What is to be done?

A concise review of the MarxMail forum on: "What's next for the Left?" after Trump's Election

Ben Seattle -- February 2025 -- *322.614.PM*
http://communism.org/node/4050

-- Reference Links --

Video of the forum: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TWPll9erfP0
Transcript of the forum (auto-generated, with amusing errors, such as "Mark's mail" for "MarxMail"): https://marxmail.world/forum/PostElection.pdf
MarxMail web page: https://www.marxmail.world/
MarxMail ListServ: https://groups.io/g/marxmail
More videos from MarxMail: https://www.youtube.com/@Marxmail/videos
Harvey Pekar's comic book biography of MarxMail founder Louis Proyect: https://louisproyect.wordpress.com/2021/06/30/the-unrepentant-marxist-comic-book-chapter-one
Essays by Ben Seattle: http://communism.org/Ben

On November 16, the *MarxMail listserv* hosted an online forum to discuss: "*What's Next for the Left?*" after Trump's election.

The MarxMail listserv is the oldest surviving public email forum discussing topics related to Marxism. It was founded around 1995 by *Louis Proyect*, a well-known activist and organizer whose caustic wit was appreciated by many and remembered by all.

Things were different in the *early days of the web*--before right-wing billionaires hijacked, defiled and commoditized this organic space and turned it into a vile corporate machine deliberately engineered to keep us ignorant and fighting one another while it monetizes our attention and pours toxic sewage down our throats.

In those early days--Proyect's listserv attracted hundreds of activists from all over the world: trotskyists, maoists, social-democrats and radical academics. Proyect's strict moderation kept things professional. And his encyclopediac knowledge of the history,

After the election:
What's Next for the Left

Hari Kumar

Moderator,
Marxmail.world

After the US elections: what's next for the left?

An online forum from Marxmail

Saturday November 16

Please join us for a vital forum on the post election landscape that is about to face the left in the USA. What should we do if Harris wins? What should we do if Trump wins? What should we do if the election is thrown into chaos by MAGA? We are happy to have three speakers from different left perspectives.

In the 1970s, **Dan La Botz** drove a truck and was a founding member of Teamsters for a Democratic Union. He authored numerous books and articles on the American and Mexican labor movements, among them Rank and File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union; A Troublemakers' Handbook: How to Fight Back Where You Work and Win! and Cesar Chavez and La Causa. Coeditor of New Politics, a member of the National Writers Union, go here for more danlabotzwritings.com

Blanca Missé is an Associate Professor of French in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at San Francisco State University. Their specialties are the Enlightenment Francophone literature and culture, as well as Marxism, feminist theory, and film studies. They are an active member of their union (CFA-SFSU) and their local Faculty for Justice in Palestine (FJP) chapter, as well as the Ukraine Solidarity Network and Bay Area Labor for Palestine. They are affiliated with Workers' Voice.

Mark Lause grew up in a small blue collar community, worked his way through college during the 1960s and 70s, and became involved in the Students for a Democratic Society. He participated in several socialist organizations and became identified with the Green Party. He has argued for united action around the broadest electoral effort that can be principally supported. Now a retired university history professor, his many books include Free Labor: The Civil War and the Making of an American Working Class and Counterfeiting Labor's Voice: William A. A. Carsey and the Shaping of American Reform Politics.

evolution and personalities of the left--as well as his indisputable talent as a writer and raconteur--combined to make the listserv a prime attraction for people to learn about all kinds of topics--and to come together in a way that *had never before been historically possible*.

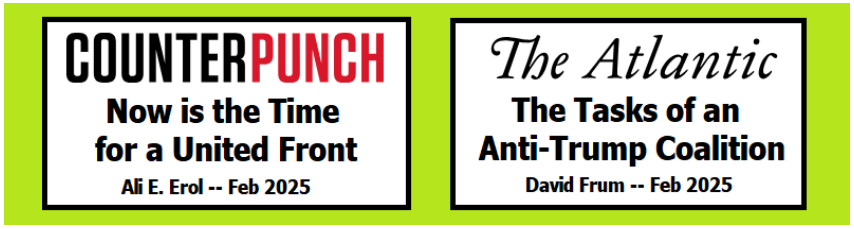
The listserv is quieter now. There are many similar forums on a variety of platforms. Proyect is no longer with us. I still check in from time to time on the chance that the light of clear explanation is cast on an interesting topic.

I saw a notice about the November 16 forum and thought it might be a good way to learn about the attitudes of many sections of the left--now that **decades of abject servitude to the Democratic Party** (and the failure to organize an independent movement deserving of the attention and respect of the working class) has finally culminated in the removal of all barriers to the ascendency of a man known to drift off to sleep each night reading the speeches of Hitler.

I was not expecting much from the forum, but it turned out to be better than I expected. Whatever shortcomings may exist in the perspectives of the forum participants--these represent the shortcomings of a *movement* that has *lost its orientation* as a result of a *crisis of theory*. What was once a living, powerful and militant movement determined to end imperialism, war, exploitation, alienation and the rule of capital--is now little more than a fuzzy shadow.

Three people with ties to well-known organizations gave their views on **the most important tasks** of our time, and **the path forward** for progressive activists. As someone in the online audience, I also spoke.

What were the **key political lines** presented? And **what needs to be said** that was not? In politics, *context* is everything, so I will also review the answers given to these questions from two other spots on the political spectrum: the *Atlantic* (ie: representative of the mainstream thinking of our ruling class) and *CounterPunch* (ie: where the radical edge of liberalism meets the liberal edge of radicalism).



Blanca Misse:

- ▶ **Why did the Democrats lose?**
- ▶ **United Front must have class independence**
- ▶ **We need decisive break from Democratic Party**

The first to speak was Blanca Misse, a faculty member at San Francisco State University, who works with several organizations, including *Workers' Voice*.

A charasmatic speaker, Blanca started with a fast-moving and compelling explanation of **why the Democrats lost** the election. This was not the usual speculation and conjecture by clueless know-it-alls. Trump's movement and supplicant media call it a "landslide". That is not what happened:

- ▶ Trump won mainly because a **big section of voters** who supported Biden in 2020 simply **stayed home**.
- ▶ During Biden's term, the bottom half of the population suffered a **20 percent paycut** because of **inflation**
- ▶ The **slaughter** of **Palestinian civilians** with bombs supplied by "**Genocide Joe**" had a huge impact on the attitudes of millions of **young people** (similar to the impact of the war in Vietnam and the civil rights movement in the 1960's)
- ▶ The Democratic Party had a total **lack of credibility** on any issue: immigrants, fracking, etc, etc, etc

Blanca reminded us of the history of the Democratic Party which (in its current incarnation) begin in the **1930's** as a result of our ruling class making **concessions** to the **powerful social movements** and **labor uprisings** that emerged out of the **Great Depression**.

In other words--there is **no free lunch** and **no shortcuts**. If we want to defend our interests--we have no choice except to **do what people did in the 1930's** and create powerful social movements and labor uprisings. Until that happens, Trump and our ruling class will continue to kick us in the teeth and shit on our faces.

What do we tell people? We are being told that the working class is at fault and is racist. Our job is to let people know that the **fault** lies in the **two party system** and our **ruling class**.

