

# **Organize around promoting and defending “Freedom Technology”**

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This article serves as a natural expansion of the things I assume we already do individually for our own collectives and adjacent circles. This time, however, we're pooling our shared skills and knowledge to not only assist radical groups take advantage in digital communication and peer-to-peer production, but also the wider public in general.

While doing so, we must also acknowledge that The Digital holds such great potential for prefiguring a society that is more representative of our values. In other words, it can serve as the training wheels for a *classless, moneyless and stateless society*.

There is also the need for us to acknowledge that The Digital, comprising of the equipment to process information, methods to process information and transmitting information, creates entirely new avenues of class struggle. The struggle against DRM and proprietary software is a modern iteration of the same struggles that resulted in the enclosure of common land, stripping the common people of a livelihood and forcing them to work for industrialists that owned the factories and workshops, paving the way for Capitalism.<sup>1</sup> The struggle against corporate and government surveillance of the masses stems from the lessons paid for in blood during the Nazi regime's genocides, which started not with pogroms and race riots, but with gathering data.<sup>2</sup>

## What is “Freedom Technology?”

1. *Free Software* — These are computer programs released under a “Free Software License” which permits users to 1) study the program and understand how it functions (access to the source code is a precondition for this), 2) run the program in the way they see fit, by either configuring it or modifying the source code, 3) distributing copies of the source code to benefit the community and distributing the source code with your own modifications to benefit the community.

Why is this important? Because non-free software, proprietary software, controls its users, not the other way around.<sup>3</sup> Even those that aren't built for (outwardly) malicious purposes are harmful to one's material conditions [and even their mind]. Some are even set up in such a way to manipulate user behavior to maximize profits at the [expense of the end-user].

Even in a more down-to-earth scenario, what if you need a certain piece of software for work? Would you rather pay a monthly fee for it, seeing as how the trend is to turn everything into a subscription?<sup>4</sup> Say that the monthly payments aren't a big problem. But what happens if the company goes under? Free Software gets around this by encouraging people to run software on their own machines, or in the case of network applications, run their own servers for these same services.

How do we help address this? By encouraging people to use free software instead of their proprietary counterparts. By helping them get set up properly and become productive in it. Some proprietary software might be better, yes. Most free software projects are volunteer- and user-lead initiatives, after all. Using and contributing to the development of free software is a political act. One that screams to the world: “The entirety of human ingenuity is the birthright of all of humanity.”

2. *Free Hardware* — Similar to the above, but for hardware. These can be built, ran, modified and repaired without being limited by outside entities.

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, “Capital, Volume One” (1867), Chapter Twenty-Seven, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch27.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Lorraine Boissoneault, “A 1938 Nazi Law Forced Jews to Register Their Wealth—Making It Easier to Steal” (Apr 26, 2018), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/1938-nazi-law-forced-jews-register-their-wealthmaking-it-easier-steal-180968894/>

<sup>3</sup> Free Software Foundation, “Proprietary Software Is Often Malware”, <https://www.gnu.org/proprietary/proprietary.html>

<sup>4</sup> Richard Stallman, “What Does That Server Really Serve?” (2010), <http://www.gnu.org/philosophy/who-does-that-server-really-serve.html>

Consider how mobile phones are black boxes with so many hidden processes running underneath. Consider how, because Google or Apple would stop releasing updates<sup>5</sup> for older devices<sup>6</sup> forcing people to replace perfectly good older devices with newer ones even though we don't need more stuff anymore.<sup>7</sup> This is Planned Obsolescence.

