

On immunity and the ruling class

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Dear friends,

I woke to news that France was refusing to arrest Netanyahu despite the ICC's ruling on his creation and maintenance of genocide. So yes, in one fell swoop, France declares a law of its own and renders the ICC as a theatre for political drama, not action –same as it ever was I suppose. This movement gives us yet another lens, in what has basically become a camera store or optometrist, through which to examine how the ruling class protects its own. This isn't surprising, after all when was the last time you saw a billionaire or war criminal actually face consequences for their actions? But what makes this moment interesting is how this protection is being reinforced in mainstream society through broader political moves –once again creating opportunities to climb and hoist up the ladder. What we see, here, is concomitant and frankly thus far unprecedented control of digital information to manufacture consent.

As always, let's delve into a little theory first. Gramsci (hello there) gave us a robust understanding of how the dominant group in society controls and maintains their power – hegemony –which helps us understand how ruling class power is maintained not just through direct state violence, but through cultural control and manufactured consent. In our digital age, this hegemonic control manifests equally through cultural institutions –now reconstituted to include social media companies –and through use of force when this manufactured consent fails. The ruling class isn't just controlling traditional media anymore, in fact they are actively shaping the architecture of digital spaces to prevent class consciousness from emerging. The newspapers, radio stations, and cultural organisations of Gramsci's time served to normalise fascist ideology and make it appear as “common sense”, today's social media platforms serve the exact same function –personalised propaganda for fascist ends.

Consider how platforms like Meta, Twitter, and YouTube have “evolved”. What began as seemingly neutral spaces for connection and information sharing have become (badly tuned) instruments of ideological control. The concentration of power in the hands of a few tech oligarchs –looking at you Musk and Zuckerberg –is an extension the media barons of Gramsci's era, hell of our era –looking at you Murdoch. These modern-day Hearsts (or “Johnny Newspaperseed” if you like) don't just own the platforms, they shape what information users can see –right so history repeats itself, got it? The “freedom” –that brief flash of democratisation –to post whatever you want is, now more than ever, utterly meaningless when “the algorithm” ensures only certain viewpoints gain traction. This hasn't “changed” because the technology itself changed –rather the technology is now more fit for purpose. Capital recognised the threat posed by truly “open” digital spaces and moved aggressively to capture and reshape them. That's why there's so much platform monopolisation and so many moves to lock down hosting, platform providers, and fundamentally “open” parts of the internet. The early internet's potential for activist organising and counter-hegemonic discourse was precisely what made it dangerous to ruling class interests. And now it's nice and Musky instead –and what's left in the open web is not substantial enough to shake Meta's exclusivity.

Modern digital hegemony is not a major departure from previous forms of platform control. Nothing truly innovative has ever emerged from capitalism, it is capable only of subsuming peripheral ideas that benefit control and manipulation tactics. But its propaganda machine is enviable and terrible –the modern Web 2.0 internet was a con to pull democratic voices and conglomerate them under tech giants. The aura of “open” remains in forums like Facebook, where people feel a sense of broad connection because their once upon a time

physical network of actual friends migrated there (and then promptly stopped interacting in the real world). Mediation of friendship and human connection through technology could have been a wonderful thing, instead it's an intensification echo chamber that amplifies the worst of humanity to serve capitalist ends. Users feel like they're freely choosing what content to engage with, but the choices themselves are curated by algorithms designed to promote ruling class interests. This is Gramsci's "spontaneous consent" operating at a deep level of sophistication.

Varoufakis offers a compelling framework, here, for understanding this transformation through his concept of technofeudalism. He argues that we're seeing the emergence of a new form of economic domination where tech platforms function as digital fiefs, extracting rents from all social and economic activity that occurs within their domains. Much like feudal lords who could demand tribute from anyone living on their land, companies like Meta and Twitter can extract value from any interaction that takes place on their platforms. Look no further than Twitter's claim that it owns Alex Jones' profile and therefore criminal action cannot seek to sell it to reclaim damages. This isn't traditional monopoly power - it's a restructuring of social relations where tech oligarchs function as modern-day lords, determining what information can flow through their digital fiefdoms while demanding tribute (in the form of data and attention) from their users. The parallel to feudal power structures is apt when we consider how these platforms have become essential infrastructure for modern life. Just as medieval peasants couldn't simply "opt out" of their local lord's domain, today's workers can't realistically withdraw from these digital spaces without facing social and economic isolation -though, I'm happily Meta free for 6 months and counting and my mental health has significantly improved.

