. All over the world, workers are entering into struggle—from teachers and Amazon, UPS and postal workers in the United States, to pilots and cabin crew in Europe, to construction workers in Turkey. These workers must understand that they are the targets of censorship, and that they must mobilize to fight the drive to silence socialist and left-wing oppositional views.



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