

Facebook and Google outline unprecedented mass censorship and election rigging at US Senate hearing

By Andre Damon

18 January 2018

Behind the backs of the US and world populations, social media companies have built up a massive censorship apparatus staffed by an army of “content reviewers” capable of seamlessly monitoring, tracking, and blocking millions of pieces of content.

The character of this apparatus was detailed in testimony Wednesday from representatives of Facebook, Twitter, and Google’s YouTube before the United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, chaired by South Dakota Republican John Thune.

The hearing was called to review what technology companies are doing to shut down the communications of oppositional political organizations. It represented a significant escalation of the campaign, supported by both Democrats and Republicans, to establish unprecedented levels of censorship and control over the Internet.

Armed with increasingly powerful artificial intelligence systems, these technology companies are free to remove and block the communications of their users at the behest of the government, in a seamless alliance between Silicon Valley and the major US spy agencies.

Monika Bickert, head of Global Policy Management at Facebook, told lawmakers that the social media giant now employs a security team of 10,000 people, 7,500 of whom “assess potentially violating content,” and that, “by the end of 2018 we will more than double” the security team.

This group includes “a dedicated counterterrorism team” of “former intelligence and law-enforcement officials and prosecutors who worked in the area of counterterrorism.” In other words, there is a revolving door between the technology giants and the state intelligence and police forces, with one increasingly indistinguishable from the other.

Bickert pointed to the growing use of artificial intelligence to flag content, saying Facebook does not “wait for these... bad actors to upload content to Facebook before placing it into our detection systems,” bragging that much of the “propaganda” removed from Facebook “is content that we identify ourselves before anybody” else has a chance to view it.

She added that Facebook has partnered with over a dozen other companies to maintain a blacklist of content, based on “unique digital fingerprints.” This means that if a piece of content, whether a video, image, or written

statement, is flagged by any one of these companies, it will be banned from all social media. This database now includes some 50,000 pieces of content and is constantly growing, officials said.

In other words, the technology giants have created an all-pervasive system of censorship in which machines, trained to collaborate with the CIA, FBI, and other US intelligence agencies, are able to flag and block content even before it is posted.

Juniper Downs, global head of Public Policy and Government Relations at YouTube, likewise boasted that Google uses “a mix of technology and humans to remove content,” adding that YouTube relies on a “trusted flagger program” to provide “actionable flags” based on the flaggers’ experience with “issues like hate speech and terrorism,” words that imply that these “trusted flaggers” are connected to US intelligence agencies.

“Machine learning is now helping our human reviewers remove nearly five times as many videos as they were before,” Downs said, adding that Google’s censorship machine is virtually automated. She said that this year there will be “10,000 people across Google working to address content that might violate our policies.”

Downs declared that since June YouTube has “removed 160,000 videos and terminated 30,000 channels for violent extremism.” The company has “reviewed over two million videos” in its collaboration with “law enforcement, government,” and “NGOs.”

Downs stated that Google is actively engaged in promoting what she called “counter-speech,” that is, the promotion of propaganda narratives. She also pointed to Google’s Jigsaw program as deploying “targeted ads and YouTube videos to disrupt online radicalization,” and “redirecting” users to content that Google approves of.

The hearing also featured the testimony of Clint Watts, a former FBI official, former US Army officer, fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, and a leading promoter of social media censorship.

Watts presented the hearing with an unhinged justification for what these massive powers might be used for, in a hypothetical scenario he dubbed “Anwar Awlaki meets PizzaGate.”

“The greatest concern moving forward,” he said, “might likely be a foreign intelligence service, posing as Americans on social media, infiltrating one or both political extremes in the US and then recruiting unwitting Americans to undertake violence against a target of the foreign power’s choosing.”

In this formulation, social opposition, what he calls the “political extremes,” including left-wing politics, is the product of foreign intervention and therefore treasonous. It is also defined as “terrorist” in content and therefore criminal.

Watts expressed extreme fear over the widespread growth of opposition to the policies of US imperialism. He arrogantly decried, “Lesser-educated populations around the world predominately arriving in cyberspace via mobile phones will be particularly vulnerable to social media manipulation.”

