

Members of Zelensky's party introduce internet censorship bill

Jason Melanovski
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Members of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's Servant of the People party have introduced a bill to criminalize the spread of "false information" on the internet and through social media that violates Ukraine's "national security."

Ostensibly, the bill is targeted at "bot" accounts coordinated by "Russian special services" who, as the authors of the bill claim, are "conducting informational influence actions against the state interests of Ukraine."

But in reality, the language of the bill is so encompassing that anyone could be arrested for posting information that the right-wing nationalist government in Kiev deems "misinformation."

Under the proposed bill, lawmakers would have broad powers to arrest anyone who participates in the "creation, acquisition, use or sale of accounts, including those containing knowingly false information," as well as the "posting and distribution of inaccurate information."

Anyone who spreads so called "misinformation" with the intention to "damage to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability, defense capability, national, state, economic or informational security of Ukraine, or to exert influence on decision-making or taking or not taking actions by state bodies or local self-government bodies, officials of these bodies," would likewise face arrest and imprisonment of 5 to 7 years and the confiscation of personal property.

According to the five authors of the bill — all members of Zelensky's ruling Servant of the People party — the law is necessary for the sake of "national security" and "to have as wide a legislative toolkit as possible to fight against persons who individually or collectively engage in information attacks, spreading false and/or manipulative information."

While the measure has yet to become law, the bill is

yet another example of the right-wing, authoritarian character of the Ukrainian government which seeks to hide the truth of its NATO-backed proxy war with Russia from both within and outside Ukraine. In this effort, the Ukrainian government works closely with its NATO backers and especially with American imperialism.

Last week, Iliia Vitiuk, head of the Department of Cyber Information Security in the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), admitted in an interview with journalist Lee Fang at a cyber security conference in San Francisco that the American FBI regularly targets supposed Russian "disinformation" on Facebook at the request of the Ukrainian government.

"Once we have a trace or evidence of disinformation campaigns via Facebook or other resources that are from the U.S., we pass this information to the FBI, along with writing directly to Facebook," Vitiuk said.

When pressed on how he determined what was "fake," Vitiuk replied that the truth of the information had no bearing on its status as "misinformation."

"When people ask me, 'How do you differentiate whether it is fake or true?' Indeed it is very difficult in such an informational flow," said Vitiuk. "I say, 'Everything that is against our country, consider it a fake, even if it's not.' Right now, for our victory, it is important to have that kind of understanding, not to be fooled."

Should the proposed bill by Zelensky's party members become law, virtually anyone within Ukraine could be arrested and thrown in jail for 5-7 years as Vitiuk's comments prove.

While Zelensky is regularly portrayed as a modern day George Washington standing up to "Russian imperialism" in the Western press, the truth is that he is the head of an oligarchical, right-wing government that

regularly tramples on the most basic democratic rights.

Leading up to the war, Zelensky's government regularly targeted pro-Russian media, banning three popular television stations associated with Opposition For Life Party leader Viktor Medvedchuk. According to Zelensky the stations "carried out anti-Ukrainian propaganda" and "interfered with the process of the country's integration into the European Union."

Medvedchuk, an associate of Russian President Vladimir Putin who previously served as an intermediary between the Ukrainian and Russian oligarchies, was later charged with treason and placed under house arrest.

With the outbreak of full-scale war, the Zelensky government, using the country's security service (SBU) has accelerated the country's crackdown on basic democratic rights amid a war that has already killed over 100,000 Ukrainian soldiers in a country of just 40 million people.

All anti-NATO political parties are now banned, restrictions on Russian language and culture have sharply increased, and any dissent from Kiev's pro-war line is sharply punished.

Earlier in January of this year the Zelensky government passed a law that permits the country's National Council of Broadcasting to censor television, print and online journalism, as well as social media and search engines such as Google. News sites that fail to officially "register as media" with the right-wing Ukrainian government may be shut down without a court ruling.

While such authoritarian measures have been dismissed by Zelensky's backers in the West as temporary and necessary wartime decisions, the Ukrainian ruling class is preparing for a war that, by Zelensky's own admission, might last dozens of years.

In a lengthy interview last week with Norwegian, Danish, Swedish and Finnish reporters, Zelensky, according to the BBC, did "not rule out that the war in Ukraine will last dozens of years. He noted that no Ukrainian territory, including Crimea, should remain under Russian occupation."

While Zelensky—a multi-millionaire actor—ponders an endless NATO-backed war with Russia, working class Ukrainians continue to lose their lives and suffer from joblessness as a result of the war. It is estimated that up to 200,000 Ukrainians have already lost their lives in

just over a year of war, with many hundreds of thousands more wounded. The increasingly repressive and ever more openly dictatorial measures taken by the government are no doubt motivated above all by growing popular opposition to the war.

As a recent report from the Ukrainian news outlet *Strana* demonstrated, with the government requiring Ukrainian men to register with the military in order to obtain a job, many are now torn between being unemployed and the risk of being handed a military summons and sent to the front.

Rostislav Kravetz, a lawyer representing those seeking to avoid conscription, told *Strana* that before the war, proof of military registration was a "mere formality," as it is in many other countries.

"Now it has become mandatory," he said. "And many are afraid that as soon as they appear at the military registration and enlistment office, they will immediately be handed a summons."

"But one of the horror stories is 'It's easier for military commissars to get you.' In fact, it is. After all, the heads of enterprises and organizations are one of the official channels for sending subpoenas. By transmitting a subpoena through an employer, it is easy to prove the fact of proper delivery, which means that a person liable for military service will not be able to evade it by claiming, 'I did not receive a summons at all.'

"Moreover, several fines for non-appearance with proven delivery of the summons may become the basis for initiating an already severe criminal sentence, resulting in up to three years in prison."



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