

The Matamoros auto strike and internet censorship

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The ongoing strike by over 70,000 workers in Matamoros, Mexico has been met with a media blackout by the major print and broadcast outlets. The strike is a rebellion against the hated trade unions that have suppressed the workers' opposition to poverty wages and slave labor conditions, and was organized and continues to be conducted by means of social media.

For over a week, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, CNN, PBS, ABC, CBS and NBC, together with every other large English-language media establishment, have failed to report on one of the most important and newsworthy developments of the new year.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has been the only English-language publication to systematically cover the strike, publishing extensive reporting and interviews on the struggle every day since January 15.

A search for "Matamoros" on Google news, for example, generates a list whose top six articles are from the WSWs, with no other English-language coverage of the strike.

The *World Socialist Web Site's* coverage has been widely read—both in English and Spanish—throughout Mexico, in the United States and all over the world. In total, the articles have been viewed 20,000 times, and have consistently been among the most-read pages on the WSWs.

The wide readership for the WSWs's coverage makes clear that reporting on the strike is not only newsworthy, but popular. Thus, the failure of the entire US media to report on the strike defies innocent explanation. One can only conclude that, at least among the major newspapers and broadcasters, a concerted decision has been taken not to cover the event.

Over the same period, the media was dominated for

days by a sensationalistic story posted by *Buzzfeed*, later disputed, regarding Donald Trump's business dealings with Russia. Other stories related to the anti-Russia campaign and the special counsel's investigation of Trump have proliferated, along with the single most widely-covered topic on the evening news: the weather.

The only plausible explanation for the media's systematic failure to cover the strike is fear that informing the American public about the struggles of Mexican workers will prompt sympathy and solidarity, cutting across the efforts of both factions of the American political establishment to promote national, ethnic and racial divisions.

The unique role of the *World Socialist Web Site* in covering the strike illuminates the real aims of ongoing efforts to censor the internet, in which the WSWs has been a principal target.

In April 2017, Google announced changes to its search algorithm aimed at promoting "trustworthy" news sources, while demoting "alternative viewpoints" in search results. In subsequent statements, the company made clear that the "trustworthy" news outlets with which it had "partnered" included the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

Since that announcement, Google search traffic for the *World Socialist Web Site* has fallen by over 75 percent. By contrast, search traffic for the *New York Times* is up by 10 percent, while the *Washington Post* is up by a staggering 80 percent.

Google made the changes to its algorithms under the fraudulent pretext of fighting what it called "fake news."

This term is a media construct: a crude attempt to draw an equal sign between news and opinions critical of the government and major media outlets, on the one

hand, and false statements, lies and scams, on the other.

Hundreds of articles in the *Post*, the *Times* and other news outlets spun a narrative that “Russians” used the internet to promote untrue statements in order to stoke up political opposition and divisions within the United States, with the aim of “undermining our democracy.”

But when the media and political commentators denouncing the phenomenon sought to give examples of “fake news,” they often cited factually accurate, true information. A case in point is WikiLeaks, which Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, attempting to explain away her electoral loss in 2016, declared “helped accelerate the phenomenon that eventually came to be known as fake news.”

But despite a torrent of invective against WikiLeaks and its persecuted former editor, Julian Assange, no one has ever lodged a credible accusation that the organization published false documents. WikiLeaks helped expose Clinton’s own corrupt ties to Wall Street banks, the Democratic Party’s attempt to undermine the primary challenge to Clinton from Bernie Sanders, and numerous criminal actions by the US government.

What is called “fake news,” in other words, is true news that powerful forces within the ruling elite do not want the broader population to see.

The campaign to legitimize censorship has targeted oppositional news websites precisely because they allow masses of people to bypass the effective censorship regime perpetuated by the major newspaper and broadcast networks.

In demanding censorship, figures within the ruling elite have demanded a return to the media climate that existed during the Cold War, when a handful of newspapers and broadcasters determined what the population could and could not see.

As Samantha Power, the former United States ambassador to the United Nations, put it in a column for the *New York Times*, “During the Cold War, most Americans received their news and information via mediated platforms. Reporters and editors serving in the role of professional gatekeepers had almost full control over what appeared in the media. A foreign adversary seeking to reach American audiences did not have great options for bypassing these umpires, and Russian dezinformatsia [disinformation] rarely penetrated.”

It is precisely to re-establish such a “mediated”

political climate that powerful sections of the state intelligence apparatus, together with the media outlets and technology monopolies, are working to censor the internet.

The internet, and in particular social media, has been a powerful organizing tool for the Matamoros workers, who have organized strikes, rallies, and meetings via Facebook.

It is precisely because of the internet’s vast power for mobilizing popular opposition that it has been targeted for censorship by a despised political establishment fearful of the growth of working class opposition. Social media, as one commentator put it in the *New York Times*, “may be one of the most powerful radicalizing instruments of the 21st century.”

As workers enter into struggle in the United States and around the world, they must take up the fight against internet censorship.



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