

Facebook announces political censorship plan in advance of US presidential election

By Kevin Reed
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Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced a program of censorship measures on Thursday that the social media platform will take “to help secure the integrity of the US elections” before, during and after November 3.

In a lengthy post to his own Facebook account, Zuckerberg said that he is concerned about “the challenges people could face when voting” and “worried that with our nation so divided and election results potentially taking days or even weeks to be finalized, there could be an increased risk of civil unrest across the country.”

In motivating his proposed censorship actions, Zuckerberg claims that they are needed to protect “our democracy” by “helping people register and vote,” “clearing up confusion” about the elections and “taking steps to reduce the chances of violence and unrest.”

Zuckerberg also says that Facebook’s leadership has learned “from our elections work over the past four years and the conversations we’ve had with voting rights experts and our civil rights auditors.” In other words, taking direction from the US government—and the intelligence agencies in particular—the social media giant has spent the last four years developing political censorship techniques aimed at ensuring that the content and dialogue on Facebook do not find a path outside of the narrow confines of the capitalist two-party system.

Among the measures that Facebook will take are refusing to accept any new political advertising in the last week before the election, removing posts that claim people will get COVID-19 by voting in person and placing an “informational label” on content that seeks to delegitimize the election outcome or any candidate or campaign that seeks to declare victory before the official results are published by Reuters and the

National Election Pool, a consortium composed of ABC News, CBS News, CNN, and NBC News.

That the fundamental purpose of Zuckerberg’s announcement is aimed at defending the bourgeois political setup dominated by the Democrats and Republicans and especially at blocking socialist and left-wing politics from entering the public discourse prior to the elections is revealed in the last of the proposed measures. Zuckerberg says that Facebook has already “strengthened our enforcement against militias, conspiracy networks like QAnon, and other groups that could be used to organize violence or civil unrest in the period after the elections.”

Although he does not name them, the “other groups” that Zuckerberg is talking about are those on the left that have been labeled “extremists” and amalgamated with the violence carried out by right-wing organizations and individuals against protesters as well as other crimes motivated by anti-Semitism, racism and fascism.

Zuckerberg continues, “We have already removed thousands of these groups and removed even more from being included in our recommendations and search results. We will continue to ramp up enforcement against these groups over the coming weeks.”

Making it clear that Facebook is fully collaborating with US state intelligence, Zuckerberg concludes his unprecedented statement with references to “coordinated online efforts by foreign governments and individuals to interfere in our elections.” Saying this “threat” has not gone away, Zuckerberg boasts without providing details, “Just this week, we took down a network of 13 accounts and 2 pages that were trying to mislead Americans and amplify division.”

Although Zuckerberg does not go into it, Facebook

worked with its security consultant Graphika and US intelligence in an elaborate investigation and report that claimed the “13 accounts and 2 pages” were affiliated with a website called PeaceData that was purportedly set up by the Internet Research Agency and tied to Russian state intelligence. Significantly, among the articles republished by PeaceData—which has denied any connection with Russian intelligence—are those of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

As the WSWS analyzed on Friday, the US intelligence agencies are once again instigating anti-Russian propaganda on the basis of entirely unsubstantiated claims that Moscow is intervening in the 2020 elections and Zuckerberg and Facebook are fully collaborating in this campaign along with the corporate media.

The connection between Facebook’s attention to “election security” and the anti-Russian propaganda of the entire ruling establishment can be traced directly to a series of meetings held between the tech monopolies and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the Department of Homeland Security since the 2016 elections.

The most recent of these meetings was held on August 12 and included representatives from nine Silicon Valley firms—including the social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, YouTube (Google) and LinkedIn (Microsoft). No details have been published about the content of these discussions other than a brief joint industry statement that says the platforms “regularly meet” with the government agencies to discuss “trends” with those who are “tasked with protecting the integrity of the election.”

Based on the measures outlined by Zuckerberg, it is clear that Facebook and its handlers within US intelligence are anticipating that the 2020 elections will be accompanied by a significant social and political crisis. Such concerns are well-founded.

The impact of the deadly coronavirus pandemic, the protests against police violence across the US for the past three months, the open incitement to violence against this movement by the White House and the moves by President Trump toward a personalist dictatorship all point to the development of an unprecedented crisis for American capitalism.

At the same time, the recent announcement by Facebook that it was changing its Terms of Service on

October 1 illustrate the ongoing efforts of the social media corporation to prove itself a loyal collaborator with the state apparatus in every country.

While Zuckerberg was publishing his election security post, Facebook sent all 2.7 billion users a brief notice on Friday that said, “Effective October 1, 2020, section 3.2 of our Terms of Service will be updated to include: ‘We also can remove or restrict access to your content, services or information if we determine that doing so is reasonably necessary to avoid or mitigate adverse legal or regulatory impacts to Facebook.’”

Clearly, Facebook is moving aggressively to control content in order to avoid government antitrust regulation or lawsuits that it is not policing its platform adequately.

On the one hand, the social media giant is facing a threat by the Australian government to ban all news sharing on its platform unless Facebook paid publishers like Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp Australia for its content. According to Facebook, the Australian government offered two choices: “removing news entirely or accepting a system that lets publishers charge us for as much content as they want at a price with no clear limits.”

On the other hand, Facebook and the other social media platforms have been threatened by the US Justice Department to have its Section 230 exemptions removed—the law that protects online services from legal liability for the content published by its users—if the company took actions deemed “censorship” by the Trump administration.

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