

The labour process, atomisation and social media

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Dear friends,

As I grow increasingly concerned about the level of influence Zucc has with his near monopoly on social media, I concomitantly grow concerned about the atomisation of workers and mystification of the labour process. Today, I'd like to spend a bit of time talking about social bonds, and the "cohesion" of society. In particular, I think we need to spend some time truly attending to how the common sense has shifted to a worship of individual billionaires, giving way to a rise of front-seat oligarchs directly in control of abstracting worker connection to production, and to direct control of the machinery of government [1]. Naturally, I'm also concerned with how this will play out in Australia given the commencement of Albanese's campaigning, but let's take it one step at a time [2].

The atomisation of workers in contemporary times is extreme. Capitalism benefits when solidarity is eroded, and it has played the long game to get here —gradually loosening social bonds outside production since the 1980s as tightening hegemony ensures compliance [3]. Where once workers might have gathered in union halls, community centres, and especially pubs to discuss our shared conditions and build solidarity, today's "flexible" work arrangements and digital mediation of social life have effectively isolated us from genuine collective experience.

The 2020s have ushered unprecedented shifts in how work, ownership, and accumulation function under capitalism. Remote work, platform-mediated gig labour, and algorithmic management have created new forms of alienation and control that Marx may only have had nightmares about [4]. Ownership itself has become increasingly abstract, with workers now renting rather than owning everything from housing to software licenses to the tools of their trade, while capitalists accumulate wealth through increasingly financialised means nearly devoid of 'traditional' production. The capitalist class has evolved from factory owners to tech oligarchs and financial speculators who control not just the means of production but the very infrastructure of daily life. The rise of management consultancies has added another parasitic layer to this exploitation, with firms like McKinsey, BCG, and Deloitte extracting massive profits by telling companies how to squeeze more value from workers while simultaneously deskilling the professional class through the outsourcing of strategic thinking. Oh, and let's not forget, literally changing legislation to be more favourable to outsourcing to consultancies [5]. These consultancies serve as high priests of capitalism, legitimising mass layoffs and worker surveillance while building dependency on their own services. Hot.

The ever shifting landscape of contemporary capitalist life hasn't, however, changed the fundamental relations of exploitation. It has only intensified them. We've talked about how this has fed configurations of what Varoufakis calls technofeudalism, where digital platforms function as fiefs extracting rent from all social activity [6]. The resulting workforce is more precarious and atomised than ever, scrambling to piece together livelihoods through multiple 'side hustles' while the capitalist class accumulates wealth at historically unprecedented rates.

The fragmentation, atomisation, and espoused individualism is not an accident, though little is under capitalism. These are tools which serve capital's need to prevent class consciousness from emerging through shared experience. Something that the internet briefly offered, at least for western nations. As Marx noted in the Grundrisse, capital must constantly revolutionise not only the means of production, but also the social relations that surround them. What we're witnessing now is the culmination of this process, where even our non-work time has been colonised by capital's logic of individualisation and competition. Work

by Fuchs [7] has shown how platform capitalism has accelerated this atomisation, creating new forms of alienation where workers feel “more connected” yet are in reality more isolated than ever before. Look no further than Meta’s AI profiles, you’ll never know if content on any of Zucc’s platforms is from an actual human again.

Social media platforms, far from bridging isolation, intensify it through use of sensation-alised timelines, manipulation of content, and broadly just ‘attention seeking’. The feeds we scroll through distracting us from our material conditions, something humans are very good at overlooking after years of conditioning, and now social media—from a very young age, despite Labor’s attempts to ban young people—actively training us to view ourselves as personal brands competing for attention in a marketplace of identity. This militant individualism, amplified by engagement-driven algorithms, transforms legitimate class grievances into personal challenges to be overcome through self-optimisation rather than collective struggle. We’ve cited Zuboff heavily on this in the past, where she argues that surveillance capitalism isn’t just interested in our attention, but actually epistemic reshaping such that our conception of social relations fits in a digital consumer / individualistic / market-driven framework to enable exploitation on all fronts at all times [8].

