

Facebook blocks ad for PES meeting in Paris to defend Assange

Alex Lantier
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On Thursday morning, members of the *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* (PES) received an email from Facebook, stating that it was suspending a paid advertisement for the June 23 PES meeting in Paris calling for freedom for WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

PES members campaigning for the meeting have met a warm response among workers, youth and “yellow vest” protesters in Paris. By Thursday, over 700 people had clicked “interested” on the meeting event page, a common form of expressing political solidarity with or support for an event. This points to the broad popular support in France for the courageous journalist and principled whistleblower, who have played central roles in exposing imperialist war crimes in Afghanistan, Iraq and beyond, amid growing working class opposition to President Emmanuel Macron.

Last week, Facebook had approved the purchase by PES members of advertising for the meeting's Facebook page, which made the meeting's page appear on the Facebook feeds of users who have expressed relevant interests. Yesterday, Facebook reversed course, blocking further purchases of ads for the meeting.

The notice from Facebook stated: “We have reviewed your ad more closely and have determined it doesn't comply with our Advertising Policies. This ad will not be active any longer until you edit it to comply with policy.” This would require creating an authorized account, a process that can take 48 hours, during which time the advertising has been cancelled.

Under Facebook's Advertising Policies, adopted after Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 US presidential elections, anyone posting a political ad is required to undergo an onerous authorization process. This includes submitting images of a state-issued ID,

verifying their address and providing further personal information.

Facebook justified the Advertising Policies as they were imposed in May 2018 based on the fraudulent argument that Trump's election was the disastrous product of a Russian conspiracy to manipulate social media to boost the Trump vote. Facebook's multibillionaire CEO Mark Zuckerberg (net worth: \$67.8 billion) said the Advertising Policies would make it impossible for “anyone to do what the Russians did during the 2016 election.”

Little over a year later, these arguments for Facebook censorship are thoroughly discredited. In March, Special Counsel Robert Mueller concluded a two-year investigation that found no evidence of any collusion between the Trump campaign and the Kremlin. Despite the obsessive focus of much of the US media and political machine on proving the link it had invented between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin, no one has provided any tangible evidence whatsoever of Russian interference in the 2016 elections.

What is clear, however, is that the hysterical anti-Russian campaign whipped up by the Democratic Party and sections of the US media serves to block freedom of expression and legitimate political speech internationally.

These events underscore that the fight to free Assange and Manning and prevent Assange's extradition to the United States, where he faces 175 years in prison and threats of further charges carrying the death sentence, is the focal point of a campaign to defend the democratic rights of working people internationally against the growing danger of capitalist police-state rule.

Facebook now censors and manipulates posts of its billions of users around the world. Under orders from Zuckerberg to Facebook to push its users to have

“personal moments” not political discussion, including by demoting “viral videos” because they are not “good for people’s well-being and for society,” a vast censorship campaign is underway. Facebook Artificial Intelligence algorithms and its army of thousands of “content reviewers” now scour social media for content to remove and report to police and intelligence agencies.

Apart from the US government itself, the French government is among the most closely tied to Facebook censorship. Last November, as “yellow vest” protests against social inequality began in France, Macron hailed France’s World War II-era fascist dictator Philippe Pétain as a great soldier and launched an unprecedented collaboration on social media censorship with Facebook. Countless “yellow vest” social media posts have been deleted since, as police detained over 7,000 protesters in the largest wave of mass arrests in metropolitan France since the Nazi Occupation.

On May 10, Zuckerberg personally met with Macron to review six months of this collaboration, in which French officials are invited directly into Facebook “content moderation” offices to monitor and examine posts culled from Facebook users’ feeds. The French state also issued a social media report co-written by Google France executive Benoît Loutrel, denouncing “unacceptable content” and “individuals pursuing political or financial objectives,” and calling for “struggle against content that is damaging for users and for social cohesion.”

Shortly after Zuckerberg’s visit to France, the 350,000-member *France en colère* (Angry France) “yellow vest” Facebook page was frozen for a day, during the European elections.

The decisions leading Facebook to reverse its approval of the PES meeting ad are shrouded behind a veil of corporate secrecy. But what is clear is that the company works intimately with the intelligence agencies of the US government who are seeking to destroy Assange and Manning. As for the French regime, it is so terrified of the workers that it sees all criticism of the despised “president of the rich,” including of its own acquiescence to US persecution of Assange and Manning, as a mortal threat to “social cohesion”—that is, to its enforcement of the banks’ austerity diktat.

The meeting organized by the PES is part of a

worldwide campaign to free Assange and Manning and mobilize the vast social opposition in the working class against austerity and the growing threat of authoritarian danger and war. The PES appeals to its supporters to share the announcement of its meeting and its material in defense of Julian Assange and Manning, as well as the “yellow vests,” to discuss these issues broadly in workplaces and schools, and to attend its meeting in Paris:

Sunday, June 23, 3 p.m.

AGÉCA

177 rue de Charonne, 75011, Paris

Métro: Charonne, Alexandre Dumas.

The author also recommends:

For a worldwide campaign to prevent Julian Assange’s rendition to the US!

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