

Musk and the death of democracy

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Dear friends,

I am constantly forced to think about Elon Musk and his egomaniacal, loud, and unearned positioning in society and emerging formal role in government in the US. Today I want to talk about consent, particularly in how consent has forged Musk as either a “super genius” or “capitalist success story”. He seems to have been depicted, at least in Australia, as an underdog innovator whose singular fortitude has allowed him to rise to power —this, at least, is Rupert Murdoch’s position on things, and you can bet that he wishes he was Musk, too. Obviously, this is a manufacturing of consent to Musk’s businesses —none of which he has meaningfully contributed anything to —and a demonstration of how consent is built. From “humble beginnings” Musk has “changed the world”, they say, which is a significantly empathetic narrative verging on outright lies. The reality, of course, is that “daddy got rich killing people” and he bought some investments with daddy’s money at a good time at the advice of others. I know which story I’d prefer to be told about me. What interests me, in this, is how even when critiquing Musk, the manufactured complicity and volume of (“quiet”) fascism still forestalls real systemic change.

The reaction to Musk’s Twitter acquisition reveals an interesting contradiction in how social media shapes resistance to oligarchic power. While communities like Reddit’s r/enoughmuskspam and the entirety of first, Threads now, Bluesky, emerged as spaces for critiquing Musk’s growing influence, they ironically seem to be contributing to a form of controlled opposition that ultimately serve his interests. By containing anti-Musk sentiment within echo chambers and focusing on his personal foibles rather than systemic critique, these spaces inadvertently helped normalise his broader accumulation of power. The obsession with Musk as an individual figure —even in opposition —distracted from more substantive analysis of how his ascension represents capital’s broader turn toward direct political control. Or, at least, this is the story I’m telling today. While users shared memes mocking his management of Twitter or cataloguing his numerous failures, his actual consolidation of power through strategic alliances with Trump and other far-right figures continue unchallenged. This phenomenon exemplifies how social media’s tendency to transform political resistance into entertainment and personal grievance can neutralise genuine threats to capital’s interests. Hegemony working as described. Rather than building class consciousness and organised resistance, the energy of critique became contained within platform-managed spaces that posed no threat to Musk’s growing power. If anything, they waited eagerly for the next blunder to fuel new memes. The result was a kind of “safety valve” that allowed people to feel they were opposing oligarchic control while actually participating in structures that enabled its expansion. Eek —but we need to talk about the broader political movements here.

Oligopoly and dictatorship, while seemingly distinct forms of power concentration, share fundamental characteristics in their service to capital accumulation. An oligopoly represents the consolidation of market power among a small number of firms, while dictatorship centralises political power —but both serve to protect and advance ruling class interests. And aspects of both of these power ‘consolidating’ approaches are in effect before our eyes in the US. The blueprint for almost every other western “democracy” the world over due to their amassed imperial power. From a Marxist perspective, these governance forms naturally emerge from capitalism’s inherent interest in monopolisation and the need to maintain class dominance through increasingly direct forms of control. As contradictions within capitalism intensify, the pretence of market competition gives way to oligopolistic domination, just as liberal democracy’s facade crumbles to reveal increasingly authoritar-

ian forms of rule. From indirect manipulation through donations, lobbying and backing favourable candidates to direct filling of government with billionaire capitalists, the future of “democracy” is beyond bleak in the USA.

This shows us the financial capture of ostensibly “democratic” political systems by mega-corporations is but a heartbeat away in the rest of the west. Not only does direct control ensure capitalist interests, it also enables the system to quell dissent and analysis —two things we hold dear here, reader. Whether through the Democratic and Republican parties in the US, Labor and Liberal in Australia, or similar “opposing” party binaries in other nations, corporate funding ensures policy outcomes that protect accumulation regardless of electoral results. But the “two party” systems of these nations serves to narrow the window of acceptable political discourse. The illusion of choice between parties masks their shared commitment to maintaining capitalist hegemony. This process has accelerated as wealth becomes increasingly concentrated among a smaller circle of tech oligarchs and corporate behemoths who can directly shape policy through unprecedented financial influence. Now, instead of pretending there’ s a choice between two fascist regressives, some countries are moving to a capitalist populism ruled by oligarchs feeding their angered masses misinformation. What a world.

The shift from performative “two-party democracy” to direct oligarchic rule through populist manipulation is yet another capitalist mask-off moment. Where previously the ruling class maintained hegemonic control through the illusion of democratic choice between barely distinguishable parties (Labor/Liberal, Democrat/Republican). Their growing confidence for oligopoly capitalism stems from their unprecedented control over information and their successful fragmentation of working class consciousness through sophisticated deployment of identity politics and algorithm manipulation. Oligarchs like Musk can now openly declare their intention to rule directly while using their platform control to manufacture consent through carefully curated misinformation and manufactured outrage. This represents a more “efficient” form of class domination —rather than maintaining expensive electoral theatrics, the billionaire class can simply channel popular anger toward manufactured enemies while consolidating their own power.

As the masks come off figures like Musk move from behind-the-scenes influence to direct political power through Trump’ s promised cabinet positions. While this is more *obvious* than lobbying or political donations, it still evades genuine media analysis. Due more to complicity by billionaire media magnates who see benefit in supporting their capitalist brethren, rather than any actual ideological position. Indeed, the utter lack of morals, culture, knowledge, or ethics is quite the hallmark in contemporary media which would rather revel in capitalist accumulation than shine any investigative light on the massive challenges of today. And this, in part, reconnects with our /r/enoughmuskspam commentary above —too much time spent in the echo chamber, not enough spent critiquing the status quo. The shift from “democratic processes” to oligarchic rule reflects capital’ s growing comfort with authoritarian governance as climate collapse and inequality explode past crisis levels. Rather than maintain the expensive facade of democratic legitimacy, capital increasingly embraces fascist solutions to maintain power —particularly as the contradictions of capitalism become impossible to manage through consent alone. The integration of tech oligarchs into direct state power represents a new phase where the distinction between corporate and political power dissolves entirely. And we continue to allow (social) media to control us in this way.

This whole situation demands both mindful awareness of how these systems operate and critical analysis of the narratives used to justify them. The mythology of “free markets” and “democratic choice” serves to obscure the reality of oligarchic control and growing authoritarianism. We need to carve new frameworks for understanding how these systems specifically harm workers and marginalised groups through intersecting forms of oppression.

Rather than accepting, at face value, narratives peddled by mainstream media sources, we need to analyse how capitalism' s rapid movement toward fascism emerges from its fundamental contradictions —and it only serves to cement capitalists, not the “fall of society” which right-wing soothsayers peddle. Only through building class consciousness and solidarity across lines of identity can we hope to resist capital' s increasingly naked grab for totalitarian control. The alternative is accepting a techno-feudal future where even the pretence of democracy gives way to direct rule by billionaire oligarchs.

In solidarity,

Aidan