The social division of labour here has evolved—and not in a good way. Today’s workers are not simply alienated from the products of our labour but through layers of hegemonic coercion, we are taught to look away from any kind of understanding of production, let alone social production. The totality of these systems, functioning together—hegemony and specific capitalist enforcement—has created conditions for the working class that obscures any solidarity. Digital platforms spewing toxic pro-capital narratives, intensified automation of systems, deskilling of workers, deprofessionalising technicians and so on all serves as the latest in obstructions to understanding the real relations between workers, between workers and production, and production and capital accumulation, making it ever more difficult to recognise our shared conditions of exploitation. When an office worker orders lunch delivery through an app, the social relations between them and the delivery worker are mystified through digital mediation. Naturally, this mystification serves capital by preventing workers from recognising our common interests across these artificially created divisions.

Social media’s role in managing workers’ understanding of our own labour power cannot be overstated. Platforms—and increasingly “platform” as Zucc takes over and outstrips the remaining ‘others’ through legislative lobbying—are now simply instruments of hegemonic control, manufacturing consent for capitalist relations through a constant stream of content that naturalises exploitation, promotes individualistic solutions to collective problems, and SELLS PRODUCTS! When we spend our free time scrolling through “hustle culture” content or “financial literacy” advice—god help you if you spend any time on LinkedIn [9]—we are being conditioned to view our exploitation as a personal challenge, nothing that would need a collective response.

The recent trend of CEO capitulation to increasingly extreme right-wing positions, particularly visible in figures like Musk, Cook and Zuckerberg, just proves how alive and well anti-worker sentiment is amongst the capitalist class. Yet does this despotism phase users? Are you still on Facebook? Do you still buy Apple products? Then you are supporting fascism—and yes, there’s no such thing as ethical consumption under capitalism, but we now see these figures directly in bed with neonazis, and that should give us more than pause. These figures no longer feel the need to maintain a pretence of caring about workers, instead openly embracing authoritarian politics that promise to cement their control. Importantly, the shift isn’t about individual CEOs, rather it is indicative of the whole capitalist class becoming more bold in their authoritarian turn. To put it clearly: we are seeing capital’s recognition that maintaining hegemony through consent is becoming increasingly difficult as contradictions intensify. The mask-off moment we’re witnessing, where billionaires

openly support fascist politics, shows how capital will readily abandon democratic pretences when its accumulation is threatened —or when individual capitalists (and their boot licking managerial class) are threatened [10].

What strikes me about the latest reactionary moment, here, is how social media platforms themselves have become key instruments for advancing this anti-worker agenda. “Mainstream” platforms (read: FB, Insta, Snap, etc.) are safe harbours for pro-capitalist content, while anything counter-hegemonic is quickly demonetised, downplayed or blocked. When Musk purchases Twitter or Zuckerberg shapes Facebook’s algorithms to promote right-wing content, they’re not expressing personal political preferences, in fact I’d be surprised if they had them, they are simply deploying their control over digital infrastructure to actively suppress class consciousness and promote reactionary politics. Can’t fight them if we’re fighting each other. And this is the fundamental issue of platform monopoly ownership. Can we just go back to everyone having blogs? (I’m giving it a shot!)

Again, we’re just on the latest page in the long line of class warfare tactics. Nothing here is new, and nothing here is revolutionary. The capitalists and perhaps more importantly their petit bourgeois boot licker enforcement class are out to ensure only the ultra-wealthy have any kind of quality of life, based on our work. The means of digital communication themselves are increasingly weapons in capital’s arsenal against worker solidarity —and only through decentralising (i.e., not using FB, Insta, Snap, TikTok, YouTube, etc.) and returning to diverse platforms and perspectives can we hope to combat these tools of hegemonic enforcement.

Go write a blog!

In solidarity,

Aidan

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1. c.f. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/01/04/elon-musk-uk-germany-canada-far-right/>
 2. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/jan/06/anthony-albanese-switches-to-election-footing-with-blitz-of-three-campaign-battlegrounds>
 3. also, interestingly, c.f. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0003687022002174>
 4. https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/98056652/Labour_process_theory_and_GANDINI_Accepted25June2018_GREEN_AAM.pdf
 5. For lucid analysis see <https://marianamazucato.com/books/the-big-con/>
 6. <https://www.penguin.com.au/books/technofeudalism-9781529926095>
 7. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003222149> (and several other books, dude’s prolific)
 8. <https://shoshanazuboff.com/book/about/>
 9. <https://sh.itjust.works/c/linkedinlunatics>
 10. <https://archive.is/2025.01.05-014335/https://medium.com/@kimpistilli/before-luigi-mangione-there-was-fred-hampton-f55a2728de13>