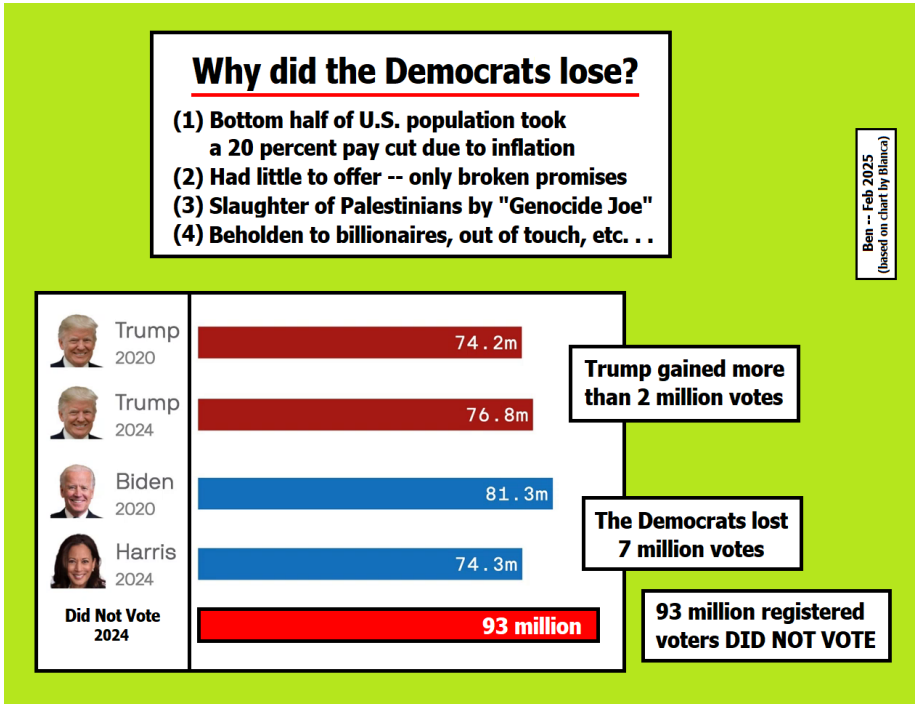
How do we build powerful united front movements that can stand up against Trump's attacks? Powerful actions were organized following Trump's election in 2016. These actions tapped into massive outrage but were controlled by the Democratic Party--which did everything possible to keep a lid on these actions and **funnel their energy** into the midterm elections. They pushed the slogan "Today we march, tomorrow we vote". There was a huge rally in Washington DC in March 2017--and all speakers were told not to utter a single word about **Palestine**. The Democratic Party can do this because it has vast resources and has **co-opted** and **controls** the liberal organizations for women's rights, immigrants, Black Lives Matter, and so forth.

As similar actions take place in the period ahead--we need to work to assist **mobilization** for mass actions and give these actions an **independent character** as part of building a movement with strategy, politics and leadership of its own. And rather than capitulate to **demands for silence** about the **genocide** in **Palestine** or attacks on immigrants because these issues are supposedly too "devisive" and "unpopular" -- we need "**political education** to unite our struggles and and fight together".

Blanca concluded by discussing the eventual need for electoral work and called for a **clean break** from political trends which cling to or promote **illusions** that the **Democratic Party** can be **reformed, split** or **transformed** into a **vehicle** for progessive change.

Instead--we need to work to build an **independent alternative** -- an **independent working class party** that can tell people that we have a **solution** to all these problems -- the environmental crisis, the unending wars, increasing poverty, the health care crisis, etc. Our solution is to **put the working class in power**. The working class **creates** everything, and is skilled and resourceful, and can develop the **consciousness** necessary the solve all these problems.

Blanca's full comments can be seen in the video or transcript (see links above). I also created the attached graphic based (somewhat loosely) on the graphic from the presentation.



Hard questions need sober answers

Blanca gave a good presentation, and covered a lot in the 15 minutes allotted each speaker. But before going any further--I will note that we need to ask ourselves some hard questions--and *not stop* until we get sober answers.

(1) If now is a good time for a clean break from the illusions promoted by the Democratic Party--then was it *not* a good time to do this 10 or 20 years ago? (Or 50 or 90 years ago?) Why has it been so hard for "the left" to make this necessary break from an imperialist party of our ruling class?

The answer, of course, is that the Democratic Party was **engineered** by FDR in the 1930's for the purpose of **capturing** and **liquidating** movements in opposition to capitalist exploitation or abuse. That is what it does--and it is good at it.

How does this work? Many of the groups on the left are little more than **recruitment machines** engaged in **cutthroat competition** with other groups for the **warm living bodies of activists** who are new on the

scene and looking to hook up with experienced organizations. And **recruitment is vastly easier** with the politics of "respectibility" -- where popular illusions are not challenged.

(2) But then this raises another question. If it has been so difficult for so many clueless or naïve "leftists" to discard illusions in the Democratic Party in the past--then how can we make sure this necessary break takes place today? Blanca says the answer is **political education**. Yes, this is true. But then we must ask *how* this necessary political education will take place? How was this political education **blocked** in the past--and how can we **unblock** it today?

(3) Similarly, Blanca discussed the need for the working class to have an **independent party** that can tell workers that they need to run society instead of the servants of capital. But **how** will this party come about? The radical left has been littered for decades with **grouplets** and **cults** that imagine that they will grow up to become such a party. What can be done today that will be *different* from--and more *successful*--than what has been tried in the past?

(4) Blanca also raised the issue of eventual **electoral work**. It is true that the working class will need to eventually *escape* from the *straightjacket* of our existing two-party system. But existing third parties, such as the Green Party, are neither independent working class parties--nor have any prospect of ever becoming such. A genuinely independent working class party would require both a **mass base** and the **political maturity** to participate in elections without promoting illusions or entangling itself in questionable alliances and politics-as-usual. But then--this leads back to the previous question--how can such an independent class party *emerge* in the first place?

We need a common information platform based on liberated algorithms

The usual answer to such questions for many activists is "I'll think about that tomorrow". I have come to my own conclusion regarding the answer to these questions--in the form of a **hypothesis** that resistance to Trump and all forms of reaction--and well as the solution to many of the most difficult problems -- (such as how activists and workers will create the **independent** and **democratic organization** they need--and how they will be able to conduct effective political education at scale) -- will be greatly assisted by the development of a **common information platform** that can harness the power of liberated information and **liberated algorithms**--to allow progressive activists and workers to *collaborate* in a productive way both to *organize actions* and to *understand*--at the deepest level--how and why things are the way they are.

The usual reaction of most activists to this hypothesis is that "*it sounds too good to be true*". This is an understandable reaction. My suggestion is to keep your eyes open.

A hypothesis is something to consider and **weigh carefully**--rather than to reflexively or impulsively either dismiss or embrace. The ascent of the orange Mussolini is having at least one good effect--it is **pouring cold water** on the smug, arrogant cynicism and self-indulgent know-it-all attitudes (and **denial**) of a layer of activists who are discovering that the **Democratic Party cannot or will not stop Trump**--and that the **only real weapon** they have with which to fight back--is their humility and their determination to be honest with themselves as they carefully think things through.

The **crisis of corporate social media** is intensifying year after year. Cory Doctorow coined the word "enshittification" in 2023 to describe the tendency of profit-driven social media platforms to steadily turn into shit as value is taken from users and given to advertisers and stockholders--and *enshittification* was voted "word of the year" [1]. On the one hand--people *need* to use social media to connect to one another. On the other hand--corporate social media is increasingly and blatantly being used *against* their interests. This cannot continue forever. *Something* has to give.

Our current zeitgeist--increasingly taking shape--is that some kind of information platform that better serves people's interests--is both **necessary** and **inevitable**. Countless efforts, from many different directions--are being made--that originate in the recognition that--if information and algorithms are being used to keep us ignorant and fighting one another--then we can **flip the script** on our enemies--and use information and algorithms to **reveal all the secrets** that have been kept hidden from us--and **coordinate our actions** to create a better world.

If efforts are being made in this direction--then we can ask ourselves--**how can we help** make this happen? And **how can this help us** do what we need to do? What is *realistic*? What *timeframes* are involved at each stage of long-term work in this direction?

More on this in a bit. For now--let's continue with our review of what is being said by activists on *MarxMail* and *CounterPunch* -- and (for context) by mouthpieces for the Democratic Party in the *Atlantic*.

Mark Lause:

- ► **How did we get where we are?**
- ► **Electoral united front?**
- ► **United front for alternative news and media**

The next two speakers, like me and like most of the people on MarxMail, are old enough to remember the ferment of the 1960's. Mark Lause became part of *Students for a Democratic Society* (SDS) at that time. SDS in many ways kicked off the Cambrian explosion of activist groups which dominated the left for the next several decades. Now a retired history professor, Mark is today loosely affiliated with the *Green Party*.

Rather than repeat the points that Blanca made, Mark began with an overview of the stages of decay of the Democratic Party following Nixon's presidency, as it gradually became a 2nd version of the Republican Party and adopted a strategy of competing with the Republicans for big donors. Once it did this, it no longer had to worry much about catering to its voter base. Election campaigns became centered on images of happiness and joy with little substance. The Democratic Party not only failed to challenge Republican positions--it adopted those positions and became Republican itself.

Now--after losing the election, the Democratic Party mouthpieces are telling us that Harris was campaigning too far to the left--and that all problems can be fixed by moving further to the right. Mark described this as a self-referencing, self-justifying, faith-based set of assumptions to rationalize what will get the most donor money.

Democratic Party leaders have called Trump and his movement fascists--and they present themselves as allies in the fight against fascism--but they have done nothing about the overt open corruption and criminality of sitting members of the US Supreme Court and dragged their feet in going after Trump for the attempted January 6 insurrection. This kind of inaction and hypocrisy is not some peculiar screw up. It represents the heart of the Democratic Party's institutional response to Trump.

Mark noted that the **failure of the left** to create a class alternative to all this stands out. Mark is in favor of a united front based on **electoral** politics. (I have already explained why, in my humble opinion, such an electoral united front is a **fantasy** that will go nowhere.)

What is holding back the necessary aggregation of socialist news and media?

In addition to the above, Mark also spoke in favor of what I might describe as a different kind of united front--based on the cooperation of individuals and groups to **create and aggregate alternative news and media** that **explicitly promotes socialist ideas**. Mark noted that he cannot explain why something such as this has not already been done.

As someone who has been focused on this very thing for decades, I can offer my humble opinion concerning why this has not been done:

(1) Such an **aggregation** of news and media would greatly increase **transparency** in our movement. Our *movement* **desperately needs** such transparency. But the *groups* in our movement are **desperately afraid** of transparency.

(2) The **crisis of theory** has reached the point where words such as **"socialism"** means nothing whatsoever other than a less bad version of capitalism or an imaginary world that cannot be explained. The groups in our movement are held together by a kind of **ideological glue** that gives necessary confidence to their supporters. Clarity on the important theoretical principles related to things such as "socialism" would tend to **dissolve this glue**--and thus dissolve these groups.

Dan La Botz:

► Focus on the people drawn into motion by forces around the Democratic Party

Dan La Botz was a founding member of *Teamsters for a Democratic Union*, has written several books, including *Troublemakers' Handbook*, and is a co-editor of *New Politics*.

What struck me about La Botz's presentation--was how knowledgeable and **absolutely confident** he was--in spite of the fact that he was attempting to justify an orientation focused nearly entirely on the people drawn into motion by the actions of Democratic governors and attorney generals, as well as the billionaires, candidates and unions closely tied to the Democratic Party. La Botz paid **lip service**, of course, to the idea of independent class politics--but mainly focused on the value of lobbying and **putting pressure** on legislators. La Botz said it would be ok to criticize these bigwigs--if such criticsm was done with sufficient "finesse". I am not making this up.

I am going to guess that La Botz is representative of a large and influential layer of activists **entirely focused on recruiting naïve people** drawn into motion by the Democratic Party. This layer **orbits the Democratic Party like flies circling shit**. If our movement needs clarity in order to overcome its dysfunction--we will not find it here.

Blanca replied to La Botz that--obviously--if the Democrats organize **mass actions in the streets**--we need to support that. But we also know we cannot rely on the Democrats to do consistent work in this direction. Therefore--anyone is free to spend their time lobbying if that is what they want to do--but what our movement needs is the kind of united front built on **independent mass action**--so that when the Democratic Party **refuses to mobilize people** to fight back against Trump's attacks--we can have confidence that an **independent vehicle** can do this work.

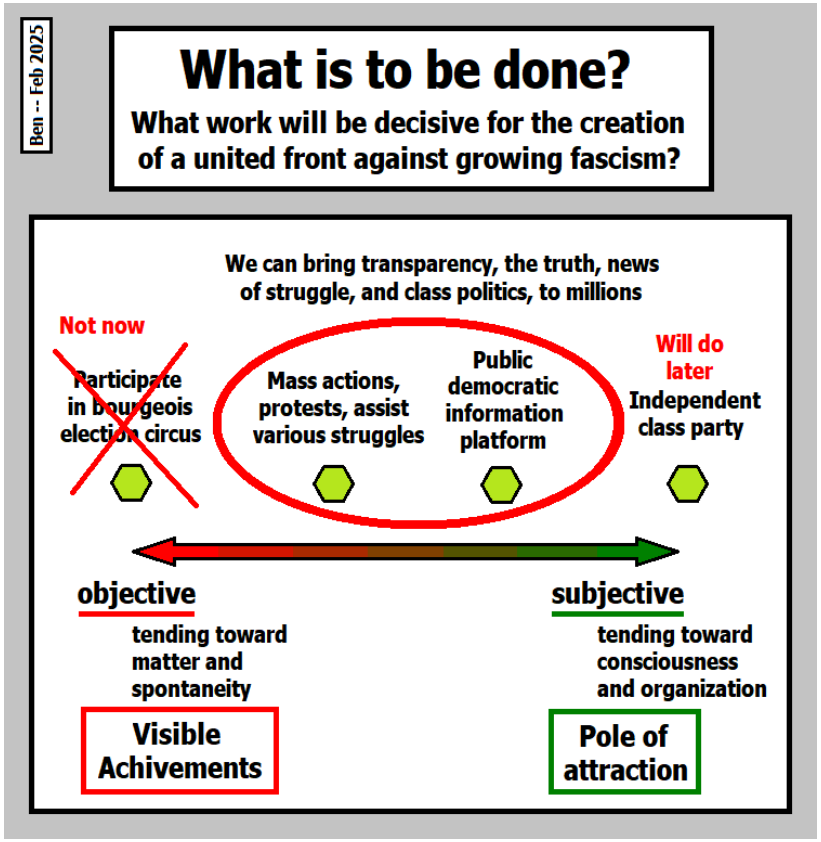
Mark Lause replied to La Botz in a similar way: if we do not stop them--the Democrats will simply walk in and take over any movement (such as for immigrant rights, abortion rights, black lives matter, Occupy, etc) and **get it off the street** as quickly as they can. We must prepare a **network** to resist this. Anything we can do along these lines, we should do.

