

War, censorship, and the invention of “fake news”

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Under conditions of mounting social opposition and escalating plans for military conflict, the US political establishment is moving ever more brazenly to implement internet censorship.

On Saturday, the two principal newspapers of the political establishment, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, published editorials demanding an intensification of political censorship on social media. The *Times*, in “The Poison on Facebook and Twitter Is Still Spreading,” cited a supposed proliferation of “misinformation” on social media, including “homegrown campaigns spread[ing] partisan lies in the United States,” to demand much more aggressive action.

The *Times* praises journalists (that is, itself) along with “self-taught vigilantes” for forcing social media companies to act to take down content. However, much more fundamental action is required, it concludes. “[A]t this stage of the internet’s evolution, content moderation can no longer be reduced to individual postings viewed in isolation and out of context. The problem is systemic, currently manifested in the form of coordinated campaigns both foreign and homegrown.”

The solution: Social media companies must internalize censorship procedures on a much more systematic level. “The role that outsiders currently play, as consumer advocates and content screeners, can easily be filled in-house.” The social media companies, that is, must themselves become the “gatekeepers” of information, as former *Times* editor Bill Keller once referred to his newspaper.

The *Washington Post*, for its part, warned of the supposed threat played by “domestic disinformation.” Twitter and Facebook are, the *Post* wrote, “finally starting to articulate their responsibility not to facilitate

manipulation, no matter who pulls the strings.”

What is the “domestic disinformation” that Facebook and Twitter are fighting, with the full support of the *Times* and the *Post*? That question was answered positively earlier this month, when Facebook removed a series of popular left-wing media accounts, including organizations opposing war and police violence, in the name of fighting “fake news.”

The term “fake news” (or “misinformation”) has been introduced very deliberately and consciously into the vernacular of American and international politics as the catch-all justification for censorship. The media uses the term without ever explaining exactly what it means, hoping that the population will simply accept that it is something bad that must, of course, be blocked.

When most people think of the term “fake news,” they think of the headlines in supermarket tabloids about alien invasions and two-headed grandmothers giving birth to quintuplets. But when the *New York Times* and the leading US intelligence agencies use the term, they mean something entirely different: reporting that cuts across the efforts of the state to promote war and political viewpoints that challenge the establishment.

Included in this journalistic amalgam are such assertions as: The US is preparing for total war, that it organized the coup in Ukraine in 2014 in alliance with fascistic forces, that it has staged chemical weapons attacks in Syria to justify its campaign of regime change, that both parties in the US function as paid servants of the corporate and financial elite—this is all “fake news.” As for the fact that political operatives, including figures like Democratic Senator Mark Warner and Democratic Congressman Adam Schiff, are conspiring with the establishment media to censor the

internet under the guise of combatting “fake news”—this, no doubt, is itself “fake news.”

In her memoir, Hillary Clinton—whose defeat in 2016 was the occasion for broadly introducing the term “fake news”—explained that this “fake news” consists of true statements that served to discredit her in the public eye. As she put it, “WikiLeaks... helped accelerate the phenomenon that eventually came to be known as fake news.” There were “wild tales” spread about the “terrible things I must have said behind closed doors and how as president I would be forever in the pocket of the shadowy bankers who had paid my speaking fees.”

The only “tales” spread by WikiLeaks were the transcripts of Clinton’s paid speeches to Goldman Sachs, where she pledged to expand the influence of the rich in politics, and copies of emails by leading figures in the Democratic National Committee conspiring to rig the Democratic nomination contest in Clinton’s favor.

Julian Assange, WikiLeaks’ publisher, is still paying the price for his role in this intolerable breach of the wall of media lies and propaganda. On Tuesday, Eliot Engel, the ranking Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs committee, penned a letter to Lenin Moreno, the president of Ecuador, effectively blackmailing the whole country for continuing to shelter the dissident journalist and demanding that he be turned over for prosecution.

In March, the US special forces held a conference to discuss state censorship, whose proceedings were documented in a report by the Atlantic Council. It warned, “Technology has democratized the ability for sub-state groups and individuals to broadcast a narrative with limited resources and virtually unlimited scope.” By contrast, “In the past, the general public had limited sources of information, which were managed by professional gatekeepers.”

In other words, the rise of uncensored social media allowed small groups with ideas that correspond to those of the broader population to challenge the political narrative of vested interests on an equal footing, without the “professional gatekeepers” of the mainstream print and broadcast media.

A principal aim of the campaign for censorship is to restore these “gatekeepers” and to restrict the public’s access to warnings of the imminent war danger.

Notably, when Google initiated a change in its page

ranking algorithm last year in the name of fighting “fake news,” the WSWS’s coverage of the threat of war was most dramatically affected. Search terms associated with the danger of world war that had previously returned the WSWS in the top 10 results no longer took visitors to the WSWS.

There is an adage, attributed to Senator Hiram Johnson when the US entered World War I, that “the first casualty when war comes is truth.” That saying applies today with one exception: Truth is being strangled in anticipation of war. And all in the name of combating “fake news”! We have truly entered the realm of Orwell’s *1984*.

Nothing frightens the ruling class more than the prospect that the working class will be informed. The escalating campaign for war and censorship expresses the deep crisis confronting the ruling elite. Facing growing social opposition and a wave of working class struggle, the ruling elite sees in war and its accompanying attack on democratic rights the means to defend its rule through naked repression.



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