Interrogating Social-Media[1]

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Some thoughts on social media

I was recently turned on to "communist" twitter, while I had been appalled and disgusted by "left –book" for some time I had not encountered the living hell that is left-twitter, upon investigating it and the bizarre interactions that take place there, I was confronted with how hysterical this would seem to the average worker if it made a long time Communist like myself cringe and want to throw up. This experience compelled me to write down some thoughts that turned into this article.

Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate… Left twitter is even more disgusting that left-book. This is not an age-gap thing; it is an ethics-gap thing, I am not very old and have witnessed 50+-year-olds behaving just as questionably online as 12-year-olds. So how is a dislike for social media a question of politics and ethics? It comes down to methodology and argumentation. The reason that Twitter is worse is because it has a lower character limit per tweet than Facebook has per post. This reacts upon the way discussions are carried out and creates an inherently unethical exchange. So something bad like Facebook which is already a clap-trap (not to mention data mine), becomes even more egregiously offensive in the form of Twitter.

[1] https://struggle-sessions.com/2018/07/03/interrogating-social-media/

What is more is that there is a Marxist methodology of study and a Marxist argumentation and these come into direct and antagonistic contradiction with the format of these social media sites. For starters a character limit imposes itself in two ways: 1) it literally prevents a person from adequately defending a thought with nuance and restricts one's ability to flesh out fundamental reasoning, it is basically a recipe for slogans without movements and bad slogans at that. 2) Due to this, there is a form of self-restriction, a culture has developed of shame and policing even on sites where there is less character restriction imposed. People, for instance, feel the need to apologize for long posts, whereas for a Marxist giving your idea adequate space to breath is necessarily in the presentation and testing of said idea. Likewise, people will attack those who do attempt to adequately flesh out or substantiate their points at length when they can by creating disrespectful abbreviations like Too Long Did Not Read. Since when does one has not read something been cause to go out of their way to comment on the matter? Only in the age of social media culture which is abysmal. No one cares if you did not read it, shut up! No investigation no right to speak!

Going out of your way to insist that you did not read something is arrogant, you see yourself as such a star that the world must know that you failed to read something (look how cool you are, a few pages was too long to read) or more likely you are actually attempting to dissuade others from reading something that your destroyed attention span, if not the character restrictions and negative self-censorship, have prevented you from ever reading in the first place. Imagine if Capital, which is not only a useful book, but a quite beautiful one as well, was only issued in a series of tweets? I admit it is an amusing thought, and it might be the only way you could convince some of these online "communists" of actually reading it. Karl Marx—TLDR.

The Shock Circus and the Oppression Olympics

Due at least in part to the restrictions imposed on exchanges and expression on social media, political thought is expressed in a certain way. It is important to keep in mind here the question of propaganda and to consider Mao Zedong's argument that when one person talks to another, this is propaganda. It becomes evident that the propaganda being carried out over the two exampled social media sites should be subjected to far greater scrutiny. One interesting and disturbing manifestation of this bad-propaganda style is the shock circus, where online personalities consciously try to outdo one another at being shocking or edgy. Typical methods of shock include sexualizing politics (which has a decidedly negative impact on the role of women in the struggle and reproduces all sorts of bourgeois ideology), fetishizing violence, and channeling anti-communist stereotypes to repurpose them (which amounts to a fascistic death obsession and infatuation with a supposed mass murder). In meme culture, social media bios and

tweets especially, we see evidence of these bad propaganda types, satire and humor are used inappropriately in all cases to make a spectacle which mocks communism. Weather its referring to oneself as a "tankie hoe" (both fetishized violence and sexualization of politics) or making mocked up images of Mao in drag or gifs of Stalin which celebrate death (all actual examples I have seen recently) humor intended to bring levity to anti-communism inevitably turns into its opposite—anti-communist propaganda, so-called-communist self-deprecation. Like a racist joke it stops being funny pretty quickly when the real world consequences catch up the lack of wit. The shock circus goes on and on with meme pages and twitter account names, names which posture as and simultaneously mock red terror, neither understanding the burden nor the necessity of red terror but hollowing it out to the point where it might as well be a Halloween lawn ornament set up to scare children, no one is fooled and the proselytizer here just looks foolish, having become a caricature of a communist propagandist. The political content becomes immature, infantile, petty and spiteful—all anti-Marxist traits. The high level of compassion and integrity required of Communists historically is hocked for the face paint and glitter of a cheap attention starved clown.

