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Immigrant activist: Facebook should belong to the people

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SLL photo

A talk given at a Peoples Power Assembly press conference in Baltimore Oct. 30 to resist the coordinated campaign by the Department of Homeland Security, Facebook and Trump supporters [to sabotage organizing for a Nov. 4 protest](#) against a stolen election.

My name is Rasika Ruwanpathirana, a filmmaker and activist.

I'm a Sri Lankan immigrant who moved to the U.S. 20 years ago. My immediate family still lives in Sri Lanka. I use Facebook to keep in touch with them as well as friends back home. Over the years, I have had quite a big network on my page — 4,000-plus people, a multicultural global network of friends, family, colleagues, co-workers and activists.

I don't have a separate page for activism and one for the family. I don't see any reason for it. I didn't do anything wrong. And I have nothing to hide.

Wednesday night, when my personal Facebook page was shut down, along with our organizing page and 15 other personal accounts, without a warning, without an explanation, I was devastated.

I wasn't even allowed to appeal the decision. None of us could.

These actions by the Department of Homeland Security and Facebook are not only a direct violation of my right to practice freedom of speech. It's by definition family separation — especially during one of the worst pandemics of our time. Facebook is the only connection for many of us during this time.

They did it because they could and they had the power to do so. So they could intimidate us and keep us from mobilizing people, in order to make it easier for them to steal an election. Is there any other explanation? I don't have one.

Facebook is also where I find work. A network I built for two decades vanished into thin air Wednesday night.

I don't know how many of you have friends and family who have died and still have their Facebook pages up? Those are very important parts of our lives now. A place to remember them, that we can virtually visit and be part of the healing process — especially when you live halfway across the world. If I had to restart a new page because of what happened, I couldn't add those memories back to my new page —

dead people can't accept friend requests.

Networks like Facebook shouldn't be controlled by one person who happened to get lucky by capitalizing on new technology that was inevitable. It should belong to the people in the first place. Mark Zuckerberg didn't invent social media; there was MySpace before and several others around at that time.

These networks are now extensions of ourselves, that we need to access regularly with like-minded people. To take that away, to hold that hostage to control us, suppress our freedom of speech, our right to organize and peacefully protest, is a violation of our constitutional rights. And there should be real consequences for that.

I'm saying this because leaving Facebook is not an option for us anymore. We want Mr. Zuckerberg to leave Facebook.

