



DHS Acts Secretly to Monitor and Manipulate Social-media Messages

Although the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) claimed to have shuttered its Disinformation Governance Board in August, it seems as if the work of controlling speech and thought carries on.

According to a story broken by The Intercept, DHS has pivoted from policing the electronic communication of Americans as part of the “War on Terror,” and the agency is now policing posts on social media to make sure that anyone contradicting the official version of events in the world can be contained or controlled. Here’s how The Intercept introduces the story:



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Behind closed doors, and through pressure on private platforms, the U.S. government has used its power to try to shape online discourse. According to meeting minutes and other records appended to a lawsuit filed by Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt, a Republican who is also running for Senate, discussions have ranged from the scale and scope of government intervention in online discourse to the mechanics of streamlining takedown requests for false or intentionally misleading information.

“Platforms have got to get comfortable with gov’t. It’s really interesting how hesitant they remain,” Microsoft executive Matt Masterson, a former DHS official, texted Jen Easterly, a DHS director, in February.

The Intercept, after analyzing a cache of minutes of DHS meetings, discovered that the policy of keeping track of social-media messages and those who post them is moving forward full steam ahead, despite the attempt to convince opponents that the Disinformation Governance Board was simply a paper tiger and is now defunct.

Not so.

Ask yourself if this next revelation from The Intercept doesn’t sound like something straight out of George Orwell’s *1984*: “There is also a formalized process for government officials to directly flag content on Facebook or Instagram and request that it be throttled or suppressed through a special Facebook portal that requires a government or law enforcement email to use. At the time of writing, the ‘content request system’ at facebook.com/xtakedowns/login is still live.”

Did you catch that?

Facebook and Instagram posts are subject to approval by “government or law enforcement” using a special back door provided by the social-media mammoth Meta (corporate owner of Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp).



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If that isn't enough to make you want to regulate the regulators, consider this bit of information provided by the piece:

According to a draft copy of DHS's Quadrennial Homeland Security Review, DHS's capstone report outlining the department's strategy and priorities in the coming years, the department plans to target "inaccurate information" on a wide range of topics, including "the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic and the efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines, racial justice, U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the nature of U.S. support to Ukraine."

It seems this Ministry of Truth is doing nothing but changing names, knowing that that's usually enough to convince people there's nothing to worry about.

This reminds me of a statement written by John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon (writing as "Cato"), two of the men most often quoted by the Founding Fathers. Yes, I know you've never heard of them, and that's on purpose, and you'll understand why you've never heard of them when you read this quotation from their 13th letter:

There must certainly be a vast fund of stupidity in human nature, else men would not be caught as they are, a thousand times over, by the same snare; and while they yet remember their past misfortunes, go on to court and encourage the causes to which they were owing, and which will again produce them.

Yet even in countries where the highest liberty is allowed, and the greatest light shines, you generally find certain men, and bodies of men, set apart to mislead the multitude; who are ever abused with words, ever fond of the worst of things recommended by good names, and ever abhor the best things, and the most virtuous actions, disfigured by ill names. One of the great arts, therefore, of cheating men, is, to study the application and misapplication of sounds — a few loud words rule the majority, I had almost said, the whole world.

Seems that's the federal government's habit: do bad things, but call them good names. The PATRIOT Act comes to mind.

And, apparently, the plutocrats are well aware of that "vast fund of stupidity" spoken of by Trenchard and Gordon, and they know that if they "disband" a Disinformation Governance Board and announce on television news that it's no longer functioning and that it was a good idea, but the execution wasn't exactly as they'd planned, then most people will ignore the fact that every single act that was assigned to be carried out by the Disinformation Governance Board is still being carried out, albeit without the Orwellian title and without the attention of those being monitored and manipulated.

Read this snippet culled from the article published by The Intercept and consider the effect of allowing a federal agency to usurp the authority to tell Americans which speech is protected and which speech is prohibited: "How disinformation is defined by the government has not been clearly articulated, and the inherently subjective nature of what constitutes disinformation provides a broad opening for DHS officials to make politically motivated determinations about what constitutes dangerous speech."

I'll close with a warning issued nearly 400 years ago by a republican beloved by our Founding Fathers, John Milton.

In his speech *Areopagitica*, Milton praised freedom of speech and thought and warned that suppression



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of those vital liberties would signal the end of liberty in his country, and indeed, in any free country. Milton declared:

What should ye do then, should ye suppress all this flowery crop of knowledge and new light sprung up and yet springing daily in this city? Should ye set an oligarchy of twenty engrossers over it, to bring a famine upon our minds again, when we shall know nothing but what is measured to us by their bushel?... Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.



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