Overlapping with the shock circus is the oppression Olympics. In this case, the internet personality must desperately legitimize their ultimately illegitimate and anti-communist worldview by linking it to some lived experience with oppression. I am in no way arguing that anyone's lived experience with oppression should be ignored, on the contrary, that this should lead to organization and collective struggle. What is at stake here is that by using living experience as the measure for legitimacy almost exclusively and in the context of the "me-show" competitive world of outdoing one another on social media—these types with or without lived experience will compete by inventing oppressions or imagining them and stacking them up with actually existing oppressions to continue outdoing one another for attention, and it becomes inconsequential whether that attention is positive or negative. The attention-starved social media personality will go to any length, much like a drug addict, to satiate their cravings, even so far as role-playing oppression. Oppression becomes something they are proud of, a badge of their legitimacy and authority on a subject. Consequently, they find themselves using their own experience to constantly delegitimize the oppression of anyone with "less oppression" than them, an oppressions arms-race with no winners. Oppression fetishizing is a deeply troubling thing on a psychological level with serious sociological consequences. In a petri-dish of these online left spaces, we see a digital phenomenon tending to remind one of Munchausen, or Munchausen by proxy (making themselves and one another believe they are sick—which is a sickness is in and of itself). The fact that each one must be oppressed by all these conditions and disorders leads to self-diagnosis and building upon assumed or imagined medical

history to diagnose one another. All of a sudden everyone is "nuero a-typical" etc. no thought is given to how damaging this can be to people's lives and interactions as it becomes a sub-cultural staple of the internet left.

These issues also become acutely damaging to women in the movement as competitive oppression stacking and invention of alternate online personalities find expression in leveling allegations of sexual-assault or denying allegations of sexual-assault. All of a sudden online friends who have never met can accuse one another of sexually assaulting the other without having ever had physical contact, while it would be wrong to deny that sexual harassment does take place in these exchanges, elevating this to the degree of actual assault and the perpetrator to the level of "abuser" has the effect of trivializing what assault and abuse entail. It delegitimizes real victims and casts doubt into the minds of those they might confide in. A simple exchange online which makes a person uncomfortable can easily be mutated into abuse by an online clique who feed off one another and off of the negative attention of controversy which has the secondary component of online support groups and sycophantic observers. Reality and a concrete analysis of concrete conditions is now anathema, even asking for investigation is blasphemy against the holy doctrine of the oppression Olympics.

No proof of the charges, just repeat it over and over again until people believe you!

This is the fascist formula for propaganda, reliant purely on emotion, on manipulating those with a priori prejudice who easily take up a demonstrable lie as fact due not to reality but to commiseration. This method of repeating the same lie, no matter how provably false over and over and over again with certainty that a few people who already detest a person or a group of people will converge and take the lie up as truth, hence strengthening it, finds currency among the social media personalities. The conditions of social media sites like twitter and Facebook are quite conducive to this method in both the worlds of the left-social media spaces and the right-social media spaces. Repeated over and over again without explanation, even in the face of hard, contradictory evidence, "antifa is the real fascists" like a mantra, people who may not be fascists but feel like antifa would certainly not tolerate their reactionary views come more and more to feel like they are being persecuted by the "real fascists" antifa. A few steps down this rabbit hole and they can be sold on the idea that they as white people are experiencing genocide and need to get organized into white nationalist movements.