When we couple these background pieces with our key point -bad people can do what they want, as long as they work for capital, and legislature, public opinion, common sense and judiciary will be turned on anyone who doesn't agree -we see hegemony in action with all its warts. What better capturing of coercive control than the Australian, particularly South Australian, Labor government's utterly insane legislation to ban under-17s from phones in school and social media altogether. As always, this isn't about "thinking of the children" . It is about preventing young people from developing critical digital literacy skills that might help them see through ruling class propaganda. Rather than teach young people how to critically engage with digital information, the response is to simply cut off access entirely. The message is clear: better to prevent access than risk class consciousness emerging through digital means. That's what TikTok was fostering -communist awareness, even if it was the Chinese brand of capitalist communism (yes, that's an oxymoron folks -and also another form of international state actors creating dissent).

All this legislature to dumb down the working class nests within a broader pattern of global control. The ruling class clearly recognised that Gen Z's unprecedented access to information posed a threat to their hegemony. For a brief moment, young people had the ability to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and access unfiltered information about capitalism's contradictions, imperial and intersectional violence, and class struggle. The response has been swift and brutal: the algorithmic promotion of fascist content, the strategic purchase of Twitter to control discourse, the flooding of the internet with AI-generated slop, and the deliberate degradation of search capabilities. There's a reason Google only offers you mainstream news, social media posts, and "Reddit discussions" (read: AI bots screaming at each other; and sadly the other dominant search index is not much better).

The purported "neutrality" of algorithms provides perfect cover for the neo-Nazi ideological project (sorry, "Labor Party") -the rise of fascism to cement capitalism under fire. When YouTube "randomly" promotes far-right content, or TikTok faces bans for allowing anti-hegemonic narratives to spread, we're supposed to believe these are natural or necessary technical decisions rather than deliberate acts of class warfare. This is what manufactured

consent looks like for the digital age. No longer just filtering information through corporate media ownership as Chomsky described, but *actively* manipulating the infrastructure of digital spaces to fragment class solidarity –and then enacting laws that ensure this is the only way to engage with politics, society, and critique. Meanwhile, the traditional protection racket continues unabated. France’s refusal to arrest Netanyahu follows the same logic as America’s refusal to prosecute war criminals from its own imperial adventures, or Australia’s protection of mining executives who destroy Aboriginal land. The ruling class doesn’t arrest its own –whether they’re genocidal leaders or billionaire exploiters. What’s changed is their ability to couple this direct protection with digital platform manipulation to preempt and prevent resistance from forming. This is what Marx would recognise as the intensification of class warfare through new technological means. The current axis of economic exploitation coupled with maintenance of “correct ideology” prevent workers from developing the consciousness needed to recognise our shared interests.

I think the worst part is that this all seems to be working. Despite having theoretical access to more information than any generation before, many young people are being systematically channelled into reactionary politics through carefully curated digital spaces. From PragerU propaganda to algorithm-boosted fascist content, the ruling class has turned digital spaces into machines for manufacturing consent. It’s a nazi’s world out there, or rather the new nazis, zionists, cryptofascists and other bullshit peddlers. The fact that they’re working to control digital information flows reveals their fear of what might happen if workers could freely share information and recognise their common interests. As always, all it takes is looking at how the 1% destroys the souls of the 99% and using these tools against them –not that that ever seems to happen.

Is there an opportunity here, now, to use the *open* technologies of the modern internet to undermine their propagandist, ecologically destructive, and toxic ideology? Of course there is, and there are a litany of open source projects that promote free platforms moderated by communities not tech oligarchs. There are many ways to learn digital literacy, to be critical of information that appears in front of you, and to reject racist, sexist, ableist, xenophobic and hollow explanations for exploitation. The real problem is very simple – capital is destroying us as a species, and all those trapped in this jail with us. If we, the vast majority of people don’t take meaningful action to change course, we’re doomed – we are already doomed, even with traditional intellectuals sounding alarms of no return. If it’s so bad that the ruling class is divided on it, the urgency of working class action has never been clearer.

We can use our own digital infrastructure, we can find ways to connect with fellow humans, and we can reject the laws, propaganda, and bullshit the ruling class has cranked up to 11. From critiquing the colonial-capitalist project, to teaching our communities how to understand information that is presented to them, there are better ways. And if none of that sounds like you, the least you can do is get off Meta’s platforms –it’s actually as simple as just deleting the app. The ruling class is betting everything on their ability to control digital spaces and prevent class consciousness from emerging through these channels. Our job is to prove them wrong.

In solidarity,

Aidan