Consider how with each passing year, it is getting harder and harder to get our electronics repaired, with mega-corporations like Apple leading the charge in making their devices easier to replace than repair.<sup>8</sup> In the belly of the beast in the United States, older tractors are experiencing a resurgence in popularity because of how difficult (not to mention expensive) it is to repair the newer "smart" tractors in the market today.<sup>9</sup>

We must aid in the struggle to combat these "tyrants," as the Free Software Foundation calls these machines, as they don't just trap end-users into a cycle of buy-break-buy with the manufacturers. But also because this trend of extending the ability of corporations, and by extension, governments, to control the use of machines remotely or influence the repairability of these machines brings the logic of landlordism into our digital activities. Imagine needing to pay a monthly fee for something you already physically have.<sup>10</sup> Or that you can't use your car or motorcycle for work because you can't get it repaired at the local mechanic because doing so would lock the car's onboard computer up, or for the simple fact that only the manufacturer has access to the parts and tools to repair it? Imagine having to give another portion of your income to the various hardware manufacturers that made the tools you need to earn a living. We cannot allow these practices to take over our lives any more than they already have in the past.

3. *Free Communications* — This refers to being able to communicate without limits or surveillance by outside entities.

Ever notice how every town, city, group of friends or a workplace has these little in-jokes, their own culture, their own ways of remembering places and events? That when you're a newcomer, it's usually pretty daunting and difficult to figure out how to fit in? The predecessors of the web, BBS's and Newsgroups, were like this, and were fairly self-regulating organizations, but were harder to monetize. The success of social networking sites and the trend towards aggressive tracking algorithms destroyed the "localness" of these early internet communities, what anthropologist James C. Scott calls "The Vernacular,"<sup>11</sup> in exchange for an internet that can be easily tapped for revenue.

The chaos of the early internet was catalogued, labeled and studied. The people using it were divided along the lines of fandoms and shared consumption, as opposed to the more organic relations. Cultivated identities<sup>12</sup> became the norm. People who already enjoy the same things tended to be more excited about newer products from the same line if you put them in the same place, after all.

Labels for the trees only benefit the logger.

And it's not just money you can harvest them for, too. The mid-2010's saw the rise of right wing populists and dictatorships riding the wave of concentrated bigotry and prejudice that only social media could create.<sup>13</sup> Our very own national Embarrassment-in-Chief, Rodrigo Duterte, admits to have made heavy use of online propaganda mills during the 2016 election.<sup>14</sup> Attention is currency in the marketplace of ideas.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Stever Ranger, "Android security warning: One billion devices no longer getting updates" (Mar 6, 2020), <https://www.zdnet.com/article/android-security-warning-one-billion-devices-no-longer-getting-updates/>

<sup>6</sup> Adrian Kingsley-Hughes, "iOS 13 likely to drop support for a lot of older hardware" (May 16, 2019), <https://www.zdnet.com/article/ios-13-likely-to-drop-support-for-a-lot-of-older-hardware/>

<sup>7</sup> Aklas.xyz, "Refuse!, or There's enough stuff in Circulation for ALL" (May 25, 2020), <https://aklas.xyz/refuse/>

<sup>8</sup> Mark Frauenfelder, "Apple discourages iPhone self-repair with a dirty trick" (Aug 8, 2019), <https://boingboing.net/2019/08/08/apple-discourages-iphone-self.html>

<sup>9</sup> Adam Belz, "For tech-weary Midwest farmers, 40-year-old tractors now a hot commodity" (Jan 5, 2020), <https://www.startribune.com/for-tech-weary-midwest-farmers-40-year-old-tractors-now-a-hot-commodity/566737082/>

<sup>10</sup> Chris Davies, "Mellow sous-vide owners get unwelcome subscription surprise" (Jul 7, 2020), <https://www.slashgear.com/mellow-sous-vide-owners-get-unwelcome-subscription-surprise-27630842/>

<sup>11</sup> James C. Scott, "Two Cheers for Anarchism" (2012), <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/james-c-scott-two-cheers-for-anarchism#toc12>

<sup>12</sup> APS, "Intervention on the Filipino Mindspace: Identity and Belonging in an age of Social Media" (Feb 28, 2020), <https://bandilangitim.noblogs.org/2020/02/28/intervention-on-the-filipino-mindspace-identity-and-belonging-in-an-age-of-social-media/>

<sup>13</sup> Angela Giuffrida, "The populist social media playbook: the battle for Facebook, Twitter and Instagram" (Dec 17, 2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/17/populist-social-media-playbook-who-is-best-facebook-twitter-instagram-matteo-salvini-narendra-modi>