Inversely there is the example of the often repeated mantra in the revisionist left "RG (A, LA, KC, C, PGH) are all white" no matter how many times reality contradicts this claim it is repeated and repeated. The people who already detest the political lines of these organizations and this movement come to re-center their gripes along the lines of identity and away from any coherent political critique. They repeat the essence of

"antifa is the real fascists" but insisting that these multinational organizations with a high percentage of people who are not white are really all white. Proof is not needed for fascist type propaganda which builds on a basal resentment no matter how deep down it resides. Again the more people repeat the unfounded lie the more people come to believe it—this is only a superficial belief which lends to the instability of this method of propaganda. Here this mythical "whiteness" is only used to whip up guilty emotions and cannot stand as an actual critique, since race does not determine political viewpoint and race science is denounced by Marxists. What is insinuated is far more devious, charges of "all white" implicitly claim that these organizations either bar people who are not white from joining (making them white supremacist organizations) or that they just consciously refuse struggle alongside the most oppressed sections of the masses, and focus exclusively on white struggles (again white supremacy)—in both cases this translates to arguing that an anti-fascist movement is the real fascist movement. The so-called internet left has come around again to agree with the internet right. Since repeating lies is the argumentation of the internet personalities, we find ourselves having to repeat the truth, a truth which is not always in line with the controversial Jerry Springer type entertainment which these people want to consume—the RG movement across the country is diverse, and with a consideration for the population diversity in this country if anything has a higher representation of people who are not white than the per-capita demographics of the country, not that this is a particularly crucial point when evaluating a political line or the quality of work exemplified by a movement.

The wages of sin

All of these formats lend themselves to certain sub-cultural norms of expression, and it's important to examine these as materialists, how the general capitalist superstructure is working here in these online spaces to express itself in the form of a particular identity. This explains at least in part how good people, and even good communists who are not vigilant, can get swept up in the nonsense and carried away with it. After prolonged exposure to a given environment aspects of the environment can work its way into your own methods of communication. People who travel a lot, for instance, develop a regionless accent to replace their distinct regional accent and vernacular, just as those who transplant themselves in a place with a very distinct accent or vernacular can and often will take on aspects of their host city/region/country. We are social creatures and purity is a myth. In this way, even the most well-meaning and ethical people can be influenced by the conditions of hell.

The ironic, edgy and intentionally offensive-to-society or controversial is all normalized. When controversy is normalized those who thrive on controversy necessarily have to outdo themselves, to be more and more shocking, like a tabloid magazine desperate

for readers, grasping and more and more extremity to keep anyone's attention. This normalization should be in apparent contradiction with the basic principles a communist should embody. For a better understanding of what is meant by basic communist principles I suggest reading the following books; *Aralang Aktibista* by the Communist Party of the Philippines (no English version available online sadly so we are linking to the original version), *Five Golden Rays* of Mao Zedong, *On Communist Morality* by Felix Dzerzhinsky and most importantly, *A Basic Understanding of the Communist Party of China* by the Shanghai Group. These books serve as textbooks or manuals for new and old cadres alike. They promote honesty, decency and seriousness as core values of what kind of person cadres are expected to be and the kind of standards which they must live up to. These are just a few examples but all of the most successful revolutionary movements have had conduct standards and social standards imposed upon those committed to the revolution. Nowhere will you find the open hedonism and libertine carelessness so common on the internet-left in any living revolution for the simple reason that behaving this way in such conditions would mean major setbacks for the Party and major propaganda victories for the enemy.