It is useful to include people like La Botz in a forum like this. People like me can get on a soapbox and pontificate to activists about the need to avoid becoming **mired** in the **tar pit** of Democratic Party politics--but there is **no substitute** for a forum where everyone can see these people in action and hear their arguments in their own words.

Ben Seattle: We need an information platform

I spoke for two minutes (at the 56 minute mark in the video and transcript). I said that I would rather **slit my throat** than waste my time on any project that required being acceptable to the Democratic Party.

I mentioned the distinction between work on the subjective and objective sides of the spectrum (please see chart below).



The **objective** aspect of our work includes things such as visible achievements, mobilizations for actions, and victories in struggles.

The **subjective** aspect of our work represents efforts related to **ideas** and things such as **consciousness** and **organization**. This includes:

(1) understanding the need to **openly confront the rot in our movement** that has led to a situation where opposition to growing fascism has been left in the hands of the capitalist class (ie: a blueprint for **catastrophe**) and

(2) the emergence of the **independent** and **democratic organization** we need for the organization of class struggle.

I noted that the work to create a **pole of attraction** is on the subjective side and would be greatly assisted with the development of an **information platform** that did not have the problems associated with corporate social media platforms (ie: where we have little control over what we see and the most **toxic content is amplified**) or the problems associated with listservs (ie: where the **signal-to-noise ratio** generally degrades as more people enter a discussion).

Discussion centered on the need for independent class politics

After that, about a half dozen more people made comments. Nearly everyone emphasized the **need to be independent** of the **Democratic Party**--and that the Democratic Party will not go along with mobilizing people into the streets. Here are some highlights:

► Our **situation is worse than 8 years ago**, protests are likely to be smaller than in early 2017 -- we need sober realism

► We can expect responses from the working class, immigrants, unions, civil servants and the Palestinian solidarity movement (which will be facing repression) -- there will probably be 50 to 100 thousand leftist activists engaged in various kinds of street protests

► Trump may end up creating a **crisis for our ruling class** -- the Democratic Party will promote itself as the resistance to Trump -- the far right is not the majority of the country and how far they can push their fascist agenda **depends on how effectively we are organized** to fight back -- and that **depends** on **political clarity** and **independence** from the **Democrats** -- we need to bring all the receipts proving that we cannot rely on the Democrats -- Working people are moving away from the Democratic Party but have not yet been captured by the right so the issue is that we need to meet them and **give them real answers** to their questions.

► Our united front needs to be based on the working class and independent class politics. We need to be clear about **breaking with the Democrats** and rejecting the path of lobbying Democratic governors and the ACLU to do the right thing -- What's going to drive people into the streets is Trumpian reaction -- which will attack immigrants, attack women and abortion rights, attack union organizing, attack resistance to police brutality. **People will be dragged into the streets by the crisis**. -- The basic issue for our united front is whether it will be based on the fight for independent class politics -- or will instead unite around the most minimal issues to get the most people. But it was the former, not the latter, that drew 50 thousand people to fight the fascists in Boston and 20 thousand the next week to fight the fascists in Berkeley. It is not elections that will build our movement, but class struggle.

The Atlantic:
Pray for a cure from the gods of plague

Neoconservative David Frum is the former speechwriter for George W. Bush who coined the phrase "axis of evil", and a senior editor at *The Atlantic*. As an anti-Trump Republican, his February article "*The Tasks of an Anti-Trump Coalition -- Avoid progressive pieties and rebuild an effective democratic majority*" [2] represents the thinking of the more traditional mainstream of our ruling class.

Frum starts by noting that, in comparison with 8 years ago--the **opposition to Trump is weaker**, and **feels dazed, confused and defeated**. More than a million demonstrated against Trump in January 2017. Thousands thronged airports when Trump tried to ban Muslims from entering the country. The demand for news was high. Today, in contrast, **mass protests are fewer and smaller**. The demand for news has diminished.

Frum lists some of the reasons for this:

► This time, Trump won the **popular vote**, unlike in 2017 where Trump lost by 3 million. From a legal point of view, the arcane rules of the electoral college are all that matter, but the popular vote has a huge impact on how people feel, and this has crushed morale.

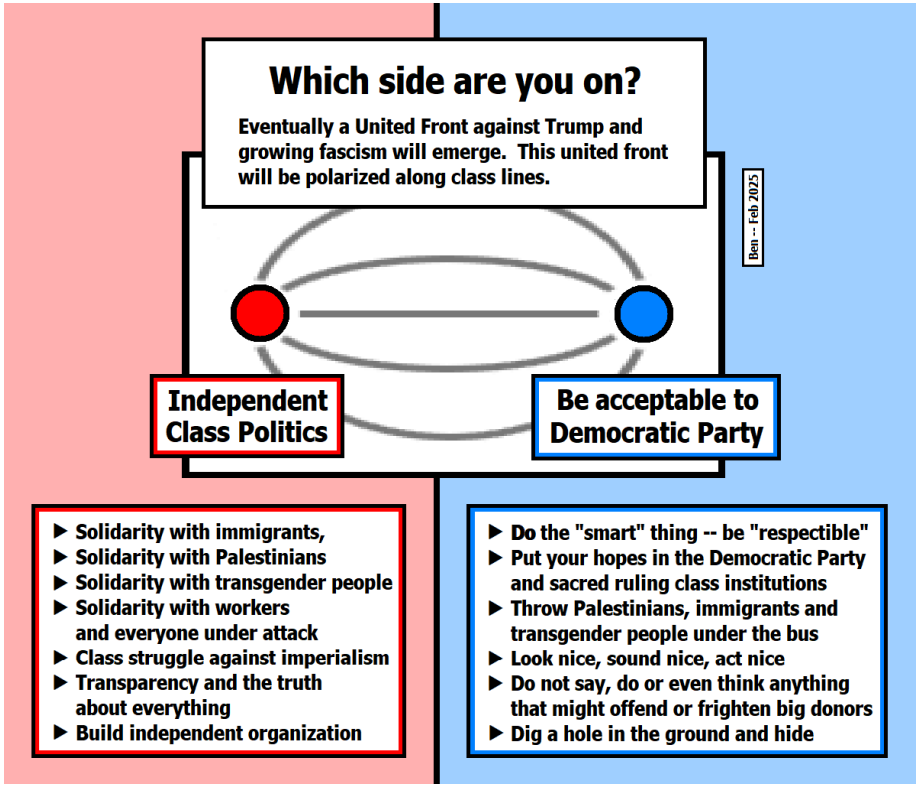
► Trump had a more prepared and experienced team, and started with Steve Bannon's "**flood the zone with shit**" tactic in which opponents feel overwhelmed and unable to sort out and prioritize where to fight back.

► The "**information space**" is quite different from 8 years ago. The **big news organizations** have been laying off staff as their revenue has been siphoned into the pockets of the **social media leviathans** which have become dominant. And the social media **algorithms** are today far more effective at detecting and **manipulating** individual bias, **fear, anger** and the need of users for affirmation and **bonding** with others in their tribe.

Frum, fortunately, has a prescription for all these problems.

► Fight back on the "smart" issues, rather than the "worst" issues. Frum gives two examples of the "worst" issues: **transgender rights** and **Palestine**. Frum cites Harris being in favor of taxpayer-funded gender-transition operations for undocumented immigrants and federal prisoners (which was turned into a viral attack ad by the right wing). And the genocide in Gaza? Frum avoids even mentioning the word "Palestine" -- and simply notes that "creating a rift between the United States and Israel is very unpopular".

► Frum also says we need to fight back in a "smart" way. What does this mean? Frum says that the anti-Trump coalition must be centered around instilling **respect** for the sacred **institutions** of our ruling class as we "**build unity**" from the "**center**" rather than the "**ultra-left**". More than this, we must aim for the politics of "**respectibility**" and "**look, sound and act nice**" up until the point where we are accused of being "**cringe**" (I am not making this up).



Frum has done a good job of **concentrating the thinking** of the more establishment oriented section **of our ruling class**--concerning all the ways that our resistance to growing fascism will be **completely** and **totally ineffective**. In the period ahead, we will see these same ideas **repeated endlessly** (including, of course, in the "left" where these ideas will seep in like water on a leaky boat). Keep your eyes open.

Ideological polarization along class lines

Before looking at the *CounterPunch* article, we can observe that all perspectives concerning the nature of a United Front against growing fascism will be at one pole or the other or somewhere in between (please see the chart above). David Frum articulated the nature of the "blue" pole of **subservience** to Democratic Party politics and Blanca did the same for the "red" pole of **independent** class politics. Most things we will read will fall somewhere in between.

How do we ACTUALLY pressure our ruling class to yank hard on Trump's leash?

And this brings up the most important point. What our ruling class is most afraid of--more than the problems that Trump is causing for them directly--is the **threat** of the working class and oppressed taking up **independent class politics** in order to **effectively fight back** against Trump's attacks. Our ruling class understands that this represents a **threat to the stability of their class rule**.

Why is this? Why are independent class politics so **dangerous** to the interests of our ruling class and so **powerful** for us?

Thomas Payne, writing in 1776 in "*Common Sense*", argued for independence from Britain with these words:

> "*There is something absurd in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island.*"

If we substitute class for geography--we can make this same argument today about the absurdity of a modern country, with a modern economy, being run in perpetuity by and for the **one percent of the population** that mismanages everything--holding back economic, technological and social development--while creating insecurity and misery for the vast majority and spending our tax dollars bankrolling genocide--all because their **social ranking and status** is bound up with their ownership of **capital** (ie: their wealth) -- and for this reason their only real interest is in making their **big piles of money** grow bigger.

This **cannot go on forever** and, as our situation deteriorates, this argument will eventually **resonate** with increasing numbers of people.

Where does this leave us? Gramsci, writing from the prison cell where he had been thrown by Mussolini, gave us a concise description of what is happening and why:

> "*The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters.*"

Up until now--our ruling class has been able to argue that at least our country is governed by laws, which apply equally to all, and which all have the opportunity to change. This was always a fraudulent argument. It was always our ruling class which made the law. But as things get worse--this fraud is becoming more obvious. And, as it becomes more obvious, greater numbers of people will be waking up and taking notice.

When this happens--then it is likely that--in the eyes of our ruling class--Trump's tendency to stir up shit--will become an **unacceptable liability**. At that point--and *only* at that point--will our ruling class pull out every stop--and **exercize every lever** at their command to **yank hard on Trump's leash**.

CounterPunch:
A mixture of clarity and confusion

The *CounterPunch* article from earlier this month [3] was better than I expected. Many things were handled well, but improvement is needed in some areas. The article briefly describes the idea of a united front to readers who may not be familiar with it--explaining that it involves different political trends uniting to work for common goals (in particular, defense against growing fascist attacks) while each trend maintains its own political perspective. The article also noted that we must "locate ourselves in history" and understand how we got to where we are. Our oppression did not emerge out of the blue.

I noted three weak points.

► The article noted that **we cannot wait** for the Democratic Party to create the united front we need, and described the Democratic Party as a "symptom" of a "societal failure". These things are true--but this is a mushy and confusing description because it **fails to confront** the **popular illusion** that the Democratic Party is a **passive institution** of capitalist society and can somehow be **captured** by progressive activists and **transformed** into a vehicle that serves the working class and oppressed. The truth is the opposite. Bitter experience proves that the Democratic party was **engineered** to **capture** and **liquidate activist energy** and activist movements. It is a **predatory** and **conscious** institution, and the creation of an independent movement will require a struggle against the influence of the illusions it promotes.

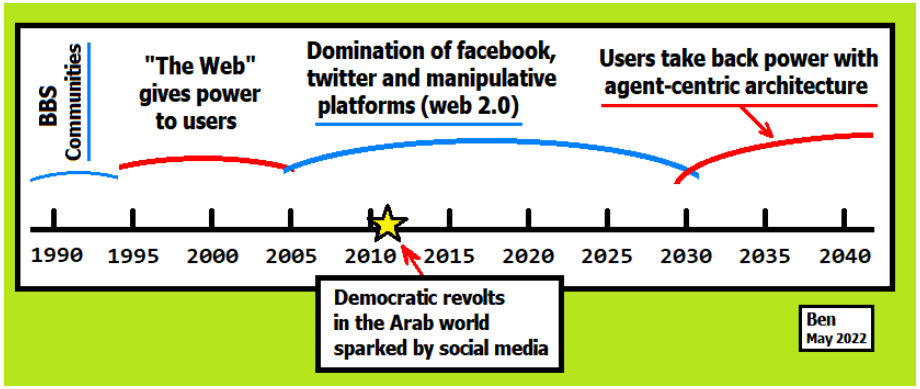
► The article correctly notes that people with liberal politics must be welcome in the work of our united front. What needs to be added, in

my humble opinion, is that welcoming such people does not mean that we need to promote the typical **liberal illusions** concerning the nature of the institutions of our ruling class.

► Finally, the article advocates that our united front should aim to create a government that is not based on **exploitation**. On the one hand--it is useful to raise the idea of ending exploitation once and for all. On the other hand--we must recognize that the political trends that unite to oppose Trump and growing fascism--will have different (and opposing) views concerning what will need to follow. Many believe we should simply aim to **return to the way things were** before Trump emerged. Others, of course, know better. It would be better, and more realistic, to advocate that our United Front encourage the kinds of debate and discussion necessary for the maximum number of people to understand what all these things mean.

I should also note that *CounterPunch* carries articles from a **spectrum** of **political views** and has (by the standards of the left) a large audience. This, of course, is useful. Unfortunately, the *CounterPunch* website has **disabled comments** on the articles it carries. Nor does *CounterPunch* have any mechanism to make sure there is **transparency** regarding the editorial decision-making concerning which articles it carries. But our movement needs this discussion and needs this transparency.

And this leads us to a question that we can no longer kick down the road: How can activists create the **kinds of forums necessary** for the **clarity** our movement needs? Answering that questions brings us to the next section--where I sketch out my perspective on the kind of **information platform** our movement needs.



Spartacus Ex Machina:

No force on earth will be able to stop the expansion of transparency

I have been studying the potential of the internet since the time that it was called Arpanet and connected a total of 6 computers. I always knew, instinctively, that it would impact society as deeply as the invention of the printing press. A force for both good and bad--in the more than 5 decades since that time, it has transformed one section of the economy after another, moved into the center of our culture, sparked the Arab democratic revolts of 2011, and played a major role in electing our first president with openly fascist ambitions.

And it is still only getting started.

From multiple directions, motion is developing to use this modern technology to **serve the interests of humanity** instead of corporate and ruling class interests. The two most important sources of this motion are (1) political and worker activists and (2) tech activists. Let's take a quick look at an example from each of these "camps":

(1) An email I received from the *Detroit/Seattle Workers' Voice* group had some observations from Tim Hall about the recent Christmas Amazon Strike that included these words [4] (emphasis added):

> Organization independent of the Teamster bureaucracy will be needed. [. . .] This raises the question of organizational form. The Teamsters will enforce **top-down control** by their bureaucracy. The Amazon workers will need some form of freedom from such control, as that control will inevitably go against their desires. Amazon worker activists should consider **forms of communication and organization horizontally** among their various worksites, some of which are not under the control of the Teamster bureaucrats, just as a start to **self-organization**.

This observation represents recognition from an experienced activist of the need for a **better kind of communications system** to help workers self-organize their struggle.

(2) A recent article on the competition between software apps for a place in the *BlueSky* ecosystem [5] used a phrase I have never seen before: "*open social web community*". This is a clear indication that the number of people in the tech world committed to creating liberated social media has been steadily growing.

For those unfamilar with it, *BlueSky* is emerging as the most promising alternative (so far) to the hellscape of Twitter. The protocol on which it runs is designed to be resistant to censorship, banning and enshittification. Most importantly--it is designed such that **users will easily be able to migrate their work** and their **community connections** away from the control of the BlueSky company itself if (or when) the company (like Google) changes its motto from "don't be evil" to "welcome to hell".

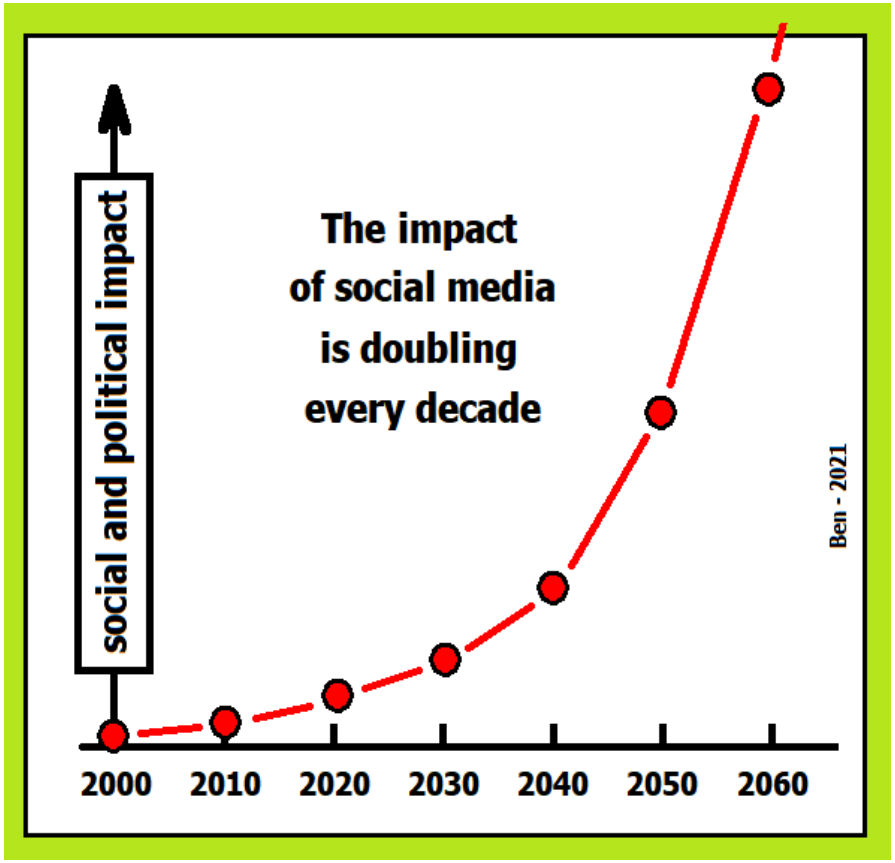
What does this mean for our work today?

The work to create **liberated social media** will ultimately be helped by millions of people and will likely **stretch through most of this century**. My conclusion is that this work will eventually greatly help to bring an end to the domination of ignorance in our world and "the time of monsters" described by Gramsci.

But what are we to do today? Must we simply wait for others to do all this work? Or can we help? Can we do our share? And, if we want to do our share--then how can we do so?

I believe that we can do things today that are **simple** and **relatively easy** to do. To help clarify this, I am including a chart (please see Chart # 1, following the "Notes" section below) on how I see the likely **stages of development** of liberated social media. I am advocating that we participate, today, in the work of **stage 1** -- which mainly involves simply **discussing** and **understanding** basic principles.

There are also simple things that could go along with this. For example, I am currently playing around with a **duct-tape-and-baling-wire project** that would receive emails and convert these emails into a website where they could be viewed. MarxMail already does this, of course, but I believe it could be done much better. Anyone who wanted would be able to add the email address of my project to the "cc" line of their email--and then their email would be processed and appear on the **experimental website** I may be able to create.



How would the website of my experimental project be better than the MarxMail website? I will get to that in a bit--but first, I would like to give my opinion that **stage 2** of this work could evolve to become the **digital nervous system** of the **pole of attraction** for the united front we need--a **level playing field** where everyone had equal rights.

This would likely play a major role in overcoming the **crisis of theory** that has paralyzed the left and also lead to the emergence of the **independent** and **democratic class organization** we need. This is what we need to understand what is going on and effectively coordinate our actions at scale.

I do not expect to live to see the development of stage 2. Like many of us, I am nearing the end of my tenure. But I believe that the work of stage 1 will be helpful (in terms of experience gained and lessons learned) to the work of those who **pick up this torch**.

What kinds of features might eventually (if I can actually motivate and discipline myself to do this) be available on the experimental website?

(1) People would be able to **add "tags"** of their choice to people or posts. Such tags could be political--such as: **#PutinApologist** or **#OrbitsDemocraticParty**. Or these tags could reflect personal qualities, such as **#WordTwistingTimeWaster**. People would be able to **automatically filter out posts** by making use of these tags. And people would be able to create their own lists (and share those lists) of which other people have good judgement and whose tags are worth taking seriously.

(2) It would be easier to automatically follow (or ignore) **threads** and determine which threads were more significant.

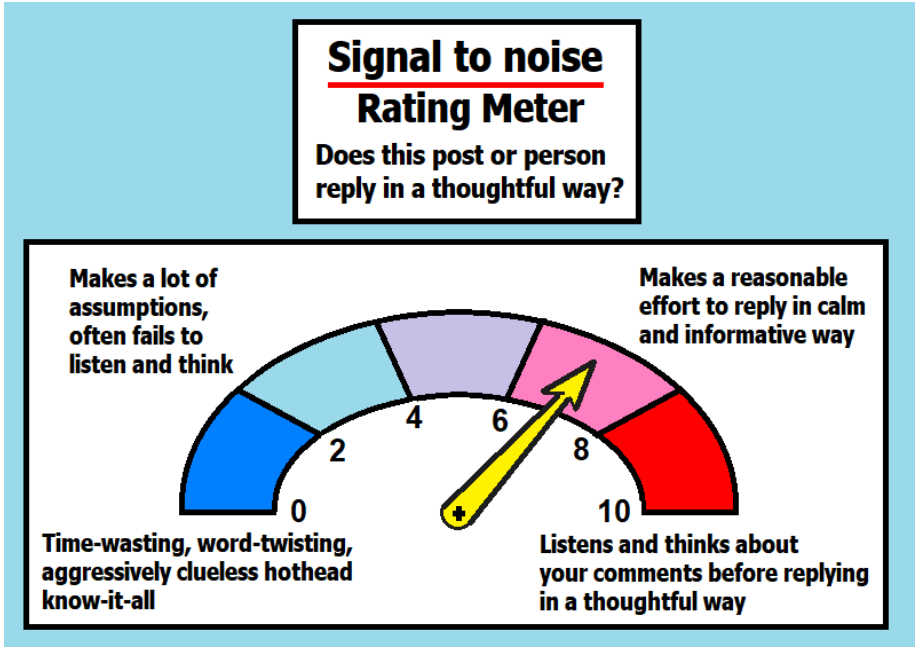
(3) It would be easy to **create lists or tables** of **articles, organizations and people**--and opinions or summaries of what such articles, organizations or people are really about.

