

Admiring Facebook: Mark Zuckerberg Goes Before Congress

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This is a dance of confused ends and mistrustful glances, mixed with occasional moments of misplaced adoration. Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook fame has never been an empathetic sort and his testifying before the US Congress has done nothing to dispel that assessment. That stands to reason: the least sociable of types, the most awkward of individuals in engaging with beings, creates the most networked social creation on the planet. In doing so, he becomes the president and promoter of surveillance capitalism, its chief priest and sovereign.

Across the spectrum, from the banal views of everyday citizenry, to information hungry political groups keen to mobilise through the forum, Facebook has been, in various ways, tolerated, even celebrated.

There has been a treasured obliviousness, a deep ignorance and refusal to consider the implications of surrendered privacy in the market of surveillance capitalism. Over the corpse of privacy, the technological charge initiated by Facebook has been feted and embraced by alibis and accessories comprised of one huge body of users.

Much of this latest data trauma and insistence has occurred because people have suddenly fallen out of love with the FB. Warnings by the noisy technocrati (Kim Dotcom, Julian Assange) that this surveillance machine ought to be boycotted have gained some traction. That this has links with Russia, the victory of President Donald Trump in 2016, and the selling and passing on of consumer data that might, however improbably, have influenced that result, is all important. It is impossible to have imagined this level of interest had the White House found itself ensnared by the Clinton junta.

This week's Congressional hearings, ostensibly to tease through the [Cambridge Analytica scandal](#) involving the collection of personal, identifiable data of up to 87 million registered Facebook users, have yielded a certain bounty of confusion and indignation. Rather than suggesting attention to detail, genuine concern, and tangible responses, the proceedings have demonstrated a counterfeit interest. Keeping apace of this judicious lack of awareness about the technology company is a certain creepy adulation that has afflicted the Zuckerberg-Congress show.

True, there were moments of reflective discomfort for Facebook's founder before [a joint session](#) of the Senate Judiciary Committee and the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee. Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) was [promising](#) heat and rigour in a statement prior to proceedings.

"I'm glad Mr. Zuckerberg has agreed to face the music. His company has

shamelessly shredded the privacy rights of users.”

There were moments of such promise.

“Mr. Zuckerberg,” shot [Senator Dick Durbin \(D-IL\)](#), “would you be comfortable sharing with us the name of the hotel you stayed in last night?”

A pause followed.

“No.”

Senator Durbin was unrelenting.

“If you’ve messaged anyone this week, would you share with us the names of the people you’ve messaged?”

Zuckerberg’s response was cautious.

“No, I would probably not choose to do that publicly here.”



Other senators seemed indifferent to the reasons they were there, avoiding their brief altogether. Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) tried to squeeze a confession about of the Facebook CEO that his company was somehow biased against conservatives. He also wondered whether the [firing of Palmer Luckey](#), founder of Oculus, was occasioned by a clash of political views. On neither point would Zuckerberg budge.

Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) revealed his cursory knowledge of Facebook’s hoovering qualities in one striking question:

“So, how do you sustain a business model in which users don’t pay for your service?”

Such situated ignorance gave Zuckerberg some breathing space, wriggle room for smug relief.

“Senator, we run ads.”

The response from Hatch was hardly one of disapproval.

“I see. That’s great.”

Capitalism, digital or otherwise, is good.

While there was the mandatory, rehearsed indignation and concern, Zuckerberg soon realised that he had something of a fan base amongst his interrogators. Hardly a reason to be surprised: Facebook has become indispensable as a political bridge to constituents.

“I’ve got 4,900 friends on my Facebook page,” Senator Thom Tillis (R-NC) bored Zuckerberg with. “I delete the haters and save room for family members and true friends on my personal page.”

He professed to be “a proud member of Facebook, just got a post from my sister on this being National Sibling Day.”

Senator Roy Blunt (R-MO) was crawling with admiration, the sort induced by starlets of their drooling admirers.

“My son Charlie, who’s 13, is dedicated to Instagram, so he’d want to be sure I mention him while I was here with you.”

Move over privacy, the love-in between Facebook and Congress is a pact of indestructible steel.

At stages, members of Congress quite forgot what the fuss was all about. Before them was a demigod, a superlative American statement of innovation, supporter of STEM, [warrior against disease](#). This was a chance for them to bask in some reflected glory, not to mention pitching in for projects that might lure Facebook to various electorates.

Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY) cast out a fishing hook [with hope](#).

“I hope you might commit to returning to Westchester County [place of Zuckerberg’s early days] perhaps to do a forum on this or other things. I hope you’ll consider that. We’ll be in touch with you but I know that Ardsley High School is very proud of you.”

Senator Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) [was angling](#) for more infrastructure from the Lord God Zuckerberg.

“My state, I’m from West Virginia, and thank you for visiting and next time you

visit, if you would please bring some fiber because we don't have connectivity in - in our rural areas like we really need, and Facebook could really help us with that."

Rep. Kevin Kramer (R-ND) suggested a prospective pool of future employees for the tech giant. The company's base could thereby be diversified.

"Maybe even your next big investment of capital could be in some place like, let's say Bismarck, North Dakota."

The coup de grâce, the confession that seemed to implicate founder, company and interrogator, was the admission by Zuckerberg that his own data has been the subject of appropriation and use. Everyone had found the "malicious third party", those shady geniuses creating apps sporting personality quizzes. (Aleksandr Kogan and Cambridge University researchers, no less!) The irony of this went begging out the door, as did much credibility over the process of hauling Facebook's founder before a body that long ago descended into murmurs, formalities and school child admiration.

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