

Oppose the US ban on TikTok!

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (US)
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The US Department of Justice (DoJ) has urged the Supreme Court to allow a federal ban on TikTok to take effect on January 19, the final day that President Joe Biden is in office. This is a reactionary attack on democratic rights and free speech that must be opposed.

At a court hearing January 10, the DoJ urged the court to reject TikTok's challenge to the law passed by Congress last year to force ByteDance, the Chinese parent company, to sell the popular app, as well as incoming President Donald Trump's request that the ban be delayed until after he takes office.

The ban is part of the "21st Century Peace through Strength Act." It was passed on an overwhelmingly bipartisan basis, with 79-18 passing it in the Senate and 352 to 65 in the House. It was signed into law by Biden last April. The TikTok ban was part of a military aid package including a bill providing \$26 billion for Israel's genocide in Gaza, \$8 billion for arming Taiwan for war with China, and \$61 billion for the US-NATO war with Russia in Ukraine.

The law required ByteDance, TikTok's parent company, to sell the app and its powerful video recommendation algorithm to a US buyer by January 19, 2025. Previously, the Chinese government has stated it would violate national security to sell the algorithm. TikTok has also indicated that such a "divestiture" would be incompatible with the TikTok system, given that the recommendation algorithm is continuously developed by a global engineering team and that the content is global in character.

It goes without saying that a Chinese effort to do the same thing to a US-based company, like forcing Google to hand over its search engine algorithm in order to remain in the Chinese market, would be denounced by the US government and the corporate media as a dictatorial effort by Beijing to seize control of American assets for the most nefarious purposes.

The US Appeals Court for the District of Columbia upheld the anti-TikTok bill in December, prompting the emergency appeal by the company. Demonstrating the advanced state of decay of what passes for the "justice" system, comments from both Republican-appointed and Democratic-appointed justices indicated that they would uphold the ban and reject

both TikTok's appeal and Trump's bid for a delay.

Biden appointee Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson suggested that banning a means of communication used by 170 million Americans somehow doesn't violate the First Amendment, supporting the position taken by Biden's Attorney General Merrick Garland in his brief to the court demanding a denial. Chief Justice John Roberts, a Bush appointee, made a similar claim. Roberts argued along the same lines as Garland, that since Congress's purpose was to prevent a "foreign adversary" from gathering information about the app's users, that the law was legitimate.

There were some significant comments made during oral arguments. Justice Elena Kagan made a connection between the US government's anti-communist laws made during the Red Scare in the 1950s to regulate the speech of the Communist Party. Jackson disagreed with Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar's claim that the act had nothing to do with changing content on the app, saying, "The whole point of the divestiture" is to change the content.

This was further confirmed by a revealing response by Prelogar to Justice Neil Gorsuch who asked if the government's position was "that ByteDance might be, through TikTok, trying to get Americans to argue with each other." Prelogar agreed, saying "that might very well be true."

Despite all the claims of "content manipulation" and insinuations about all-pervasive propaganda, the government itself has presented no evidence of this. Gorsuch at one point said, "The government admits that it has no evidence that TikTok has engaged in covert content manipulation in this country." The whole government case has about as much evidence as George W. Bush produced of Iraqi "weapons of mass destruction," the claim which was infamously used to justify the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Trump has argued for a delay on the grounds that he, Trump, has unique expertise in using social media and that the Supreme Court should acknowledge this by giving him the final decision on whether to implement the congressional ban. In effect, he asked the Court to expand even further the extent of presidential power over all of social and economic life.

While pretending to pose as a defender of the democratic rights of TikTok users, taking advantage of the right-wing policy of the Biden administration, Trump seeks to effect a similar result, only giving himself the time to steer the forced sale of ByteDance to billionaires of his own choosing, such as “Shark Tank” investor Kevin O’Leary, American billionaire Frank McCourt, or even Elon Musk. He would accomplish essentially the same aim as the Democrats in limiting free speech, while enriching favored oligarch buyers.

Garland and the Biden administration are clearly lying when they claim that the act isn’t an attempt to “suppress disfavored views” in violation of the First Amendment. One of the primary points of the act as described by Republican Senator and Trump acolyte Marco Rubio is to proscribe “disfavored views.”

Rubio, who is the fascist Trump’s nominee for secretary of state, led the campaign to ban TikTok and was one of the first backers of the bill to ban it, saying the legislation would be “a huge step toward confronting Beijing’s malign influence.” Rubio’s official X account has pages upon pages of posts shrieking for TikTok to be banned because it is controlled by “Communist China” and the “Chinese Communist Party,” phrases he repeats ad nauseum. This hate campaign is in line with the bipartisan support for the Wuhan Lab conspiracy theory which vilifies China by blaming it for COVID-19.

Rubio is also against TikTok because of the role it has played in exposing Israel’s genocide in Gaza. In one post from November 4 of last year, he claimed the app was “amplifying pro-Hamas content” and that that “is another reason to ban the app.” In another such post from February he claimed, “TikTok’s influence over young Americans and its users is creating an anti-Israel, pro-Hamas sentiment.” In another: “TikTok is a tool for spreading terrorist propaganda and antisemitism. Yet another reason to ban this app.”

That is, what the ruling class and their parties really fear is the capacity for social media to show the truth about capitalist society, its wars, staggering inequality, and the attack on basic democratic rights.

Congress members have claimed the ban has to do with protecting Americans’ personal data, but that is belied by their reauthorization in April of Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) which renews the ability of the NSA and CIA to conduct a massive, warrantless, unconstitutional spy operation that combs through all of Americans’ phone and internet data. The largest threat by far to the American public’s democratic rights is the American ruling class, not TikTok. The first and most important step to truly defend democratic rights would be to dissolve the National Security Agency and the Central

Intelligence Agency.

The IYSSE opposes the ban on TikTok, whether by the Democrats or Trump, and calls on students, youth and workers to demand its rescinding. The ban is aimed at whipping up national chauvinism and anti-Chinese hatred in preparation for war with China and at suppressing socialist and anti-war views more generally.

While opposing the ban, the IYSSE also recognizes that TikTok itself carries out censorship. Content opposing the genocide in Gaza, as well as calls to free opponents of the Ukraine war such as Ukrainian Socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk have been censored.

In any TikTok forced sale, the US government would seek to install a Facebook-style censorship regime or worse. Facebook is notorious for having tens of thousands of thought police combing through posts and censoring left-wing and socialist ideas. Google has admitted in a Senate hearing to censoring the *World Socialist Web Site*. Instagram conducts mass censorship against opposition to the genocide in Gaza, as revealed by a Human Rights Watch report.

The main source of disinformation and propaganda is the capitalist system, under which a handful of wealthy oligarchs controls the economy and the political system. The Trump administration represents a full-scale seizure of all political power by the oligarchy, which can only lead to dictatorship and the destruction of all democratic rights.

To fight these dangers, the IYSSE demands the expropriation of all social media and internet companies by the working class, the disbanding of corporate and government censorship, and the democratic control of the working class over these companies on the basis of the widest freedom of discussion and debate.



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