

Whistleblower testimony launches bipartisan campaign for Facebook censorship

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Whistleblower and former Facebook product manager Frances Haugen testified before a Senate subcommittee hearing on Tuesday and said that the social media company's platforms "harm children, stoke division, weaken our democracy and much more."

Haugen—who has also worked at Google, Pinterest and Yelp—said that the company's leadership "knows ways to make Facebook and Instagram safer and won't make the necessary changes because they have put their immense profits before people." She said that congressional intervention is necessary because Facebook, "cannot solve this problem without your help."

Haugen was asked to testify before the Senate Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security after she leaked a series of internal Facebook documents to the *Wall Street Journal*. The documents became the basis for a six-part investigative series published between September 13 and October 4 by the *Journal* entitled, "The Facebook Files."

In its analysis of the internal research reports, online employee discussions and drafts of presentations to senior management provided by Haugen, the *Journal* concluded that the company's platforms—including Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp—"are riddled with flaws that cause harm, often in ways only the company understands."

The *Journal*'s series summary also said: "Time and again, the documents show, Facebook's researchers have identified the platform's ill effects. Time and again, despite congressional hearings, its own pledges and numerous media exposés, the company didn't fix them. The documents offer perhaps the clearest picture thus far of how broadly Facebook's problems are known inside the company, up to the chief executive himself."

The solution to "Facebook's problems," according to Haugen and the *Wall Street Journal*, is government control over what is said by Facebook's users. A review of Haugen's testimony as well as the response of both the Democrats and Republicans and the corporate press reveals that a consensus is developing within the capitalist ruling establishment for government intervention that, far from stopping the giant tech company from putting "profits before people," aims to gain control of all of Facebook's platforms and, in particular, censor left-wing and socialist content.

Frances Haugen, 37, describes herself as "an advocate for public oversight of social media." In her various tech industry jobs, she has specialized in designing algorithms and tools for determining what users see on social media. In 2019, she was inspired to join Facebook "because someone close to me was radicalized online" and became a member of the company's 200-person Civil Integrity team tasked with stopping "election interference."

Indicating her connections with the US intelligence state, Haugen later worked on Facebook's counterespionage team. During her Senate testimony, Haugen said this work at Facebook included examining China's use of the platform for "tracking and surveillance" and Iran's "tracking of other state actors." She complained that Facebook's "consistent" understaffing of counterespionage information operations and counterterrorism was a national security threat.

In her prepared remarks, Haugen said that Facebook "amplifies division, extremism, and polarization" and undermines "societies around the world." She added that the "severity of the crisis demands that we break out of previous regulatory frames." She said that this

means that adjusting “outdated privacy protections or changes to Section 230 will not be sufficient.” Section 230 is the language in the Communications Decency Act of 1996 that protects online services from legal responsibility for the content posted by users on their platforms.

Haugen stated that nothing less than “full access to data for research not directed by Facebook” is acceptable and, on this basis, “we can build sensible rules and standards to address consumer harms, illegal content, data protection, anticompetitive practices, algorithmic systems and more.” In other words, the public is becoming radicalized, and the government must get control of the internal workings of Facebook’s social media platforms in order to stabilize the situation.

Under the guise of fighting content that is harmful to children, the Democrats and Republicans are coming together in support of state control of Facebook data and newsfeed algorithms.

Senator Marsha Blackburn, ranking Republican from Tennessee on the subcommittee said during the hearing that Facebook was intentionally targeting children under 13 with an “addictive” product saying, “It is clear that Facebook prioritizes profit over the well-being of children and all users.”

Richard Blumenthal, subcommittee chairman and Democratic Senator from Connecticut, said, “Facebook exploited teens using powerful algorithms that amplified their insecurities,” adding, “I hope we will discuss as to whether there is such a thing as a safe algorithm.”

As noted by NPR, the Democrats and Republicans “are actually united on regulating Facebook.” The public radio broadcaster then said, “At one moment in the hearing, Republican Senator Jerry Moran of Kansas turned to Blumenthal and said they should put aside their partisan differences to tackle a common goal: reining in Facebook.”

In response to the bipartisan pressure, Facebook’s Vice-President for Global Affairs and Communications Nick Clegg appeared on NBC’s Meet the Press on Sunday morning and said that changes are coming to both Facebook and Instagram. Clegg said that the company would reduce the presence of politics on newsfeeds and claimed that the measure was requested by users seeking “more friends and less politics.”

The depoliticization of Facebook’s platforms has been underway since before the 2020 elections. Clegg said, “It’s simply not true to say we lifted those measures immediately—in fact, we kept the vast majority right through to the inauguration. And we kept some in place permanently—so we permanently don’t recommend civic and political groups to people.”

Clegg admitted that Facebook was engaged in throttling and censoring “perfectly innocent videos” and that “very blunt tools” have been used in “scooping up a lot of entirely innocent, legitimate, playful and enjoyable content.”

The corporate media has endorsed the campaign to “rein in” Facebook content. This has nothing to do with concern for children. Instead it is motivated by fear over the revolutionary implications of masses of working people using social media to coordinate and organize their growing struggles against social inequality, war and the deadly public health consequences of the herd immunity policies pursued by the ruling elite throughout the coronavirus pandemic.



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