

The kids aren' t alright -they' re banned

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Dear friends,

Yesterday the ALP passed into law legislation that bans all young people from social media [1]. This has been widely regarded as a bad move [2]. Without wanting to sound like a broken record, this is another step towards fascism from a supposedly union-supporting party -populism anyone? As mentioned a few days ago, social media bans for young people are not Lovejoyesque “won’ t somebody please think of the children” , but rather a sinister configuration of common sense that seeks to shape and control the development of class consciousness in the digital age -amongst those most likely to see that there’ s something really very wrong with our social order. This enacted ban, dressed up in the language of protection, is nothing but an attempt to forestall the development of digital literacy and thinking skills among young people. In 2024 the best tool the ALP and LNP can dream up together (yeah, those two supposedly opposed parties) is banning -this is simply because they can’ t force US tech giants to capitulate to their will and enforce their particular brand of fascism.

So, to get to the bottom of this, we need to understand what social media *actually* represents under contemporary capitalism. These platforms aren’ t spaces for connection. In fact, I doubt anyone is “connecting” on any tech-bro founded social media (and if you’ re on social media, odds are you’ re *on* social media not the fediverse). No, contemporary social media platforms, of which there are ever smaller numbers not subsumed by Meta (Zuckerberg), are a human-machine hybrid of mechanisms to enforce hegemony. They simultaneously atomise users while harvesting their data for profit. Does that make you feel good about your social media use? Nah, me either. Meta, Twitter, “Truth Social” , Bluesky and their ilk function as digital fiefdoms -we talked about this earlier today [3] -where interaction itself becomes a commodity. The “social” in social media is a cruel joke. What’ s actually being cultivated is a form of managed isolation that serves capital’ s interests. So, not a great place to exist if we can agree on the toxicity of these systems and their owners. So what, banning this is a good thing now?

The trouble here is young people are being systematically denied access to even this hollow form of connection, while simultaneously being prepared for lives of digital exploitation. And more importantly, because social media is such a “thing” their ability to navigate these spaces is forestalled, and appropriate forms of engagement aren’ t suitably developed. At least, that’ s what this bill would prefer. Remember the “digital native” narrative? I was supposed to be one of those, computers were just accessible enough during my youth that I pretty well had access to one from birth, and this made me a digital native -no questions asked. Except I’ m the exception -most of my peers have no clue how a computer works, how to navigate digital spaces critically, or engage with thinking about the problematic nature of platform concentration. No, they were too busy seeing the opportunities presented by MySpace to cyberbully each other. I’ m not helping here, am I?

But this *is* the fundamental trouble.

Young people either learn to be consumers of technology, and particularly today’ s youth are directed almost exclusively towards consumerism. YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, it’ s all “consume” with very little create -beside perhaps performative selfies. This doesn’ t build technical literacy, actually it seems to do the opposite. Young people today can’ t touch type on a keyboard (maybe on a phone screen), they don’ t know what a CPU is, and they certainly don’ t understand TCP/IP. Yeah, so the last one is maybe not so necessary -but my point here is about deliberate mystification of technology. This mystification only ever

serves capitalist interests –it reinforces the exploitative status quo, and by denying young people access to digital literacy, it reinforces digital sheep –giving up all their personal information and attention, numbing the existential pain of knowing we are all dying from human-made climate death. Weeeee.

The intersectional impacts of this ban also demand our attention. For young people already marginalised by race, class, disability and other axes of oppression, being cut off from digital spaces means being denied access to community, support networks, and critical information about identity and resistance. The bourgeois fantasy that kids will just “go outside and play” ignores how digital spaces can provide vital refuge and resources for marginalised youth –particularly LGBTQI+ kids who are at incredible risk of “vengeance” from their right-wing moron parents. When the ALP talks about “protecting children”, they tacitly, and deliberately, mean only the straight white middle class children. Certainly not working class kids, Indigenous kids, or queer kids who rely on digital connections to find community and survival strategies. They also deny knowledge of how these systems operate, are governed, and whose interests they serve –the real educational piece needed today. We know creating communities is a threat to the ALP. Because anything that’s not one of “theirs” is a threat to their hegemony, and they are viciously and disgustingly protective of their “community” (cult). Probably something to do with the ban, ey.

Rather than dwelling in doom and gloom, let’s think about the interesting aspect, and perhaps hopeful corner offered by this ban. The very attempt to lock young people out of mainstream social platforms could create opportunities for new forms of digital resistance and community-building. And I don’t mean because Meta will basically refuse to enforce this (unless they see it as an opportunity to force you to tie your social media profile to a drivers license, etc. so they can extract more real-world data from you, the opportunities are endless, if you’re a sociopath). No, as a response to the “enshittification” of mainstream services we have already seen the emergence of federated platforms like Mastodon and Lemmy that operate on fundamentally different principles than the corporate social media giants. Different, but still susceptible to human problems. These spaces, governed by communities rather than algorithms, suggest possibilities for social interaction that isn’t primarily oriented toward data extraction and profit generation. As long as that’s what the communities focus on (and ignoring those problematic fascists purporting communism over in the .ml TLD).