The content of Thursday’s testimony points the far-advanced preparations for the establishment of police state forms of rule.

The effort to control speech online is driven by a ruling elite that is immensely fearful of social opposition. Amid growing social inequality and the ever-mounting threat of world war, broad sections of the population, and in particular the working class, are increasingly disillusioned with the capitalist system. Having no social reform to offer, the ruling elites see censorship as the only means to prop up their rule.

Given the explosive content of the statements made at Thursday’s hearing, it is extraordinary

that they received no significant coverage in either the print or broadcast media.

The hearing took place just one day after the *World Socialist Web Site* carried its live **webinar**, “Organizing Resistance to Internet Censorship,” featuring WSWS chairperson David North and journalist Chris Hedges.

Fight Google's censorship!

Google is blocking the *World Socialist Web Site* from search results.

To fight this blacklisting:

Share this article with friends and coworkers



Facebook



Twitter



E-Mail



Reddit

G. David Daley • 6 hours ago

This video presentation can be saved locally by 'right clicking' over the video and selecting 'save link as.' <https://tinyurl.com/y89tsxxt>

• Reply • Share ›



michaelrolloff • 9 hours ago

I think of note is the infantile piece on the Facebook position published in the New York Times technology section yesterday that makes

no mention of the decision's political intent. <https://www.nytimes.com/201...>

• Reply • Share ›



CumExApostolatus • 18 hours ago

First of all usury is mistaken for capitalism. And that is a fatal mistake.

As for this quote in the article attributed to Clint Watts: "The greatest concern moving forward," he said, "might likely be a foreign intelligence service, posing as Americans on social media, infiltrating one or both political extremes in the US and then recruiting unwitting Americans to undertake violence against a target of the foreign power's choosing."

Yeah, the fear is they'll do what the deep state within the FBI has been doing in the U.S. for at least 70 years.

(And why does my comment immediately go to moderation? Pt calling the kettle black?)

• Reply • Share ›



dreamjoehill • 21 hours ago

"Having no social reform to offer, the ruling elites see censorship as the only means to prop up their rule."

Well that and violent police repression. Also I think the ruling class is going to roll out a corporate led purge of "extremists" by getting "extremists" fired from their jobs. The corporatization of #MeToo is the pilot program for a more widespread Neo-McCarthyism that will be designed to starve opponents of capitalism, militarism and imperialism, and thus weaken and crush any nascent popular movement in those directions.

• Reply • Share ›



yamdigger • 21 hours ago

Facebook, Google, Amazon, et-al are in desperate need of some long-overdue, stiff competition. These companies are starting to look like the telephone and oil hegemonies of old.

↪ • Reply • Share ›



Kalen • a day ago

This is all ridiculous bordering with absurd when largest commercial purveyors of violence, intimidation and physical and emotional domination for profit or political expediency like FB, Google and Tweeter and more, impudently claim guardianship of human civility, acceptable political discourse and social progress.

Social media is an abomination and must be abolish in its global form of massively concentrated capital serving neoliberal oligarchic elite while destroying humanity via orchestrated economic/financial crises and wars for profit.

As all other social platforms, FB does what they are designed to do by NSA: mass spying and surveillance, mass manipulation of human feelings of vulnerable via suppressed judgement of

[see more](#)

↪ • Reply • Share ›



liz_imp • a day ago

Sounds like the old East Germany 😊 ! Where the Stasi and their "Spitzeln" held sway...People used to say that's why the DDR had no unemployment: because half the population was employed spying on the other half!

Does sound like a job scheme for unemployed/retired US spooks and cops.

Well: I hate being censored by moderators and "flaggers", including on this site. They don't always go after trolls by any means.

Anyway: Aren't some posts deleted automatically on some platforms because somebody who doesn't like them flags them as "spam"? That could be any random conservative. They've been doing that sort of thing for years! And giving left-wing books one-star reviews on Amazon.

