

Facebook intensified political censorship in advance of Chauvin verdict

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20 April 2021

On Monday, Facebook announced it would “limit content that could lead to civil unrest or violence” in advance of the jury verdict in the trial of Derrick Chauvin, the Minneapolis police officer who was found guilty Tuesday on all three counts for the murder of George Floyd last year.

In a Facebook Newsroom post, Vice President of Content Policy Monika Bickert adopted a law-and-order stance, writing that company moderators were “working around the clock” to prevent “online content from being linked to offline harm and doing our part to keep our community safe.”

Furthermore, using language typical of the ongoing law enforcement assault on protesters over the past year, Bickert wrote that Facebook had deemed Minneapolis to be a “high-risk location” and that “we will continue to monitor events on the ground to determine if additional locations will be deemed as temporary, high-risk locations.”

In an effort to take the repressive edge off of her pronouncement, Bickert wrote that Facebook was also “working to protect the memory of George Floyd and members of the Floyd family from harassment and abuse.” She added, Facebook will remove any posts that “praises, celebrates or mocks George Floyd’s death.”

In a remarkable portion of the Facebook announcement, Bickert states the social media platform considers Derek Chauvin to be a “public figure” who has “voluntarily placed himself in the public eye” and that the company policy against “bullying and harassment” means “we will remove attacks” on the now-convicted murderer “that are severe.”

The final section of the Facebook Newsroom announcement reiterates that the platform is enlisting “third-party fact-checking partners” and special tools to

“ensure that potential misinformation is flagged.” Confirming the cooperation of the Facebook content regime with the state apparatus, Bickert concludes that “given the risk of violence following the announcement of the verdict,” the company will remain “in close contact with local, state and federal law enforcement.”

The Facebook post was published two days after Representative Maxine Waters (Democrat from California), speaking to reporters at a rally to protest the police killing of Duante Wright in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota, said, “I hope we get a verdict that says guilty, guilty, guilty. And if we don’t, we cannot go away...we’ve got to get more confrontational.”

Even though Waters reiterated her support for peaceful protest, declaring, “I am nonviolent,” Republican Party and fascistic media personalities seized on her comments as “inciting violence in Minneapolis.” On Tuesday, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (Republican from California)—who voted against the certification of the 2020 presidential election results and abetted the violent mob that attacked the US Capitol on January 6—moved a censure resolution in the House against Waters because her comments “raised the potential for violence, directed lawlessness, and may have interfered with a co-equal branch of government.” The resolution was tabled on Wednesday in a party-line vote of 216-210 shortly before the Chauvin guilty verdict was announced.

Waters’s statement was also used in the courtroom by Chauvin’s attorney Eric Nelson to argue for a mistrial on the grounds that jury had been prejudiced by media coverage of Waters’s statement and protests demanding a guilty verdict over the weekend. While Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill dismissed Nelson’s motion, he also threw Chauvin’s defense a bone by saying, “I’ll give you that Congresswoman

Waters may have given you something on appeal that may result in this whole trial being overturned.”

Facebook’s statement, the comments from Judge Cahill and the Republican Party resolution are all connected to the ongoing attempt by the political and media establishment to brand protests against police violence as “violent mobs” and “riots.” Taken entirely by surprise by the intensity and scale of the protests that began last May following Floyd’s murder, the ruling elite is fearful that this movement will merge with the growing struggles of the entire working class against the capitalist system.

Throughout the protests against police violence over the summer, which involved approximately 20 million people in the US, the Democrats supported the false characterization of the demonstrations as violent and compared them to the fascist mobs organized by the Republican Party. For example, then the Democratic Party’s candidate for the White House, President Joe Biden, said in August, “I condemn violence of every kind by anyone, whether on the left or the right. And I challenge Donald Trump to do the same.”

Facebook and the other tech platforms—corporations that are at the center of the enormous fortunes amassed by the billionaire Wall Street oligarchs—have been working with the state intelligence apparatus for years now to perfect methods of censorship that suppress left-wing politics and block workers from using social media to organize their struggles.

In a significant example of the political character of Facebook’s content policy, platform moderators blocked the sharing of a *New York Post* article on Thursday that exposed the \$3.2 million in real estate purchases of Black Lives Matter co-founder Patrisse Cullors. Any user who attempted to share the *Post* article received a message that the content was removed because it “goes against our Community Standards” and violated Facebook’s “privacy and personal information policy.”

Facebook’s ongoing efforts to “depoliticize” its platform mirrors the undemocratic and authoritarian sentiments within both parties of the financial elite. Becoming more and more isolated and hated by the broad mass of the public, there is growing sense of foreboding among the ruling class that the leftward movement of the working class and young people must be smothered beneath a regime of repression and

control.



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