

White House nears antitrust lawsuit against Google while advancing new censorship rules for social media

Kevin Reed
26 September 2020

The US Justice Department (DoJ) is expected to file an antitrust lawsuit within days against the internet search monopoly Google that would be “a landmark case against the tech giant,” according to the *New York Times*.

The *Times* report on Monday said that, according to four people familiar with the DoJ plans who did not want to be identified, the case would focus on “whether the company used its dominant search position to block rivals and harm consumers.”

The emphasis on Google’s control of online search, the *Times* said, indicates that DoJ’s investigation into the company’s practices in the “ad tech market” are not “fully developed” and will not be included in the lawsuit. Actually, it is impossible to separate Google’s domination of the search market from its advertising business. It is the nine out of every 10 online searches that make its advertising solutions so attractive.

Google is by far the most dominant internet and World Wide Web search engine. According to a 2020 report by *Oberlo*, approximately 92 percent of online search traffic goes through Google and the remaining 8 percent is divided among other very small providers: Bing (2.55 percent), Yahoo (1.66 percent), Baidu (1.44 percent) and Yandex (0.52 percent). This is the textbook definition of monopolistic domination.

The *Washington Post* also reported on Monday that the DoJ is briefing Republican state attorneys general this week about plans to file the antitrust lawsuit against Google. The *Post* report said, “The timeline puts federal competition watchdogs on track to file a case against Google potentially next week, capping off a wide-ranging inquiry into the tech giant and the extent to which its sprawling corporate footprint harms

rivals and consumers.”

As reported by the *World Socialist Web Site* previously, Attorney General William Barr has considered the case against Google as a “top priority.” In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* last May, Barr stated his intention to bring the case “to fruition” by early summer.

However, any antitrust action against Google by the US government, whether it is focused on the search or advertising aspects of the tech firm’s business, has nothing to do with stopping anticompetitive practices or protecting the rights of consumers.

The report that the DoJ began briefing state attorneys general on Wednesday has heightened expectations of an imminent announcement of a lawsuit against Google. According to the *Post*, the need to meet with the AGs arose when states “embarked on their own bipartisan probe last summer” and threatened to derail Trump and Barr’s campaign against Google.

While there is unanimity between the Trump administration and the state AGs about the need for legal action against Google, the *Post* report says, “It remains unclear which states may ultimately join the Justice Department in any lawsuit it files in the coming days, or whether they could file their own additional complaints. Some Democratic attorneys general also have signaled they may want to wait until after the 2020 presidential election before deciding their next steps.”

There no question but that the DoJ pressure to proceed with the antitrust case against Google is driven by the election calendar. This has been borne out by reports that career lawyers at the DoJ have expressed concerns about the “fast-track timeline” of the case. As

the *Post* report says, “The timeline illustrates the extent to which Barr has sought to mount one of the most high-profile assaults against big tech by the Trump administration.”

The rush to move forward with the antitrust case against Google is also being followed up by a White House offensive against the dominant social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. On Wednesday, speaking in the White House Cabinet Room, Trump said that “a small group of powerful technology platforms” have “tightened their grip over commerce and communications in America.”

Speaking alongside Attorney General Barr on Wednesday, Trump claimed that the tech giants have been, “at the urging of the radical left,” limiting the reach of conservative users, including himself. Jumbling phony antitrust concerns with unsubstantiated claims of online favoritism to the “radical left,” Trump said, “They’ve used this power to engage in unscrupulous business practices while simultaneously waging war on free enterprise and free expression.”

AG Barr then said that the Justice Department had sent to Congress “proposed legislation to reform Section 230” of the Communications Decency Act of 1996, and “that legislation addresses concerns about online censorship by requiring greater transparency and accountability when platforms remove lawful speech.”

Section 230 protects online services from prosecution for illegal exchanges and posts by users on their platforms. The “reforms” proposed by the DoJ would remove such protections from online services such as social media platforms that are determined “publishers” by the White House because they censored content deemed “legal” by the President.

Barr also said that the federal government does not “prevent the states from using their own state laws against platforms that are engaged in defrauding or misleading users.”

The new round of attacks on Google and the social media platforms by the White House—far from fighting anti-competitive practices or defending freedom of speech and stopping online censorship—is connected to the ongoing conflict within the ruling establishment that erupted in the aftermath of the election of Donald Trump in 2016 in the form of purported but never proven “Russian interference.”

While the Democrats and sections of the intelligence

community are seeking to implement Internet censorship by working directly with the tech giants and social media monopolies—as in the case of Facebook’s plans for “exceptional measures” during the 2020 elections—the Trump administration is using the courts and the Republican Party majority in the Senate to ensure that its extreme right-wing and fascistic agenda is maintained online.

In this regard, the imminent antitrust lawsuit against Google and the changes to the Section 230 legal protections must be seen within the context of the preparations by Donald Trump to ignore the results of the 2020 elections, overthrow the US Constitution and impose a Presidential dictatorship in the US.

Regardless of the differences between them, the Democrats and Republicans and the intelligence community all agree that the flow of online information and the use of social media platforms by masses of people must not be allowed to develop outside of the capitalist two-party system and toward revolutionary socialist politics. It is for this reason that the entire capitalist establishment is unified in its effort to censor the *World Socialist Web Site*.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact