

Social media platforms expand censorship of anti-war and anti-imperialist voices

## Six years of Chris Hedges' *On Contact* program erased by YouTube

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On March 27, YouTube removed the entire archive of six years of Chris Hedges' *On Contact* from its platform without any notice or explanation. Even though very few of Hedges' shows referenced Russia or Vladimir Putin directly, his association with RT America as well as his opposition to NATO warmongering was all that was required for YouTube to delete hundreds of hours of interviews on a range of political subjects that were critical of both the Democrats and Republicans.

The *World Socialist Web Site* denounces the malicious and anti-democratic suppression of the archive of *On Contact* and demands that full public access to it be immediately restored.

As reported previously by the *World Socialist Web Site*, the Russian state-funded cable news network RT America was shut down in the US on March 3 and all 120 of its employees were laid off at offices located in New York City, Washington D.C., Los Angeles and Miami.

Although the management of the news channel said the network had experienced "unforeseen business-interruption events," the abrupt shutdown of RT America was no doubt part of the anti-Russian offensive mounted by corporate media outlets and governments aligned with the US and NATO in the proxy war being fought in Ukraine against the regime in Moscow.

Among the RT America programs terminated were several popular left-wing and anti-war TV shows including *Redacted Tonight* with Lee Camp and *On Contact* with Chris Hedges. These programs were

specifically targeted for censorship because they adopted an anti-war standpoint that was opposed to the narrative developed by the ruling political establishment in the US and Europe.

This campaign to silence voices critical of the role of imperialism in provoking the war in Ukraine has been extended to the removal of video content from YouTube, podcasts from Spotify and other censorship measures by the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter.

Hedges had denounced as a "war of aggression" the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. But he went on to explain the war in historical context and suggested that the betrayal of agreements with Moscow, which he covered as a reporter in Eastern Europe during the dissolution of the USSR, as well as the expansion of NATO on the perimeter of Russia likely baited Putin to invade Ukraine.

In a statement published on Substack, Hedges wrote of the censorship by YouTube, "The entire archive of *On Contact*, the Emmy-nominated show I hosted for six years for RT America and RT International, has been disappeared from YouTube. ... I received no inquiry or notice from YouTube. I vanished. In totalitarian systems you exist, then you don't."

Hedges went on to explain that the lack of oppositional content in the mainstream media was one of the reasons he was on RT in the first place, "I was on RT because, as a critic of US imperialism, militarism, the corporate control of the two ruling parties, and especially because I support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement against Israel, I was

blacklisted.”

Hedges denounced the Democrats for being the biggest advocates of online political censorship in the US, “The most vocal cheerleaders for this censorship are the liberal class. ... Democrats in the U.S. Congress have held hearings with the CEOs of social media companies pressuring them to do *more* to censor content. Banish the troglodytes. Then we will have social cohesion.”

He also drew broader conclusions about the meaning of the removal of his programs from YouTube, “Julian Assange and Edward Snowden exposed the truth about the criminal inner workings of power. Look where they are now. This censorship is one step removed from Joseph Stalin’s airbrushing of nonpersons such as Leon Trotsky out of official photographs. It is a destruction of our collective memory. It removes the efforts to examine our reality in ways the ruling class does not appreciate. The goal is to foster historical amnesia. If we don’t know what happened in the past, we cannot make sense of the present.”

The actions of YouTube, which is owned by Google’s corporate parent Alphabet Inc., are part of a coordinated effort by the big social media platforms to silence anyone who does not adopt the political line of the White House and US State Department and label them as “Russian propaganda.”

Other recent developments include the decision by Twitter as of February 28 to label the tweets of those who worked at RT America with a message that says, “Russia state-affiliated media.” Absurdly, this includes the Twitter account of Ed Schultz, the former host of MSNBC’s *The Ed Show* and, starting in 2016, the host of *News with Ed Schultz* on RT America. Schultz’s Twitter account now has the Russian state media label even though he died of natural causes on July 5, 2018.

Also reported previously on the WSWS, comedian and activist Lee Camp’s 500 hours and eight years of video archive of *Redacted Tonight* was removed from YouTube and his podcast *Moment of Clarity* was removed from Spotify. In a recent post, Camp called the anti-Russian censorship McCarthyism, “We live in a world of immense censorship that is increasing every day. ... America claims to be this is the place where we have freedom of press or freedom of speech and yet they are deleting everything that is possibly anti-war and anti-imperialist.”

On Saturday, Facebook deleted a popular anti-war video produced by the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) without explanation. The video, “No Third World War! Against Ukraine war, NATO aggression and German rearmament!” resonated with the public and had been viewed over 20,000 times within a few days before it was removed.

The video gained a following because it presented a fundamental truth about the present danger of a world war with nuclear weapons. The SGP both condemned the Putin regime’s war in Ukraine and explained how the conflict was provoked by the encirclement of Russia by NATO and the wars conducted by the US and its European allies over the past thirty years.

The new round of online censorship is a continuation of the campaign mounted by the tech monopolies under the direction of the intelligence state apparatus that began in 2017 to prevent anti-capitalist and revolutionary socialist political ideas from reaching wide layers of the working class. With the development of the Internet, and especially social media, over the past three decades, the ruling elite fears that its grip on information and political analysis through traditional corporate media channels has been significantly undermined.

The *World Socialist Web Site* views as a basic responsibility the defense of all progressive and left-wing individuals and political tendencies against government instigated censorship and repression. We therefore urge all supporters and readers to circulate this statement as widely as possible in order to build public support for the restoration of access to Hedges’ *On Contact* archive.



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