I could add more--but this essay is already too lengthy. Part of the value of the experimental platform would simply be to help people understand how **transparency** will work--and what **algorithms** can do. The simple truth is that--when fed the fuel of human experience and intelligence--algorithms can do almost anything.

I also include (Chart # 2, below) another chart of a third stage of this work--which I call the *Universal Public Information Platform*.

We are living in the century of information war. The success of all of our many struggles is bound up with the development of an independent machine aimed at connecting people with the truth. **Without** such a machine--we are at a disadvantage because the corrupt politicians and greedy corporations will control the information space--and the flow of ideas in society. **With** such a machine--the **working class will overcome all obstacles** -- because it will **make itself conscious** and gain the ability to **coordinate its action** at scale.

This essay is posted at http://communism/node/4050 and I will also post there all replies that contain the tag **#PublicDomain**. I look forword to thoughtful questions and comments and criticism, and I am committed to thoughtful replies, although it often takes me a while to respond.



Jane's List of Jerks to Filter

Name	Reason	Reference Note
Jack	Troll	Note # 6002
John	Racist	Note # 6004
Charlie	Stupid	Note # 6006

Click here to use Jane's Filter

(Above) from Appendix B of "Spartacus Ex Machina" (2017). It will be easy to filter out timewasting jerks. Ben -- Dec 2022

An example of how MarxMail subscribers could use democratic algorithms to create a democratic and transparent journal

Step 1:
A MarxMail subscriber would add the email address of the experimental platform to the CC line of his post

To: MarxMail
Cc: experimental_platform@something.com
From: John Smith

Hi everyone, here is the latest ...

<journal>

blah, blah, blah ...
blah, blah, blah ...

</journal>

Step 2:
The email is processed and the content (ie: between the <journal> tags) is added to the experimental website

Step 3:
MarxMail subscribers then add tags to rate the content (ie: good, bad, ugly, stupid, #PutiniteApologist, #OrbitsDemocraticParty, etc)

Step 4:
Readers of the website use the ratings and tags to filter out crap

I am Kelly, your obedient BouncerBot.

What kinds of shit do you want me to filter out today?

Who are the people whose tags you consider reliable?

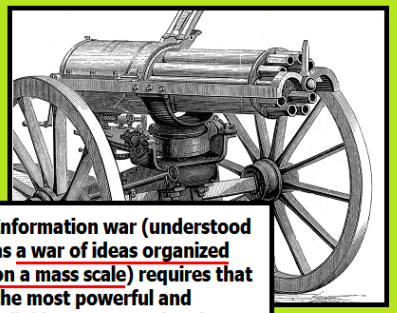
Alice Apple
Bob Banana
Chris Cabbage
Ben Seattle

What tags do you want to use for your filter?

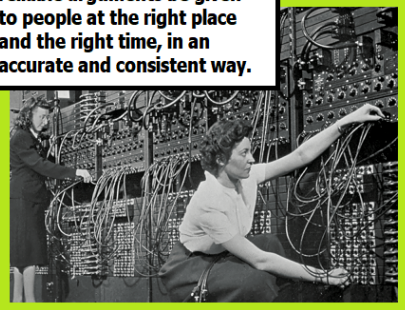
- [x] #WordTwistingTimeWaster
- [x] #OrbitsDemocraticParty
- [x] #PutinApologist

Show discussion

We Need A Reliable Machine for Information War



Information war (understood as a war of ideas organized on a mass scale) requires that the most powerful and reliable arguments be given to people at the right place and the right time, in an accurate and consistent way.



We will win the online war of ideas because we report the truth with integrity, in a way that everyone can understand, and because we can use the weapon of transparency to openly organize the activity of many people on all social media platforms.

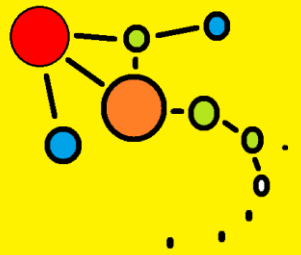
A public website can collect information from many platforms and serve as a central public index of articles, people and arguments, as well as a dashboard giving visibility to everything and giving everyone quick and easy access to all kinds of important reference material.

The website itself can be run in an open and democratic way. Just as organized activity is more powerful than scattered actions, so also is organized information more powerful than scattered and hard-to-find information.

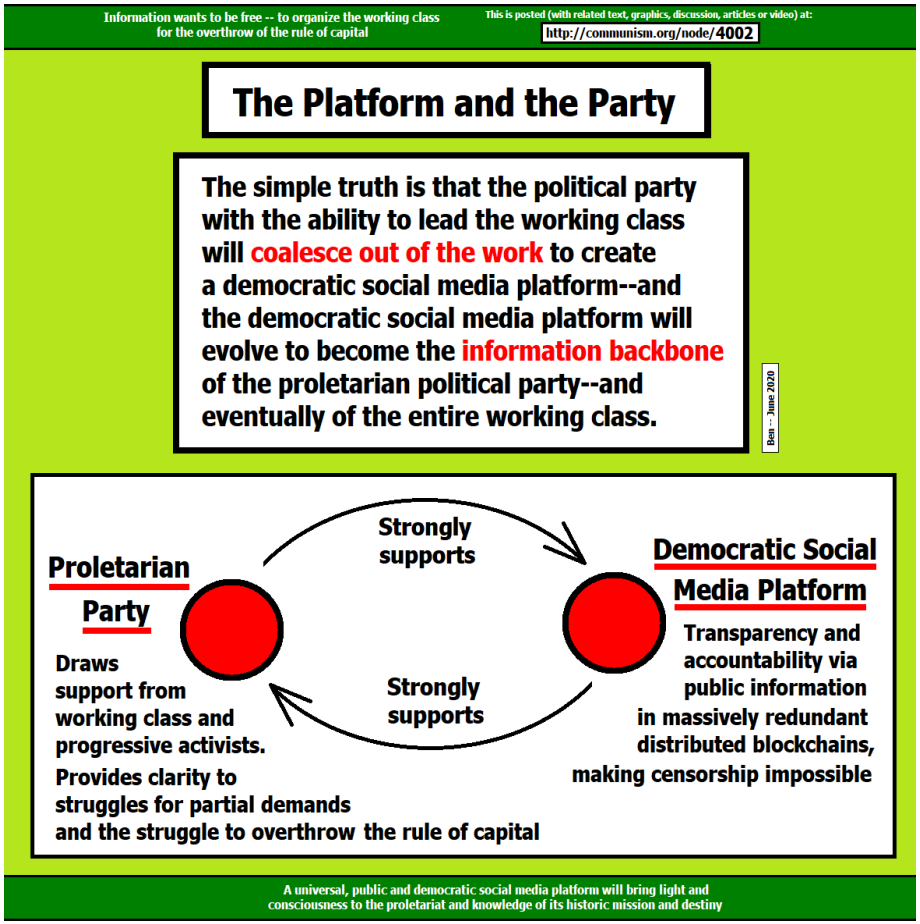
Ben Seattle -- Sept 2023

The Public Margins

Interesting visual display of generated conversations



In this graphic, each sphere represents a note that emerges as a reply to a parent note. The size and color of each note are used to represent an estimate of its quantitative and qualitative features.



