

Facebook escalates social media censorship with shutdown of far-right accounts

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On Thursday, Facebook banned the social media accounts of right-wing InfoWars publisher Alex Jones, Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, the alt-right figures Paul Joseph Watson and Milo Yiannopolous, right-wing nationalist Laura Loomer and self-described “pro-white” neo-Nazi candidate Paul Nehlen.

The scrubbing of these individuals from both the Facebook and Instagram platforms was confirmed in a company statement to the media. “We’ve always banned individuals or organizations that promote or engage in violence and hate, regardless of ideology. The process for evaluating potential violators is extensive and it is what led us to our decision to remove these accounts today.”

A Facebook spokesperson also told CNN Business that the decision to shut down the accounts was the product of a process of determining that an individual or organization is “dangerous.”

According to the CNN report, among the factors Facebook considers are “whether the person or organization has ever called for violence against individuals based on race, ethnicity, or national origin; whether the person has been identified with a hateful ideology; whether they use hate speech or slurs in their about section on their social media profiles; and whether they have had pages or groups removed from Facebook for violating hate speech rules.”

On a social media platform that has 2.4 billion active users worldwide, how is it possible that unknown and unnamed Facebook employees are empowered to decide who is “dangerous” or what is “hateful ideology” or who is “engaged in violence”? There is no process by which an individual user or organization can object or challenge their labeling by Facebook as “extreme” or question the process by which their account has been deleted.

Facebook is restricting others from expressing praise or supporting a banned person or organization, the CNN report said. Facebook will also remove groups, pages and accounts created to represent the banned individuals when “it knows the individual is participating in the effort.” Meanwhile, this policy “may not apply to any or all of the people banned Thursday, however.”

Far-right organizations have support from powerful factions of the state—a fact demonstrated by the President Trump’s denunciation of Facebook’s decision on Twitter over the weekend. On the other hand, all factions of the political establishment are united in their support for censorship of the left, for which Facebook’s actions establish another precedent.

The latest justifications given for Facebook censorship are a departure from those provided beginning last August. At that time, Facebook and the other social media platforms such as Twitter and YouTube used the charge of “inauthentic behavior” and Russian- or Iranian-backed “influence campaigns” to shut down accounts that were, for the most part, left-wing or oppositional to US government policies.

The move to ban right-wing and extreme nationalist social media publishers is a new stage in the campaign launched against “fake news” and “Russian meddling” during the 2016 presidential elections. In the aftermath of the release of the report by special counsel Robert Mueller, an aspect of the Democratic Party’s neo-McCarthyite campaign against Donald Trump is the lie that social unrest and class conflict in America are the products of Russian trolls on social media.

The coverage of the latest Facebook censorship by the media is virtually universal in accepting the attack on free speech. One example is the May 3 column by Clarence Page of the *Chicago Tribune* entitled,

“Facebook is right to boot abusers such as Farrakhan, Jones and Yiannopolous.” In it, Page argues that the digital age has brought a “new normal” in which the social media monopolies “have not only a right but an obligation” to censor.

The shift to silencing high-profile right-wing, anti-Semitic and fascistic elements on social media is in no way a deviation from the Internet censorship that has been underway for the past two years. It is part of the preparations by the ruling elites to put a halt to the utilization of the Internet and social media platforms to coordinate and organize the expanding class struggle that is underway and growing internationally.

The actions taken by the social media corporations against people like Jones and Farrakhan, whose odious views are opposed by the vast majority of the public, are not because of their racism, anti-Semitism and extreme nationalism. The new round of censorship is a test by the tech monopolies—in cooperation with the surveillance and intelligence apparatus of the state—for the suppression of mass political struggle against the capitalist system.

The implementation of “link-banning,” whereby anyone and everyone who shares the views of those who have been identified as “dangerous” can be shut down without justification, is a warning to all workers and young people. The social media corporations like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube (Google) and others are working with the state to catalog every conversation, every shared link and every comment being made on these platforms to identify those who are interested in political ideas opposed to imperialism and the profit system.

As was shown in Sri Lanka following the Easter Sunday bombings that killed 300 people—where the government rapidly blocked public access to all social media platforms—the state is experimenting with techniques for shutting down the online discussions and political and organizational activity of the insurgent working class.

The threat of extreme right-wing and fascist political forces is real. While there is currently no mass fascist movement, the ruling class is encouraging such groups in response to the growth of anticapitalist sentiment. The struggle to defeat fascism must be conducted by the working class on the basis of the political program of socialist revolution, not appeals to the corporations

or the state to silence or stop them.



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