



Written by [James Murphy](#) on June 2, 2020

## Facebook Staff at Odds With Zuckerberg Over Trump Posts; Stage Virtual Walkout

Several members of Facebook's senior staff took very public umbrage with company founder Mark Zuckerberg's decision not to censor a remark made by President Trump about the riots in Minneapolis late on Thursday. The anger over Zuckerberg's perceived inaction led many in the company to stage a virtual walkout on Monday.

The statement in question was first sent out on [Twitter](#) and migrated over to Facebook and other social-media platforms. Trump wrote: "...These THUGS are dishonoring the memory of George Floyd, and I won't let that happen. Just spoke to Governor Tim Walz and told him that the military is with him all the way. Any difficulty and we will assume control but, when the looting starts, the shooting starts. Thank you!"

The president's remark was an obvious warning to those who would use the protests over Floyd's death to engage in looting, arson, and rioting. But many on the Left heard the phrase "when the looting starts, the shooting starts," as a racist dog whistle and criticized the president for the remark.

Twitter, in fact, [hid the tweet](#), claiming that it "violated the Twitter rules about glorifying violence." Users were still able to access the tweet, but only after seeing a stern warning about it from the social-media company. Mainstream media also bashed the president and called for the message to be removed.

Zuckerberg — perhaps rattled by last week's executive order calling out social-media platforms for censorship — took a different approach. The Facebook CEO [explained](#) himself on his own platform.

"I've been struggling with how to respond to the president's tweets and posts all day. Personally, I have a visceral negative reaction to this kind of divisive and inflammatory rhetoric. This moment calls for unity and calmness, and we need empathy for the people and communities who are hurting. We need to come together as a country to pursue justice and break this cycle," Zuckerberg wrote.

"But I'm responsible for reacting not just in my personal capacity but as the leader of an institution committed to free expression. I know many people are upset that we've left the President's posts up, but our position is that we should enable as much expression as possible unless it will cause imminent risk of specific harms or dangers spelled out in clear policies."

But that wasn't enough for many of Zuckerberg's employees, who seem to feel that they are now the gatekeepers of all expression.

Ryan Freitas, a director of product design at Facebook, took to a [rival platform](#) to voice his displeasure:





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“Mark is wrong, and I will endeavor in the loudest possible way to change his mind.”

“I work at Facebook and I am not proud of how we’re showing up,” said Facebook employee Jason Toff. “The majority of co-workers I’ve spoken to feel the same way. We are making our voice heard.”

“Censoring information that might help people see the complete picture *is* wrong. But giving a platform to incite violence and spread disinformation is unacceptable, regardless who you are and if it’s newsworthy. I disagree with Mark’s position and will work to make change happen,” wrote Andrew Crow, the head of design at Facebook portal.

And there were others as well:

I don’t know what to do, but I know doing nothing is not acceptable. I’m a FB employee that completely disagrees with Mark’s decision to do nothing about Trump’s recent posts, which clearly incite violence. I’m not alone inside of FB. There isn’t a neutral position on racism.

— Stirman (@stirman) [May 30, 2020](#)

I believe Trump’s “when the looting starts, the shooting starts” tweet (cross-posted to FB), encourages extra-judicial violence and stokes racism. Respect to [@Twitter](#)’s integrity team for making the enforcement call.

— David Gillis (@davegillis) [May 31, 2020](#)

i’m taking PTO from [@instagram](#) by [@facebook](#) today for [#BlackLivesMatter](#). i’m deeply disappointed & ashamed in how the company is showing up the world rn. fb fam – if u feel similarly, join me & let’s organize. put your ~\$~zuck bucks~\$ where ur tweets are. support Black-led orgs!! [pic.twitter.com/TXnD5qPNer](https://pic.twitter.com/TXnD5qPNer)

— #BLACKLIVESMATTER ? (@ktzhu) [June 1, 2020](#)

Zuckerberg then hinted that he might be open to changing Facebook’s policy. As the [Sun noted](#),

“There is a real question coming out of this, which is whether we want to evolve our policy around the discussion of state use of force,” he said, according to The Verge.

“Over the coming days, as the National Guard is now deployed, probably the largest one that I would worry about would be excessive use of police or military force. I think there’s a good argument that there should be more bounds around the discussion around that.”

While the president’s remark was not very tactful, it was not an incitement to violence. It was, in fact, a clear warning against committing violence. It was a warning to those who would engage in such violence that there would be serious consequences.



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But that didn't matter to many Facebook employees who threw a collective hissy-fit and [took a day off](#) of work to "send a message" that Zuckerberg's embrace of the First Amendment (in this case, at least) was not appreciated by rank-and-file employees. The company's human-resource department has informed managers to not retaliate against employees who walk out by making them use paid time off to account for the missing day of work.

Facebook has a long way to go to be considered a platform that values free speech and America's First Amendment. After all, they're still [censoring PragerU](#) for reporting accurately on polar-bear populations. But for once, Zuckerberg took a principled stand for free expression (for now). Here's hoping the Silicon Valley mob doesn't cause him to do an about-face.

*Image: screenshot from [Twitter post](#)*

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