Okay, back on the constructive bandwagon. Our questions become: how might we support young people in developing the technical literacy and the critical consciousness needed to build and maintain alternative spaces? Not “teaching kids to code” (though it probably wouldn’t hurt). What I’m pushing here is fostering forms of digital literacy that help them, and frankly everyone else, to understand and resist the mechanisms of control embedded in mainstream platforms. We need to craft tools and *practices* that support genuine community governance, intersectional equality, and meaningful dialogue rather than engagement metrics and algorithmic manipulation. The systems we have now either started as and became perfected under capitalist ontology, or are late-comers who go full throttle capital accumulation and propaganda out the gate. Where community run systems exist, we need safeguards that prevent hijacking on the basis of popularity, attention, and ad sales.

Let’s get into the construction zone –pouring some concrete here, we could:

1. Develop open-source moderation tools that centre harm reduction and community accountability rather than automated content filtering
2. Create educational resources that teach both technical skills and critical analysis of platform capitalism
3. Build infrastructure for local, community-controlled social spaces that can’t be easily co-opted by capital

4. Support young people in understanding and creating their own governance structures for digital spaces

But we should also be clear-eyed about the challenges. Capital is proven at co-opting and neutralising resistance movements. Any alternative platforms or practices we develop will face intense pressure to either conform to market logic or become irrelevant. Or worse, be legislated out of existence. The history of the internet is littered with promising experiments in digital democracy that ended up serving as research and development for corporate platforms. Remember when that soccer club setup a digital platform for making all their corporate decisions? Neither does capitalism, but the emergence of investor decision centres based on the same principle –just tailored for accumulation rather than public good – certainly go strong even today.

The likely immediate effect of the social media ban will be to push youth interaction into even less accountable spaces –private Discord servers, anonymous forums, and encrypted messaging apps. While this might temporarily evade state and corporate surveillance, it also fragments community and makes collective organising more difficult. The ALP knows this –again, the goal isn’t actually to “protect” young people but to prevent them from developing the digital literacy and class consciousness needed to resist exploitation. Added bonus points if adults forced into validating their age also have to hand over 100 points of ID to Zucc to expand his surveillance propaganda machine. And a big glaring reminder that Zuckerberg recently “bent the knee” to Trump at Mar-a-Lago, granting the dictator platform control [4].

We can’t ignore how this ban fits into broader patterns of surveillance and control –and a space of continued interest to the ALP who seek to regulate anything “private” into their domain. A friendly reminder that the Australian Labor Party is the very same current government who are expanding police powers, criminalising protest, and maintaining some of the most draconian digital surveillance laws in the supposedly “democratic” world. It’s never been about safety. It’s all about maintaining hegemonic control as capitalism enters an increasingly authoritarian phase. Of course, the very intensity of these control efforts suggests their underlying fragility. Capital wouldn’t work so hard (they rarely work at all) to prevent young people from developing digital literacy if it wasn’t afraid of what they might do with it. The challenge is always using moments of crisis to build genuine alternatives. Letting corporate social media platforms win is just a modern system of “digital enclosure”. Instead, we can, and are, finding better ways of community building.

This means thinking beyond individual platforms or technical solutions to consider how we might fundamentally reshape human interaction in digital space. Instead of engagement metrics and data extraction, what if we oriented digital tools toward mutual aid and collective liberation? Instead of algorithmic manipulation, what if we developed practices of genuine dialogue and democratic decision-making?

We already see, globally in forums, fediverse tools, and other digitally-mediated social spaces:

1. Networks of community-controlled servers and services
2. Educational programs that combine technical skills with political analysis
3. Tools that support consensus-building and collective decision-making, and
4. International solidarity networks that can resist state and corporate control.

Ultimately, though, the question of youth access to digital spaces can’t be separated from broader struggles against capitalism and fascism. The ALP’s social media ban is just one front in a larger war being waged against the possibility of collective resistance and alternative futures. Our response needs to be equally comprehensive –not just “building better platforms”, but developing new forms of governance, engagement, solidarity and struggle that can effectively challenge capital’s control of digital (and physical) space. The

fascist creep doesn' t just happen in parliament or the streets -it happens in code, in algorithms, in the architecture of our digital lives (and we choose who the architect is). Resistance means developing not just alternative platforms but alternative ways of being together online, of making decisions, of building power.

They want to deny young people access to digital literacy and community? Fine. Let' s build something better -something they can' t control or co-opt. The future isn' t in the Metaverse or government-approved platforms. It' s in the spaces *we create*.

In solidarity,

Aidan

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1. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/nov/28/labor-passes-migration-and-social-media-ban-bills-after-marathon-senate-sitting>
 2. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/nov/26/australia-social-media-ban-expert>
 3. <https://mndrdr.org/2024/on-immunity-and-the-ruling-class>
 4. <https://www.mediaite.com/tv/mark-zuckerberg-visits-mar-a-lago-after-trump-threatened-him-with-imprisonment/>