Notes:

[1] 'Enshittification' is coming for absolutely everything
https://archive.ph/uAruT

[2] The Tasks of an Anti-Trump Coalition -- Avoid progressive pieties and rebuild an effective democratic majority -- David Frum -- Feb 2025
https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2025/02/trump-election-second-term/681514/

[3] *Now is the Time for a United Front* -- Ali E. Erol -- Feb 2025
https://www.counterpunch.org/2025/02/04/now-is-the-time-for-a-united-front/

[4] Some Observations about the Christmas Amazon Strike
Tim Hall -- Jan 26 -- Detroit/Seattle Workers' Voice mailing list
(This will eventually be posted here: https://CommunistVoice.org)

[5] Here are the apps battling to be become the "TikTok for Bluesky"
https://techcrunch.com/2025/02/01/here-are-the-apps-battling-to-be-become-the-tiktok-for-bluesky/

More to explore:

More essays by Ben Seattle on these topics:

Reference docs and graphics
http://communism.org/node/4049

All Power to the Public Domain
http://communism.org/node/4048

Please see Chart # 1 and Chart # 2 on the following pages

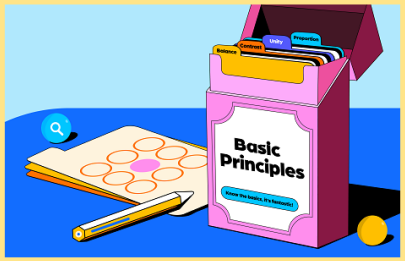
Chart # 1 -- Likely stages of development of a common information platform

Likely stages in the development of a common public information platform

Democratic algorithms want to be free to organize information and bring transparency and consciousness to the class struggle

Stage 1

Discuss and understand basic principles



Timeframe:

Today

What it will do:

- Discuss and understand basic principles
- Learn the difference between algorithms used to keep us ignorant and algorithms we can use to find and organize the vital information we need to change the world
- Experiment with small-scale prototypes

How many users:

experimental platforms could have dozens of users

Ben -- Feb 2025

Stage 2

Public information platform for an open network of activists

Timeframe:

The next several years

How many users:

hundreds or thousands

What it will do:

- Share and digest the news
- Discuss and debate the path forward
- Build communities of struggle and connect them together
- EXPORT and IMPORT content to and from email, listservs and corporate social media
- Fight corporate and political censorship
- Transparency to help unfuck the "left"

Stage 3

Universal Public Information Platform

Timeframe:

The next several decades

How many users:

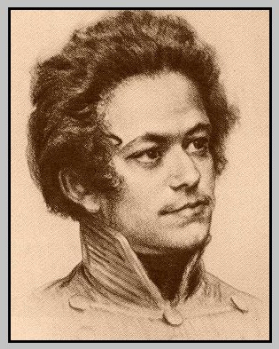
millions

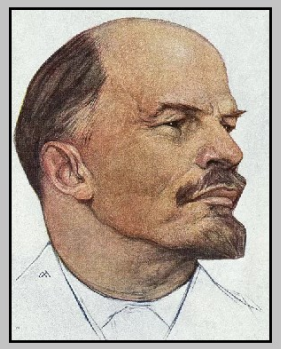
What it will do:

- Bring the truth to millions
- organize struggle at scale
- Win key victories in the online war of ideas

Political activists and tech activists will work together to bring transparency and the truth about everything to everyone

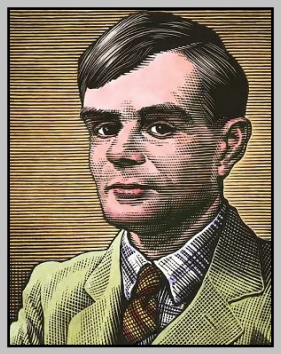
Chart # 2 -- The third stage -- the Universal Public Information Platform

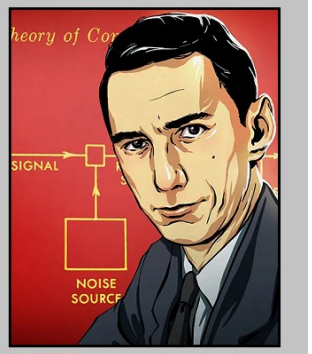




The Universal Public Information Platform

will bring transparency and the truth about everything to millions and become an invincible weapon in the hands of Proletarians and Palestinians in humanity's century of information war





Marx

Gave us the solid theoretical foundation of humanity's need to overcome commodity production and the rule of capital and for the working class to run the world

Lenin

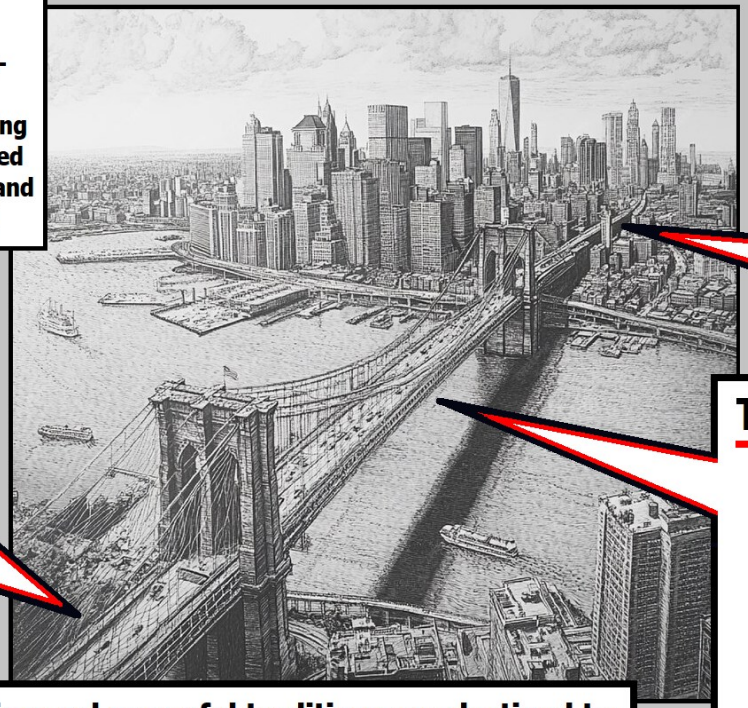
Led the first large-scale attempt to liberate the working class and oppressed from colonialism and the rule of capital

Turing

"Turing machines" are today called computers

Shannon

Gave us the digital world of "bits" and "signal-to-noise ratio"



Democratic Algorithms

tech activists -- information activists movements for free software, free information and liberated algorithms

Class Struggle

Left activists, workers and trade union activists

examples of struggles:

- Defending immigrants
- Higher wages
- Black Lives Matter
- We are all Palestinians

Ben -- Feb 2025

The bridge between democratic algorithms and class struggle

Left activists and tech activists will work together to create a universal public information platform beyond the control of greedy corporations and repressive governments.

Activists and ordinary people will be able to make public posts and comments and find whatever they want by using algorithms of their own creation or choice. This will change the balance of power in every struggle and emerge as a pole of attraction that helps all the best activists find one another.

Two amazing and powerful traditions are destined to combine their forces to defeat every form of reaction and liberate humanity from the rule of capital