Modesty must replace arrogance and attention seeking behavior must be consciously restricted. This is not an easy order for people in an imperialist country in the age of social media. What is helpful here is understanding some basic marketing concepts produced by the fact that capitalism always has to adapt to changes in society in the interest of commodification by altering only its marketing techniques. Post WW1, marketing was just breaking into mass production and rampant consumerism as a result of the opening of new markets by imperialism (as well as the distribution of its spoils in the form of commodity). It was quickly aware of how to manipulate psychology and psychoanalysis to benefit marketing goods which society mostly did not need or want at that time. The going idea then was that most people had the desire to fit in, they wanted to keep up appearances with their neighbors, so this period was marked by a general likeness, to be liked and to be alike you had to buy certain things and you had to update these things according to the marketing trends determined by imperialism. This produced some backlash eventually and the advertising geniuses (relating back to the newer psychoanalytical trends) determined that people were beginning to criticize consumerism on the basis of its inherent likeness and its outwardly uniformed direction. These critics were then seen as a potential consumer base themselves and their critiques were then made to inform new marketing techniques. Now being different and individual—a unique consumer—became the going trend, now you could have every different color of the same marked up bullshit so that you "standout" from your neighbor etc. Marketing now having appropriated its critics adapted to sell both fitting in and standing out. This is the genius of marketing and advertisers are well aware

of this history as well as any entry-level sociology student. What might be a little less obvious is the way this interpenetrates and responds to the social-media phenomenon.

Capitalism has its economic base and its superstructure. Without going into detail on all the ways which these work, it is critical to point out that the maintenance of social-control by the bourgeoisie is carried out by ownership over the means of news and entertainment within the superstructure with the explicit purpose of capitalist reproduction. Social media is no exception to this. Massive corporations have been made and maintain control over social-media and largely for two reasons – the first being monitoring and the second being marketing. This goes way beyond targeted advertising and product placement. It goes all the way into social engineering and social reproduction of class relations. The formation of so-called communist sub-cultures online is just offering up another form of pacification, another commodity to be consumed for relaxation and entertainment. This is far, far from the weapon of theory envisioned by Marx and his followers. Only this time, it's a voluntary commodification, ideological costuming in the interests of capitalism. It is the whole reason why bourgeois democracies do not ban talk of communism or the study of it, it is easier to repress if it's just another flavor at the buffet of ideology as curiosity. Now it has become nothing of a threat.

Entitlement and instant gratification

These are cornerstones of the sociological pod effect of sect-like political spheres of the internet forming their own social-ecologies, which can battle in digital tribal war for entertainment. Sometimes these battles are attached to material struggles offline; this is a question of disorganized line struggle and should be left for another time. What is interesting is when those who battle for entertainment like digital gladiators are most often not organized at all, not trying in the slightest to put their political ideas into practice, which is the only place they can be improved or comprehended correctly. Entertainment itself has undergone marked changes with technology from radio broadcasts, to network television to the invent of the cassette tape and DVD's etc. Now with streaming sites, no one really prefers waiting around for a program to air; they can consume it all at once by "binge watching". The same attitude, the same desire for instant gratification and a sense that one is entitled by rights to this gratification is now superimposed onto political discourse.

Criticism in the form of a tweet is seen as on-par with a thought-out polemical approach to theoretical struggle, and as its equal, it demands immediate and collective response. Even if this tweet is made to closed groups they can engender rumor that this or that Party or organization "refuses to engage with criticism", one more reality

has gone out to lunch for these people. Their own individual position presented with the least amount of diligence and effort deserve an immediate address, of course, the small group of online spectators cannot be disappointed and their binge cannot be interrupted by real material organizing concerns. This psychology fits well with the average consciousness of consumers in an imperialist country with higher than average living standards, they are taught after all and from an early age that if they want cookies for dinner anyone who tells them 'no' is being repressive. An aggressive consumer is the ideal type of consumer in an imperialist center. This serves beautifully in the division of the masses into individual consumption units away from their unified class interests and is one of the best counter-revolutionary measures the ruling-class has at play at any given time.

