

Facebook versus Citizens

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Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

A wonderfully written recent article on the ethics of Facebook Inc provoked me to think about my own position. It's oft said in defence of the software that Facebook is a forum for progressive public debate, an ideal and desirable stimulus for democracy. So I was pleased the article stimulated a lively exchange of ideas on a contentious issue, the ethics of Facebook itself.

During the unprecedented, wild explosion of Facebook's popularity, it had a revolutionary vibe. By 2018, political scandal had engulfed the company and Facebook vs The People hit the high court in the USA, stoking public concern over how much power the business has. Nonetheless, Zuckerberg is teflon-skinned, at least in the elite privilege networks he moves in, because they are acting as if, and telling us that, Facebook is socially responsible, acts lawfully, and is not a threat to democracy. In all truth, the fact Facebook successfully established the "publisher" defence in court (Wikileaks?) suggests that its primary function as corporate spyware is left unmentioned, intact, and beyond the purview of public scrutiny. In all truth, the only revolutionary thing about Facebook is it has upgraded the ability of the powers that be to repress dissent, especially powerful dissent spawned on Facebook itself.

Like every revolution, Facebook had its cadre, its battle, its legacy. Like every revolution, the cadre was purged, the battle turned downwards, the legacy? Propaganda. By stealth, the undemocratic vanguard of Facebook enacted policies to accrue more power, more wealth, and became an ossified nomenclatura that cultivate, fiercely protect class privileges. Like Stalin being bestowed praise in *Pravda*, Zuckerberg is given laurels in *Time*, his eerie face a reminder of who is officially the great man of our times. Like Stalin in the USSR, he is the primary political Titan and heavyweight behind the facile facade of popular democracy. In 1917 the revolution was red, its slogan "Bread and Peace." In 2018 the revolution is hollowed of soul and substance by a blue collar, data age enterprise, indoctrinating people to think they care about meaningful "connection" before capital, or people, before profit.

Commentators call the data age the fourth industrial revolution. Borne aloft by the rapid global expansion of processes of digitisation and artificial intelligence, the fourth industrial revolution has had vast effects on the economy, the means of production and society at large, blurring the distinction between the digital and physical. Evidently this has had a profound effect on social relations and power dynamics. At once liberating the best and worst instincts in humanity, the means of informational production contains the possibility of liberation today, but in the hands of anti-democratic incumbent elites in politics, business and law enforcement, it deepens and broadens the vassalage relations of feudalism and capitalism by affording elites the power of surveillance, which is an easy way to regulate modes of thought and behaviour to conform to their agenda.

Such unethical psychological and behavioural manipulation was a key strategy of the well documented, but scarcely understood, partnership between Cambridge Analytica, a sordid global lobbying consultancy, and social media. The presidential and Leave-the EU campaigns represent many millions spent on completely manufactured demands: Trump's policies and Brexit.

The sad truth of where power lies in politics today is that Cambridge Analytica didn't work for political campaigns. The political campaigns really worked for Cambridge Analytica, because Trump's and Leave's roles were — perhaps unknowingly — not to be borne aloft to victory by underlings at the firm but to act as stooges to rally, recruit more and more citizens to be crunched in the firm's matrix and spat out as a model voter, pliable citizen and captive consumer, a purpose for which corporate information management has been using political campaigns for well over a decade.

Data, advertising and social media companies already have long established and vastly more significant income revenues from the constant use of their software by other means than having to depend on single political commissions to get by. A commission like Trump's or Leave's merely sanctions the act of harvest, a mass reaping. Corporate data management portfolios have, over time, edged closer and closer to the architecture of political power, to the extent the two are fast becoming indistinct, a single power complex.

Silicon Valley is increasingly deployed as a strategist, and in turn campaigns enrol them to lobby us in such a way as to recreate our "psycho geographic profile" to fit their model. The idea of elections in days gone past was that, accepting of course it fast became the norm not all candidates abided to the norm, that candidates nonetheless made an earnest pledge for a mandate on which they would be judged by the public and ultimately be rewarded or punished at the ballot box, not that the electoral process would become a spectacle in which dishonest promotions to audiences would be used to nudge and steer them towards well advertised ideas.

Why has this change occurred? The advent of transnational informational capitalism meant centralised hierarchical networks of IT experts like Silicon Valley could pursue their own selfish agenda, namely self enrichment, the most direct and obvious means to that end being to sell the data we so willingly impart within their software within a culture of what I call "consensual coercion" that has taken over our lives. That is, a lifestyle of unnecessary transparency that is promoted to us through social media and, longing for acceptance, we do it, cultivated, nurtured, fed by big business. Lots of companies have high stakes in our penchant for carelessness with data and have long sought for us to give it up by latent or patent means.

To understand the *raison d'être* of Cambridge Analytica and, by proxy, contemporary political campaigns we have to move backwards to the inception of consumer psychology, the art and science of manipulating the minds, emotions and desires of citizens to generate intended economic outcomes.

As partisan wings of the liberal media stage manage and rehearse their response to the Cambridge Analytica scandal to get their verdict on which breach was worse in first, to best frame events to the advantage of their partisan agenda, the world becomes ever more deceived and confused about precisely how far, how deep, how rancid the rotten corruption runs. Scapegoating Trump alone for the scandal not only ludicrously attributes the misuse of the politics and economy of information management — based on complex mathematical

modelling and research — to him, but moreover overlooks the social and historical context of these revelations, which implicates the politico-corporate infrastructure of silicon valley in a vast conspiracy against the people.

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