<sup>14</sup> John Paolo Bencito, "Duterte admits paying trolls for 2016 elections" (Jul 26, 2017), <https://manilastandard.net/mobile/article/242853>

<sup>15</sup> Peter Coffin, <https://twitter.com/petercoffin/status/926633333714452481?lang=en>

We've mentioned earlier how the struggle against corporate and government surveillance comes from the fears of using that information against their customers, workers and citizens similar to what happened in Nazi Germany. So far we have only been talking about a passive power that comes from online surveillance, that of influencing the behavior of other people. But there is also a more immediate and tangible risk with organizations in a position of power knowing more about you than you know about them. The Armed Forces of the Philippines has called for extending the coverage of the Anti-Terror Law (ATL) to social media, which would've allowed them to more aggressively monitor and arrest people based on their online activities.<sup>16</sup> The official line is that the ATL cannot be used on social media,<sup>17</sup> but they've already been arresting people under the provisions of the cyber-libel law, so it's not unreasonable to think that the government would escalate this trend.

It is in our best interests, immediately as radicals and generally as a society, to move as much of our communications into not only encrypted channels, but also using infrastructure that we control. This means three things:

1. Learning how to use PGP encryption for email, Signal or Matrix for instant messaging and using alternative search engines such as duckduckgo.com for finding things online. Other projects providing access to non-commodified internet services include nolog.cz, anarchyplanet.org, framasoft.org, riseup.net, autistici.org, and of course, nothing beats self-hosting your own servers. However, these services, especially self-hosting, may require more effort on the part of the users to set up, and set up securely. This is why it is vital that there forms a community of class-conscious tech workers that can help facilitate the transfer to using and operating these tools and services.
2. Using federated or decentralized alternatives to social media like Mastodon, Lemmy and other community-run projects. Mainstream services like Gmail, Facebook and Twitter are all centralized, meaning, only one organization has control over the network in which people communicate. Facebook owns your posts, and so does Twitter, and can control who sees and doesn't see the things you post there. By using services that are inherently decentralized, we can ensure that the operation of the network as a whole is distributed between collaborating entities and organizations. Power over the information they control is shared and distributed, instead of hoarded by a single, faceless megacorporation that can easily sell you out to the cops.
3. Using and building alternative ways to transmit data, either by Packet Data Radio, meshnets, and especially in more remote places in the Philippines, "Sneakernets."<sup>18</sup> Packet Radio and Meshnetworking might be daunting, and for some, it might just be a matter of getting the right hardware. But anyone who can buy cheap flashdrives and some means of getting it to and fro can participate in a sneakernet right now, as anyone who's downloaded and shared around pirated games and movies can tell you. But, at the time of this writing, the world is still in the throes of the COVID19 pandemic. The Philippines in particular, is still under an increasingly militarizing lockdown.<sup>19</sup> Let your comrades write their email drafts and after-action reports offline and upload/send the

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Shaun @shaun\_vids

4 Nov 2017 The left call me a bigot. The right call me a cuck. For me, though, the important thing is that they are both talking about me, and that I am also currently talking about me. Let's keep all the attention on me, folks

@petercoffin

4 Nov 2017

Replying to @shaun\_vids @shaun\_jen

Attention is the currency in the Marketplace of Ideas.

Tweet.

<sup>16</sup> Rambo Talabong, "Social media use should be regulated by anti-terror law – AFP" (Aug 3, 2020), <https://www.rappler.com/nation/afp-chief-gapay-says-social-media-use-should-be-regulated-by-anti-terror-law>

<sup>17</sup> Darryl John Esguerra, "Palace: No provision in anti-terror law that can regulate social media" (Aug 4, 2020), <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1316669/fwd-palace-no-provision-in-anti-terror-law-that-can-regulate-social-media>

<sup>18</sup> We don't have enough space on this particular work to discuss the merits of the "Sneakernet" system, but in brief, it's when you transmit data stored on a physical device, like a Flash Drive, on foot or mail.