Indicting Yourself and Creating Favorable Enemy Terrain

The manifestation of left-book and left-twitter also pose some clear-cut operational and security concerns. On one hand, those with views antagonistic to the existing social order are profiled and data is collected on them, their IP addresses are logged and their activity is monitored. To minimize this many have attempted to conceal to at least some degree their specific identities by making their profiles and commentary mostly private for their own online social circles. This is completely inadequate for avoiding state surveillance which is advanced enough to know who is who based on the IP address of where a social-media account logs in most often, combine this with mobile logins and the state can actually track movements and get a precise idea of an individual's identity. In this respect, social media becomes an excellent counter-insurgency apparatus. Sock-puppet accounts (accounts that limit public information disclosing individual identity) only work to obscure identity from non-state agents, like fascist online stalkers or civilian infiltrators and potential wreckers. But these have a dual nature, on one hand, they offer limited cover which provides a danger of encouraging potential activists or dissidents to let their guard down, to abandon common sense or organizational security protocol and get comfortable in their online activity, they begin to feel too safe there with their faulty cover accounts. On the other hand, these type of accounts become normalized to the point where anyone good at faking it could create their own—this includes the fascist stalkers, the civilian infiltrators, the wreckers and the state agents who all have a fairly common interest in both data-mining and creating discord.

The rotation of semi-private accounts with cover pictures of general lefty things or extremity creates a sort of standard where no one really knows who is who and their personal online brand does not have to be at all a reflection of who they are, they are

most often playing a role. Readers have surely encountered friends and comrades who act very tough online and posture as one thing, but in person, these same people are timid or frail or even cowardly. This offers us a glimpse at how easy it is to make a presentation online which is far from the mark of the person behind the presentation. This terrain is highly favorable to enemy agents of any stripe, who as surely as someone who fancies themselves a communist can create a brand and online persona for their account and use this to do quite a lot of damage. Cointelpro in the internet age is quite a scary concept with near limitless potential, especially when it is focused on people and organizations which do the vast majority of their work offline. Anyone can grasp that what takes place online has real-world consequences. I will not pretend to be capable of thinking through this problematic in one article but contribute in the interest of staring conversations which are solution oriented. The terrain of social-media seems at times wrought with danger from all sides, yet it is not my interest to cause panic or paranoia which are just as detrimental to organizing practice. Panic and paranoia actually spread like the flue on social-media from person to person and can again seep out into in-person practice. It is not enough to think of things in compartments as the real world, and the digital world as both are material social interactions which overlap.

Within the environment of sham communists and what amounts to online role-playing with invented personas, people tend to underestimate risk generally. Those who are not activists in offline struggles feel a false sense of security that they have done no action and hence face no repression. This view is totally wrong in the fact that it underestimates the state and its agencies and what lengths they will go to as fascist ideology and even policy begin taking root within the government and in populist movements. It is important to evaluate historical occurrences of fascism here. We can turn to the example of General Pinochet and the military fascist CIA backed coup in Chile. It was not simply organized communists who came under the fascist gun; it was artists, intellectuals, poets, photographers, journalists and anyone who even remotely resembled left-wing, left-leaning or left-sympathetic. You did not have to be a member of a Communist Party to become a target, you only had to resemble someone sympathetic to social equality. With the rising stakes, advancing crisis, and acute class struggle it means something to call oneself a Communist, at least to the enemy if not to those in the masquerade online. The excuse of "I am not a Communist I only play one online" will not work when the enemy decides to place us in their prepared camps. The state when it begins to shed its democratic mask will indiscriminately with escalating intensity impose itself on Communists as well as those using the term loosely. We already live in a prison house of nations where the bloodthirsty and mad-dog bourgeoisie gnash their fangs while calling it democracy, if they are to give up pretense of democracy things will get even worse. The idea is chilling. Already under

the Trump administration, Communists are under increased scrutiny and have marked the pages of Department of Homeland Security reports and analysis. The game many people are playing online is already starting to have material consequences they just have not become fully clear to those playing what the stakes really are with their casual engagement with communism and their taking up the title Communist. Obviously, I am not arguing here that fear of fascism's indiscriminate persecution of perceived leftists should stop one from engaging in public politics, political art and culture etc. just using this example to highlight the false sense of ease encouraged by online sub-cultures.

