

First, Elon Musk Made Us Pay for ‘Free Speech’. Now He Decides Who’s Allowed It

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Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

The ‘saviour of free speech’ is cracking down on criticism of Israel’s genocide. What he calls the ‘faaaaaar left’ is in his crosshairs. It’ll be erased so utterly, you won’t remember it was ever there.

Many users of X, formerly Twitter, seem deeply misguided. They imagine that Elon Musk is the saviour of free speech. He’s not. He is simply the latest pioneer in *monetising* speech. Which isn’t the same thing at all.

All the blue ticks on X – mine included – are buying access to an audience. Which is why Musk has made it so easy to get a blue tick – and why there are now so many of them on the platform. If you don’t pay Musk, the algorithms make sure you get minimal reach. You are denied your five seconds of fame.

That has particularly infuriated corporate journalists. On what used to be called Twitter, they got access to large audiences as a natural right, along with politicians and celebrities. They never paid a penny. They felt entitled to those big audiences because they already enjoyed similarly big audiences in the so-called “legacy media”. They did not see why they start competing with the rest of us to be heard.

The new media system was rigged, as the old media system has been for centuries, to ensure that it was their voices that counted. Or rather it was the voices of the ultra-wealthy paying their salaries who counted.

Independent journalists, including myself, have been some of the chief beneficiaries of Musk’s X. But I don’t for a minute make the mistake of thinking Musk is really in favour of *my* free speech – or anyone else’s – compared to his own.

A reminder that free speech in America is special and we need to do everything possible to preserve it <https://t.co/yAvX1TpuRp>

— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) [August 19, 2024](#)

Being able to buy yourself an audience isn’t what most people understand as free speech.

Musk’s X is simply the latest innovation on the traditional “free speech” model from the bad old days. Then, only a handful of very rich men could afford to buy themselves lots of hired hands, known as journalists; own a printing press; and be in a position to attract advertisers.

Billionaires paid a small fortune to buy the privilege of “free speech”. As a result, they managed to secure for themselves a very big voice in a highly exclusive market. You and I can now pay a hundred bucks a year and buy ourselves a very, very small voice in a massively overcrowded, cacophonous marketplace of voices.

The point is this: Speech on X is still a privilege – it’s just one that you can now pay for. And like all privileges, it is on licence from the owner. Musk can withdraw that privilege – and withdraw it selectively – whenever he thinks someone or something is harming his interests, whether directly or indirectly.

Musk is already disappearing opinions, either ones he doesn’t like or ones he cannot afford to be seen supporting – most visibly, anything too critical of Israel.

As I said earlier this week, “decolonization”, “from the river to the sea” and similar euphemisms necessarily imply genocide.

Clear calls for extreme violence are against our terms of service and will result in suspension. <https://t.co/1fCFo5Lezb>

— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) [November 17, 2023](#)

He has threatened users with suspension for repeating slogans such as “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” – in other words, for calling for an end to what the judges of the World Court recently [decreed](#) to be Israel’s apartheid rule over Palestinians. He is also against hosting on X the term “decolonisation” in reference to Israel, claiming perversely that “it implies a Jewish genocide” – itself an implicit admission that Israelis (not Jews) have long been colonising Palestine and ethnically cleansing Palestinians.

The Israel lobby is also pushing hard for a ban on the words “Zionism” and “Zionist”. It won’t be long before X, like Meta, cracks down on these terms too.

Note that banning these words makes it all but impossible to discuss the specific historical forces that led to Israel’s creation at the expense of the Palestinian people, or analyse the ideology that today underpins Israel’s efforts to disappear the Palestinian people, or explain how the West has been complicit in Israel’s illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories for decades and is currently aiding the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza.

The loss of “Zionist” and “Zionism” from our lexicon would be a serious handicap for anyone trying to explain some of the major events unfolding in the Middle East at the moment. Which is precisely why the establishment, and Musk, are so keen to see such words discredited.

The Egyptian comedian Bassem Yousef, one of the most acute and acid critics of Israel, has suddenly disappeared from X. Many assume he has been banned. The Jerusalem Post [highlights](#) that, shortly before he vanished from X, he had written: “Are you still scared to be called an antisemite by those Zionists?”

Whatever the case, you will see Musk’s X getting a lot more censorious over the next months and years, especially against what he is terming the “faaaaaar left” – that is, disparate groups of people he has lumped together who hold opinions either he doesn’t like

personally or that can damage his business interests.

From the standpoint of the faaaaaar left, this platform is far right, but it's actually just centrist <https://t.co/PUNAvdTKQS>

— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) [August 20, 2024](#)

Billionaires aren't there to protect free speech. They got to be billionaires by being very good at making money – by seizing markets, by inflating our appetite for consumption, and by buying politicians to rig the system to protect their empires from competitors.

Musk understands that the only people against a world based on rapacious profit and material greed are the “faaaaaar left”. Which is why the “faaaaaar left” are in the crosshairs of anyone with power in our rigged system, from the centrists to the right wing, from “liberals” to conservatives, from Blue to Red, from Democrats to Republicans.

The right and the centrists disagree only on how best to maintain that rapacious, consumption-driven, environmentally destructive status quo, and on how to normalise it to different segments of the public. They are competing wings of a system designed by a single ruling cabal.

I am willing to serve pic.twitter.com/BjhGbcA2e0

— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) [August 20, 2024](#)

Musk used to see himself as a liberal and now leans towards the Trumpian right. Trump used to see himself as a Clintonian Democrat but now sees himself as... well, fill in the blank, according to taste.

The point is that centrists and the right are, in essence, interchangeable – as should be only too clear from the rapid shift of free-speech liberals towards authoritarian censorship, and the rapid (pretend) reinvention of conservatives from moralising guardians of family values to the embattled defenders of free speech.

Neither's posturing should be taken at face value. Both are equally authoritarian, when their interests are threatened by “[an excess of democracy](#)”. Their apparent differences are simply the competition for dominance within a system that's been gerrymandered to their mutual benefit. We are their dupes, buying into their games.

JUST IN: 🇪🇺 🇪🇺 Emmanuel Macron's Liberal MEP threatens to shut down X in Europe .

"If Elon Musk does not comply with the European rules on digital services, the EU Commission will ask the continental operators to block X or, in the most extreme case, force them to completely... pic.twitter.com/8rbt4pjSPp

— BRICS News (@BRICSinfo) [August 20, 2024](#)

The two tribes are there to offer the pretence of a battle of ideas, of competition, of choice at election time, of freedom. They look hostile to each other, but when push comes to shove they are united in their support for oligarchy, and opposition to genuine free speech, to real democracy, to meaningful pluralism, to an open society.

The “faaaaaar left” are the true enemy of both the centrists and the right. Why? Because they are the only group struggling for a society in which money doesn’t buy privilege, where speech isn’t something someone can own.

That’s why, when Musk intensifies his crackdown, it will be the “faaaaaar left” that’s erased so completely you won’t notice it’s gone. You won’t remember it was ever there.

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