

# Australia's social media ban sets global precedent for online censorship

Oscar Grenfell  
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A ban on Australian children under 16 accessing social media came into effect on Wednesday, setting a global precedent for state control of the internet amid rising hostility to inequality, authoritarianism and war.

Social media platforms have been compelled under threat of massive fines to institute age-verification measures and remove children. Potentially all users, including adults, now face new obligations to remain on platforms, such as providing government identification or photographs to the conglomerates.

The measure has sparked mass opposition, including from young people already finding ways to circumvent it.

This is not merely an Australian issue. The Trump administration has introduced a nearly identical policy to the US Congress, and a host of European powers are moving towards a similar ban.

Legislation was rushed through parliament by the Labor government last year, supposedly to protect young people from online harm, particularly to mental health. Those claims are false. Mental health advocacy groups overwhelmingly opposed the ban, warning it will likely intensify children's psychological problems.

The Labor government is implementing a program that can only worsen the mental health crisis. It has done nothing to address the fact that one in six children live below the poverty line, instead imposing the burden of the cost-of-living crisis on working-class households and inflicting austerity on vital social services.

These social conditions, and the reality that capitalism offers them no future, are fuelling a radicalisation of young people. The real aim of the ban is to suppress that sentiment and prevent it from finding organised political expression.

The ban is being imposed after long developing social

anger erupted to the surface amid the Gaza genocide, which has politicised an entire generation. In Australia, masses of youth participated in often weekly demonstrations, held school strikes and engaged in other actions to oppose the war crimes they were witnessing through social media.

The footage of maimed Palestinians, bombed hospitals and decimated schools showed a reality completely at odds with the lies of the major imperialist powers, including Australia, which backed the slaughter. It is such exposures of government lies and criminality that the ban seeks to prevent.

The mass opposition to the genocide followed outpourings over the climate crisis, including school strikes in Australia and globally involving hundreds of thousands.

Anger over these manifestations of capitalist crisis is increasingly cohering into an attraction to socialism. The most recent polling on the issue in Australia found last year that 53 percent of young Australians wanted "more socialism," mirroring similar results in the US and Europe.

Government leaders have covered over their political motivations when publicly justifying the ban. Instead, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has trotted out conservative tropes about the need to return to an idyllic past when children played outdoors.

But the underlying agenda has been expressed in other contexts. In a November address, Mike Burgess, head of domestic spy agency ASIO, warned of growing "revolutionary extremism" associated with hostility to the Gaza genocide and left-wing opposition.

Beyond the immediate issue of cracking down on oppositional sentiments among young people, government leaders have long railed against the ability of ordinary people to make political statements online

with relative anonymity.

Albanese has denounced “keyboard warriors who can anonymously say anything at all without any fear.” In that context, the government’s claims that it will not access the identification details collected by the social media companies hold no water.

Just as growing social anger is international in character, so too are the imperialist powers coordinating in their attempt to suppress it.

In December 2024, just days after the legislation for the social media ban was passed, the Five Eyes spying network released a report warning against “youth radicalisation.” Five Eyes is led by the US and composed of the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

The report warned that young people “have grown up online and are technologically savvy.” They were using such platforms to “view and distribute violent extremist content which further radicalises themselves and others.” This threat had to be combatted with a “whole-of-society” effort.

It is clear that the under-16s social media ban is part of that effort, underscored by the fact that the Trump administration and European countries are moving to implement similar measures.

In that context, the warnings of “violent extremism” are a transparent fraud. Trump is seeking to erect a fascist dictatorship, overturning the Constitution including through the mobilisation of far-right and even Nazi forces.

To the extent that the social media companies amplify anti-immigrant and racist content, that is one component of a broader promotion of fascism by the political and media establishment. The connection is exemplified by X/Twitter, increasingly transformed by the world’s richest man Elon Musk, a former member of the Trump administration, into a loudhailer for far-right propaganda.

The assault on online freedom is part of a broader offensive against left-wing opposition. That includes this week’s memorandum by US Attorney General Pam Bondi, classifying as “domestic terrorists,” those who promote “opposition to law and immigration enforcement; extreme views in favor of mass migration and open borders” or “anti-capitalism.”

The crackdown on democratic rights involves not only openly fascist forces such as Trump, but the

entire political establishment, expressed in the fact that it is a Labor government that is setting a global precedent for censorship.

That precedent builds on longstanding attempts by governments to gain control of the internet, which is viewed as a revolutionary threat because it provides those outside the corridors of power with the ability to disseminate their views, communicate and organise opposition.

A key turning point came in 2017, when Google, acting at the behest of government agencies, introduced a new algorithm, suppressing the *World Socialist Web Site* and other alternative outlets in search results, instead prioritising corporate publications.

The crisis of capitalism is far deeper than when those measures were instituted. The major powers, led by the US, are responding with imperialist war, including not only such crimes as the genocide in Gaza, but also confrontations with Russia and China that threaten nuclear world war. Domestically, they are enforcing social inequality unseen since the days of the French Revolution, through dictatorial measures.

There is widespread hostility and growing resistance. That has found expression in large numbers of young people denouncing Australia’s social media ban and defiantly circumventing it. Protests, school strikes and other actions must be organised.

An alternative political perspective is required. The capitalist program of censorship and ultimately dictatorship can only be fought through a mass movement of the working class, independent of the entire political establishment.

The fight for online freedom and democratic discussion poses nothing less than the dismantling of the repressive capitalist state apparatuses and the placement of all the major productive forces of society, including the technology corporations, under the democratic control and ownership of the working class.



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