

Fight back against internet censorship!

By Andre Damon
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In July 2017, the *World Socialist Web Site* published an exposure of the fact that changes to Google's search algorithms had massively slashed traffic to left-wing, anti-war and socialist publications. Over the course of dozens of articles, we established that Google, together with the other technology monopolies, was engaged in a campaign of censorship of oppositional viewpoints, in close collaboration with the US intelligence apparatus.

In the ensuing year, every claim made by the WSWS, initially denied by the technology giants, has been established as fact. Google, Facebook and Twitter have all acknowledged that they have promoted "trusted" news outlets, while restricting the distribution of "alternative" sources of information. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has stated that it is promoting publications like the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, while demoting and blocking "sites that have intense followings" but are supposedly "not widely trusted beyond their core audiences."

Under conditions of growing social and political opposition, censorship is taking ever more overt forms. Just last week, Facebook announced that it had shut down the official event page for a left-wing counter protest to "Unite the Right 2," a neo-fascist demonstration scheduled in Washington on April 12, the anniversary of last year's Nazi rally in Charlottesville.

The Washington police plan to escort the fascists to the scene of this weekend's rally and "protect" them from anti-fascist demonstrators. And the Washington, D.C. transportation authorities had been pushing a plan to provide separate metro cars for fascist demonstrators at the rally, which it only abandoned in the face of mass opposition by transit workers.

Even as the extreme right receives state support and promotion, the major technology companies have begun censoring far-right organizations as a cover for their aim of shutting down left-wing opposition to capitalism, war and inequality.

This week, Apple, Facebook, YouTube and Spotify all removed or blocked the content of far-right conspiracy

theorist Alex Jones, censoring his podcasts, videos and livestreams. The companies justified their actions by claiming Jones had violated their policies against "hate speech" and "harassment."

The actions of these corporations are shot through with hypocrisy and bad faith. Whatever their justification, the fact remains that such censorship is a fundamental violation of the freedom of expression.

Long experience has shown that political censorship by the state and corporations does not harm the fascistic right but strengthens it by burnishing its absurd claims to oppose the state and political establishment. Jones' censorship by the technology giants has received widespread coverage in all major newspapers and TV networks, which have largely ignored the censorship of left-wing news outlets. The extreme right, moreover, enjoys support at the highest levels of the military, the police and the state.

The censorship of the far right creates a political precedent for censoring left-wing political movements—the main target. It justifies the false moral equivalency between fascism and left-wing opposition to capitalism, claiming that both represent forms of political "extremism." Such reactionary amalgams are being used throughout Europe and in Australia to implement far-reaching attacks on democratic rights.

The WSWS, which has been a central target of the censorship campaign, has led the fight against the attack on free speech. In a letter to Google published nearly one year ago, the WSWS demanded that Google "stop blacklisting the WSWS and renounce the censorship of all the left-wing, socialist, anti-war and progressive websites." It added, "Censorship on this scale is political blacklisting. The obvious intent of Google's censorship algorithm is to block news that your company does not want reported and to suppress opinions with which you do not agree."

In January, we issued an open letter calling for "socialist, anti-war, left-wing and progressive websites, organizations and activists," to join "an international

coalition to fight Internet censorship.”

This appeal received the support of numerous principled journalists, including WikiLeaks’ Julian Assange, John Pilger and Chris Hedges, along with thousands of workers and young people. The campaign to censor the Internet is intersecting with the attempt to drive Assange from his forced refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy in London. In June, the Socialist Equality Party in Australia organized a powerful demonstration in defense of Assange, demanding that the Australian government secure his safe return to Australia.

As the technology giants intensify their efforts to censor the Internet, the *World Socialist Web Site* is expanding and intensifying its campaign against internet censorship on the basis of the demands outlined in the open letter:

- * Safeguarding the Internet as a platform for political organization and the free exchange of information, culture and diverse viewpoints, guided by the principle that access to the Internet is a right and must be free and equally available for all.

- * Uncompromising insistence on the complete independence of the Internet from control by governments and private corporations.

- * Unconditional defense of net neutrality and free, unfettered and equal access to the Internet.

- * The banning and illegalization of government and corporate manipulation of search algorithms and procedures, including the use of human evaluators, that restrict and block public visibility of websites.

- * Irreconcilable opposition to the use of the Internet and artificial intelligence technologies to carry out surveillance of web users.

- * Demanding the end to the persecution of Julian Assange and Edward Snowden and the complete restoration of their personal freedom.

- * Advocating the transformation of the corporate Internet monopolies into public utilities, under internationally coordinated democratic control, to provide the highest quality service, not private profit.

- * The fight against Internet censorship and the defense of democratic rights cannot be conducted through appeals to capitalist governments and the parties and politicians who serve their interests, but only in uncompromising struggle against them. Moreover, this struggle is international in scope and totally opposed to every form and manifestation of national chauvinism, racism and imperialist

militarism. Therefore, those who are truly committed to the defense of democratic rights must direct their efforts to the mobilization of the working class of all countries.

In the United States, which is at the center of campaign by the ruling classes of the world to censor the Internet, the Democrats have led the way in channeling the demands of the intelligence agencies for a crackdown on domestic opposition. The Democrats have focused their criticism of the Trump administration not on its fascistic attacks on immigrants, its warmongering, its abolition of net neutrality, or its tax cuts for the wealthy, but on the right-wing, neo-McCarthyite claim that Russia is “sowing divisions.” This campaign is being intensified in the run-up to the 2018 midterm elections.

Meanwhile, the array of pseudo-left organizations that operate in the orbit of the Democratic Party, and which represent privileged sections of the middle class, have ignored the censorship drive and covered up its far-reaching implications.

This demonstrates that fight against internet censorship must be rooted in the working class, the vast majority of the population. The defense of free speech online is essential for the working class as it enters into struggle to defend its social rights and oppose inequality, war and the capitalist system.

We call on all of our readers to take up the fight against internet censorship by contacting us today.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>