

Facebook CEO Zuckerberg says company will “depoliticize” its News Feed

Kevin Reed**30 January 2021**

In a fourth quarter financial earnings call with investors on Wednesday, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg said that the social media platform was preparing to implement measures to permanently depoliticize the Facebook News Feed of billions of users around the world each day.

Zuckerberg, Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg and CFO Dave Wehner also discussed during the call the fact that the company beat analysts' predictions and increased revenue over last year by 33 percent between October and December, taking in \$28.1 billion. A transcript of the call has been published online by The Motley Fool.

After reporting that Facebook has 2.6 billion daily active users and 200 million business users, he went on to review “communities” on the platform. He said that Facebook had helped users “find and participate in communities that are meaningful to them” and that 600 million people are “now members of a group on Facebook that they consider to be meaningful in their lives.”

Zuckerberg reported that the company had taken down more than one million groups during 2020 that “break our rules against things like violence or hate speech.” He then acknowledged that Facebook had also shut down groups “that we may not want to encourage people to join even if they don’t violate our policies,” and, for example, he said, “we stopped recommending civic and political groups in the U.S. ahead of the elections.”

He went on to say that Facebook had been working “for a while to turn down the temperature and discourage divisive conversation and communities.” Zuckerberg then arrived at the crux of his point with the investors, saying, “Now, along these same lines, we’re also currently considering steps that we can take to

reduce the amount of political content in News Feed as well. We’re still working through exactly the best ways to do this.”

As the *World Socialist Web Site* and its affiliated organizations, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth & Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) are well aware, Facebook’s efforts to “turn down the temperature” and “reduce the amount of political content” are part of a broader campaign against socialist and left-wing ideas on its platform.

On January 23, the WSWS reported that Facebook had targeted left-wing and socialist pages, groups and users and deleted their accounts with no explanation. Among those who had their accounts terminated were leading members of the SEP and the page of London Bus Drivers Rank-and-File Committee which was set up with support from the SEP (UK).

On January 25, the WSWS reported that the page of the University of Michigan (U of M) chapter of the IYSSE had been terminated by Facebook, along with the user accounts of its administrators, including among them Genevieve Leigh, the national secretary of the IYSSE, and Niles Niemuth, the US managing editor of the *World Socialist Web Site*, who are also members of the national leadership of the SEP.

A review of the work of the U of M IYSSE leading up to the elections holds clues as to why Facebook—along with its intelligence state advisors—would target the organization. First, the club was actively involved in the strike by the graduate student teachers at the university during the second week of September. The IYSSE fought in the course of the strike to unite the grad student-workers with the broader struggle of the working class.

In the middle of November, less than two weeks after the US presidential elections, the U of M IYSSE

organized an online meeting entitled, “Trump’s electoral coup and the threat of dictatorship,” which Facebook blocked from being posted on its platform claiming that it “goes against our Community Standards.”

In response to this attack, the WSWS, SEP and IYSSE launched a global campaign to mobilize the working class to demand that Facebook reverse its actions. The campaign won widespread support internationally and forced Facebook to restore the IYSSE page and administrator accounts. Of course, the company claimed—in a statement to the *Financial Times* in Britain—that the shutdowns were the result of an “automation error.”

The report in the *Financial Times* included a statement from David North, the chairman of the WSWS International Editorial Board, who said, “Even though this particular ban has been [reversed], it’s a warning we don’t know what might come next.”

The statements from Mark Zuckerberg give an idea of what Facebook’s plans are. While the reports in the capitalist press focus exclusively on his remarks as a response to the right-wing assault on the US Capitol on January 6 and the role that social media played in enabling the fascistic organizers, none of them has pointed to the coordinated assault on the left that followed.

The *Guardian*, for example, referred to the antitrust probes in Washington and the lawsuit filed by the Federal Trade Commission and 48 states accusing Facebook of abusive business practices as a means of the government forcing through policy changes at the number one social media monopoly. The *Guardian* said nothing of Facebook’s censorship of the left.

In its report on Zuckerberg’s comments, *Politico* refers to the impact of the Facebook depoliticization policy on “grassroots” movements that have relied on the platform to win supporters. *Politico* says that advocacy groups leaders fear that the policy change “will disadvantage organizers who help to usher new people into new movements, like the Trump-era women’s marches or Black Lives Matter protests.”

Among the first publishers to report on Zuckerberg’s conference call statement, the UK-based *Independent*, quoted the statement of US Senator Ed Markey (Democrat of Massachusetts) in a letter to Mark Zuckerberg calling Facebook groups “breeding grounds

for hate, echo-chambers of misinformation, and venues for coordination of violence, including explicit planning for the insurrection at the US Capitol on 6 January 2021.”

Markey also pointed to an investigation by The Markup—a publisher focusing on data-driven journalism—that revealed that the pre-election claims by Facebook that it would stop recommending “political or social issue groups” turned out to be false and never occurred.



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