<sup>19</sup> Simoun Magsalin, "Abolitionism against pandemic policing in the Philippines" (Sep 4, 2020), <https://bandilangitim.noblogs.org/2020/09/04/abolitionism-against-pandemic-policing-in-the-philippines/#more-791>

files for them. Elaborating on the different ways offline/online networks can be formed is beyond the scope of this work, and will require its own treatment, however.

We are under no delusion that we will be able to overtake the wider internet using these methods, but rather, create spaces where not only can we pursue our passions and self-discovery in peace, but also a staging area from which to launch an organized resistance.

## **How do we go about doing this?**

As I write this, I am a part of a publishing collective that is working to get anarchist and libertarian socialist theory become more popular in the Philippines. Anarchism as a distinct political ideology has only returned to the Philippines in the early 1990's after it was wiped out back during the American occupation. The people of that older milieu have either retired from the public and revolutionary scene, or have adopted a more lifestyle mode of activism, preferring to "live" their anarchism than organize along social issues.

The new crop of libertarian socialists and anarchists of is more engaged with social organization as well as the tools of the current information age. Because of the toils of daily life, people are forced into some level of specialization, activists and radicals are no different. What we need to do is to find more groups of a similar tendency to ours, or those already halfway there. Finding the others, form a community of anarchist hackers, socialist coders, democratic developers, etc.

With this network of talent formed, we will become better equipped to deal with the security and technological requirements of pursuing the class struggle in the present day, with the collective knowledge of the group being an order of magnitude greater than of an individual. Being a thing in-and-of-itself, we can also pursue the rough sketch of the agenda I've outlined above and more.

## **But, why?**

Two reasons:

The first is that I am seeing so many activists and even some members of subversive groups doing organizing work on platforms like Facestalk and that annoying blue bird. While nothing is wrong with putting out propaganda material out in the open like that, that's where all of the people are after all, especially during the pandemic. What grinds my gears is that they also do coordination and organization on these same platforms. It's any state intelligence officer's dream, all of that information, conveniently available from a single FB group's members list. Digital technologies are becoming more and more integrated into our daily lives with each passing day, even out in the countryside. If we are going to win, or at least not end up in a military torture chamber out in the middle of nowhere, we have to act accordingly.

The second is that in a more general sense, the cat is out of the bag. People now walk around with the equivalent of several supercomputers from 50 years ago in their pockets. The entire knowledgebase of humanity recorded up to the present is available at the click of a button. Society changes by the relationships and interactions that form and occur within it. If we are to believe that, then technology adds a new layer of interaction within society, if not completely mediating all of them. Witness the boom online shopping has experienced the past three years. This gives those who control the platforms built on digital technology an immense amount of power, one to rival entire nations, even. And if the present day is to be any indicator, having all this power in the hands of such a vanishingly small amount of hands is not a good sign.

***There is no going back.***

All that's left now is to make sure that the left, and those who believe that power should not be in the hands of a few make sure that the equipment to process information (hardware), the methods of processing information (software), and the transmission of information (the internet) be controlled by those who build and use them, and not those who seek to benefit off of simply owning them, the digital feudal lords of our age.

The Luddites, a term that has come to mean someone who is anti-technology or otherwise reluctant to participate in, came from the name of a protest movement specifically attacking machines that were operated in a “fraudulent and deceitful manner” from 1811 to 1816 in England. “Fraudulent and deceitful” here means factory owners who used machinery to circumvent labor laws and remove jobs from the workforce because they were rendered obsolete by the automation of the time.<sup>20</sup> The average Luddite was one who knew how to build and operate the mechanical looms and other machines in the textile industry. So when the owners of the factories and workshops decided these same workers have become too costly and obsolete in the face of this new tech, the Luddites were also the best equipped to sabotage and destroy them. They weren’t backwards people who hated technological development on principle, they were against the use of technology that would leave them and those they love starving because they’re out of work. That’s a struggle I can get behind any day of the week.

Torches and pitchforks won’t work this time around... But encryption and DIY measures just might. But only works if there’s a lot of us.

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Conniff, “What the Luddites Really Fought Against” (March, 2011), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/what-the-luddites-really-fought-against-264412/>

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