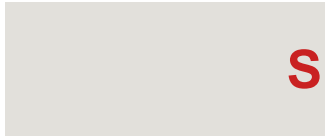


**BRENDAN O'NEILL**  
EDITOR

The banning of Infowars is an alarming act of capitalist intolerance.



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o we're now trusting the capitalist class, massive, unaccountable corporations, to decide on our behalf what we may listen to and talk about? This is the take-home message, the terrible take-home message, of the expulsion of Alex Jones' Infowars network from Apple, Facebook and Spotify and of the wild whoops of delight that this summary banning generated among so-called liberals: that people are now okay with allowing global capitalism to govern the public sphere and to decree what is sayable and what is unsayable. Corporate censorship, liberals' new favourite thing – how bizarre.


We live in strange times. On one hand it is fashionable to hate capitalism these days. No middle-class home is complete without a Naomi Klein tome; **making memes of Marx** is every twentysomething Corbynistas' favourite pastime. But on the other hand we seem content to trust **Silicon Valley**, the new frontier in corporate power, to make moral judgements about what kind of content people should be able to see online. Radicals and liberals declared themselves 'very glad' that these business elites enforced censorship against Jones and Infowars. We should be 'celebrating the move', said *Vox*, because 'it represents a crucial step forward in the fight against fake news'. Liberals for capitalist censorship! The world just got that bit odder, and less free.


Over the past 24 hours, Jones and much of his Infowars channel has been 'summarily banned' – in the excitable words of *Vox* – from Apple, Facebook, Spotify and YouTube. Initially, Facebook and YouTube had taken only selective measures against Jones. In response to a Twitterstorm about his presence on these platforms, they took down some of his videos. But then Apple decided to ban Jones entirely – removing all episodes of his podcast from its platform – and the other online giants followed suit. Or as the thrilled liberal commentary put it: 'The dominoes started to fall.' Despite having millions of subscribers, despite there being a public interest in what he has to say, Jones has been cast out of the world of social media, which is essentially the public square of the 21st century, on the basis that what he says is wicked.


This is censorship. There will of course be apologists for the corporate control of speech, on both the left and right, who will say, 'It's only censorship when the government does it!'. They are so wrong. When enormous companies that have arguably become the facilitators of public debate expel someone and his ideas because they find them morally repugnant, *that is censorship*. Powerful people have deprived an individual and his network of a key space in which they might propagate their beliefs. Aka censorship.

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Free speech

It doesn't matter what you think of Jones. It doesn't matter if you think he is mad, eccentric, and given to embracing crackpot theories about school shootings being faked. You should still be worried about what has happened to him because it confirms we have moved into a new era of outsourced censorship. It shows that what was once done by the state is now done by corporations. The illiberal, intolerant cleansing from public life of ideas judged to be offensive or dangerous has shifted from being the state's thing to being the business elite's thing. Witness how many campaigners for censorship now seek to marshal capitalist power to the end of erasing voices they don't like – from the **Dump Farage** campaign that wants corporations to withdraw their advertising from LBC until it dumps Nigel Farage as a presenter to the calling on Silicon Valley to deprive the oxygen of publicity to **offensive broadcasters**.

In essence, so-called liberals and sections of the political class now want corporations to do their dirty work for them. They want the capitalist elites to do what it has become somewhat unfashionable for the state to do: ban controversial political speech. What an extraordinary folly this is. To empower global capitalism to act as judge, jury and executioner on what may be said on social-media platforms, in the *new public square*, is to sign the death warrant of **freedom of speech**. What if these bosses decide next that Marxist speech is unacceptable? Or that Zionist speech is dangerous? In green-lighting the censorship of Jones, we grant corporate suits the moral authority to censor pretty much anything else, too.

People on both the liberal left and the libertarian right argue that what has been done to Jones is acceptable because this is simply a case of businesses deciding freely who they should associate with or provide platforms to. This is disingenuous. This was not a clean, independent business decision – it was a