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FREE SPEECH UNION

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Free Speech Union Welcomes Elon Musk’s Purchase of Twitter

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Free Speech Union welcomes the news that Twitter has accepted Elon Musk’s offer. On behalf of our members, we look forward to an overhaul of the social media company’s content moderation policies so it becomes possible for users to challenge prevailing orthodoxies, whether about the participation of transwomen in women’s sports or the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccines, without running the risk of being no-platformed.

The billionaire inventor has described himself as a “free speech absolutist” and accused Twitter of “failing to adhere to free speech principles” in its capacity as the “de facto public town square”. We agree that if the microblogging site is to continue to play a critical role in shaping the news and current affairs agenda – and hosting debates around the world about controversial issues – free speech needs to be at the core of everything it does.

Twitter used to call itself “the free speech wing of the free speech party”, but in the past few years it has lost sight of that important social mission. Hundreds of our members have been suspended or banned from the site for dissenting from the narrow ideological viewpoint of its twentysomething employees.

We encourage Twitter’s new owner to initiate a public discussion on the platform about how best to adhere to the principles of free speech while, at the same time, discourage political opponents from engaging in vicious personal attacks or trying to cancel each other. As a crucial first step, Twitter needs to regain the trust of all sides across a range of contentious political issues. That means making public the algorithms the company relies on to automatically censor its users, auditing its fact-checking department to uncover any ideological biases and embarking on an internal review of all the bans it has imposed in the last five years.

Toby Young, the General Secretary of the Free Speech Union, said: “This is a huge leap forward for the cause of free speech. If Elon Musk can transform Twitter into a safe space for lively, democratic debate, where people can express their honestly held opinions without risking being cancelled, that would be an even bigger achievement than creating Tesla or SpaceX. If anyone can do it, Elon can.”

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