This sub-cultural leftism is not exclusively and online thing. In places with low levels of struggle where there is minimal threat from organized reactionaries or the state, there are people who run around in attire adorned with communist iconography. There are varying degrees of this costume, there are those who go full-on historical reenactment with Soviet or Chinese uniform costume pieces and there are those who just wear excessive t-shirts and those who simply make political statements with a button or two. The point here is not to oppose this attire outright since when its used correctly and in the right context it can be argued that its good conversation starters or a good way to propagate your politics to likeminded sympathetic people—I'm not taking issue with this as moderate approach. What does become a spectacle is the extreme approach, emersion into an online fetishized version of the propaganda which becomes obnoxious and abrasive and shows no organizational sense. Organized Communists who are working in the context of a society with a lot of anti-communism are not going to print everything on t-shirts and hats to parade it in front of their enemies or potential enemies, because they know that much of our work requires finesse and outmaneuvering the red-baiting and red-scare tactics the enemy uses, this does not imply that we are to hide our views but that we are to convey them strategically and in an organized way, not as casually as we would convey interest in a rock band via a concert t-shirt.

The view of "Communist" as a self-identification which resembles the presentation of a sports fanatic is disinterested in actually propagating anything desirable to the masses; obviously the extreme social media accounts have the same effect on the masses which are present in general online spaces. The garishness and abrasiveness is alienating to the masses, associating the hammer and sickle with something exclusionary—a social club with its own inside jokes and own elitist standards, closed to new comers. This overlap is present when you have super fans turn up at demonstrations decked out in all their latest costume attire, who are deeply invested in left-book/left-twitter, but are absolute misfits who aggressively and in most cases belligerently demarcate themselves from the average working person. Again this is an attempt to personalize their politics and exclude rather than to popularize politics. I have witnessed online "communist exclusive" humor and inside jokes exchanged between even so-called organizers during

mass meetings. It's not unusual to find a small group of leftist-friends siting and joking together instead of mingling with the masses in attendance. This emersion in social-media and sub-culture is often the product of and reproduces an anti-masses sentiment. These cliques become too shy to engage with the people but confident enough to make jokes which the masses are not going to even comprehend. The internet spilling over into the offline once more. While online tribes will war with one another aggressively they become meek in the face of mass debate, and even worse at confronting authorities.

In Conclusion My intention here is not to tell people without exception to get offline, or to ignore new means of propaganda but to remain principled and consciously engage in propaganda. This is a tall and complex order and to be able to fill it we need to begin interrogating social-media from a Marxist viewpoint. It is true that the past generations of revolutionaries never really had to contend with this viral world which is in many ways constantly shifting up; there is not classic literature which explicitly addresses the internet, its benefits or its detriments.

I do encourage revolutionary minded people with an interest in Communism and Communist history to spend more time among the people; this is necessarily what it means to become a revolutionary. If this means spending less time arguing with revisionists on the internet then good, its far more gratifying when they lose arguments in front of the masses in the context of mass work anyway. I am not even arguing that we stop arguing online, as I am well aware of the fact that this article is in part using social-media to reach readers. Marxists have no interest in turning back time, our interest is however in being ruthless critics of all things in existence. I am encouraging other ruthless critics to prepare the best criticism possible and provide the most attention possible to the concrete conditions and pleading that people break with casual engagement and casual criticism.

By bringing up the concerns of repression it is my intention to shed a little bit of light on often ignored conditions and just maybe get a few people to begin weening themselves off the social-media pacifier, to begin self-examination and self-interrogation regarding social-media addictions by considering the assets these provide to the state and other class enemies. Basic Communist principles of clandestine work and its correlation with above ground work are both compromised by left-book and left-twitter. Let's all stop making a spectacle of our ideas and stop fucking around online. Calling on people to take things seriously is not in vogue right now, but it is demanded by our reality in our current conditions.