So: WHICH sites *aren't* partners-in-censorship with Facebook? And which are? That would be useful to know.

↷ · Reply · Share ›



Greg · a day ago

"Having no social reform to offer, the ruling elites see censorship as the only means to prop up their rule."

That says it all.

↶ · Reply · Share ›



binks · a day ago

“ Given the explosive content of the statements made at Thursday’s hearing, it is extraordinary that they received no significant coverage in either the print or broadcast media. ”

extraordinary

10 · Reply · Share ›



JR binks · a day ago

That is true of most articles I read on this website and other progressive ones.

↷ · Reply · Share ›

michaelroloff · a day ago



"Given the explosive content of the statements made at Thursday's hearing, it is extraordinary that they received no significant coverage in either the print or broadcast media" is astonishing indeed since e.g. the NY Times reports on most other of Thune's doings.

↻ · Reply · Share ›



denis ross · a day ago

While the main focus of the actions by the internet platform corporations Google, Facebook, Twitter, concerns suppression of information, its other purpose is to access what the intelligence agencies call "open sources of information". These set the agenda for the government in knowing where to direct its intelligence, security and propaganda activities. Just as governments send barflies into barrooms to eavesdrop on what people are discussing, so the monitoring of the internet serves a similar purpose, and warns the government where its propaganda is effective or non-effective.

↻ · Reply · Share ›



Charlotte Ruse · a day ago

"The group includes "a dedicated counterterrorism team" of "former intelligence and law-enforcement officials and prosecutors who worked in the area of counterterrorism." In other words, there is a revolving door between the technology giants and the state intelligence and police forces, with one increasingly indistinguishable from the other."

It's obvious that the elites are frightened that "knowledge" will lead to social unrest--the population must be kept uninformed and ignorant. Propaganda has proven to be successful in the past and will work again in the

future only if the ruling class can gain total control of the internet.

0 | • Reply • Share ›



liz_imp Charlotte Ruse • a day ago

I think they're trying to put a genie back in the bottle that has long since escaped. History shows you can't put genies of the technological or social progress sort back into bottles; any more than women will ever go back to wearing crinolines.

1 | • Reply • Share ›



weilunion Charlotte Ruse • a day ago

They will force real resistance underground as they have historically.

0 | • Reply • Share ›



Ric Size • a day ago

Greetings to all!!

This article proves why political collaboration is necessary. Julian Assange mentioned the existential threat of artificial intelligence (AI) to humanity.

We see it everyday on the WSWS, in the comments posted as provocation, misdirection, and pessimism by newly-created screen names. Always ask provocateurs to identify themselves and their interest. Expose the lies and the motives behind them!

The growth of AI is an indication that the ruling class has lost its collective mind, and therefore needs something to think in its place, while removing human emotion. This is how scenarios for nuclear war get drawn up and possibly

[see more](#)

7 | • Reply • Share ›



liz_imp Ric Size • a day ago

But your "new screen names" on here are just as likely to indicate that the WSWS's articles on issues of extreme interest such as this one and #metoo for instance, are attracting lots of new readers and commentators: because they have seen the WSWS'S articles shared: or found them via search engines other than Google.

And not everybody is on Disqus so they may join it just to comment. Simple.

↻ | • Reply • Share ›



weilunior Ric Size • a day ago

I have long argued that the alternative progressive and left media must align. Without an organized yet free media, we cannot win.

For many it is not possible to support, financially, the many good sites out there. An organized yet free media would certainly help both in the fight against internet censorship and for the fight to promote socialism.

1 | • Reply • Share ›



liz_imp weilunior • a day ago

Yes: this is what I say! The WSWS, Counterpunch et al should join with the broader left websites such as Alternet, Comondreams, etc, etc: & form a legal fighting fund to fight censorship bt taking Google and Facebook to court. *Hear me, WSWS leadership?*

No good just grousing...

| • Reply • Share ›



Jason Kennedy liz_imp • 21 hours ago

Why would wsws join with websites beholden to the Democratic Party that pursue a political agenda completely at odds with that of the wsws?

1 | • Reply • Share ›