(handwritten margin notes, upper left)
- HALF OF ALL AMERICANS HAVE A POSITIVE VIEW OF CAPITALISM, WHILE 40% REACT NEGATIVELY TO THE TERM.
- 49% OF PEOPLE UNDER 30 THOUGHT POSITIVELY ABOUT SOCIALISM IN 2011.
- 2016 WAS THE FIRST TRUE SOCIAL MEDIA CIRCUS, AHEM, HE MEANS ELECTION.

REVOLUTIONARY TECH

HOW THE DIGITAL WORLD IS SHAPING THE POLITICAL FUTURE

by Katie Fustich

THE DISPATCH BY FOLK REBELLION

According to Karl Marx's seminal text, The Communist Manifesto, a successful socialist society can only be born at the hands of a revolution. "In place of the old bourgeois society with its classes and class antagonisms," he writes, "we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." By his logic, such a social upheaval is necessary in order to wipe away traces of capitalism and redistribute wealth and power in an egalitarian manner.

With more than 50% of today's youth in the United States openly rejecting capitalism, as reported by The Washington Post in 2016, and an increasing number of self-identified socialists and communists in the political arena, as evidenced by a 2016 report in The Guardian, Marx's call for revolution appears more relevant than ever.

As capitalism struggles to continue to support itself, and the number straining to exist under its conditions reaches critical mass, one can't help but wonder what revolutions the future will bring. And, even more curiously, what these revolutions will look like.

Ask any political organizer of the last ten years, and they will tell you that technology has proved to be a vital tool in rallying support for grassroots movements from socialism to the Tea Party. For leftist ideologies, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, and Instagram profiles built around these ideas are more visible than ever. There is even a "Sassy Socialist Memes" page on Facebook, for those seeking a bit of Marx-based comedic relief. Such a network ensures that those with specific political goals are able to connect with each other, and those with political curiosities are capable of participating in a community that may not be readily available in their "real" life.

The ever-expanding online world allows for the construction of proto-Marxist/socialist societies in a virtual space. For example, one could consider a project like Wikipedia—an entirely community-edited encyclopedia that has thrived for 16 years—a massive success of online socialist thinking; Paul Mason's Postcapitalism: a Guide to Our Future explains how the human, not economic, benefit of Wikipedia makes it an anomaly in capitalist society. The grassroots, small-donation based funding of Democratic-Socialist Bernie Sanders's presidential campaign is another snapshot of this thinking in virtual action. The events of the Arab Spring offered a portrait of technology's use for large-scale revolution.

What complicates the leftist possibilities of technology is the fact that most high-tech entities—everything from the iPhone to the Tweet—have strong, perhaps irreconcilable, pro-capitalist ties, either in the form of incorporation, company leadership, or company policy. It's a curious thought experiment to imagine whether something like Facebook could exist in a full-fledged socialist society. It's unlikely many tools that modern-day leftists use today could exist in their present states if society did, in fact, shift to one that is not reliant on capitalism.

Take Facebook as an example. Facebook's reliance on capitalistic competition—to be the best, biggest, and singular source for one's interpersonal relationships and interaction with the media—also makes it the most central platform for many individuals hoping to organize around an anti-capitalist agenda. It's murky water: using a capitalist tool for anti-capitalist purposes may feel like a clever exploitation of the system but, at the same time, it is evidence of how difficult it can be to disconnect from the comforts of capitalist society one is theoretically working to deconstruct.

Another downside to technology, and to social media, in particular, is the passivity it allows its participants. It seems possible that so many individuals presently identify with leftist ideologies because online interactions make doing so a straightforward experience. Even interacting with the aforementioned Sassy Socialist Memes page is likely to fill someone with a sense that they are on the right side of history. But when the Democratic Socialists of America boast more than 141,000 likes on their page on Facebook but claim just 31,000 in actual membership, the problematic nature of this divide is clear. A political movement is impossible when such a significant portion of its would-be supporters are unwilling to exist outside of the confines of an online space.

Despite the uniqueness of today's technology-rooted issues, perhaps answers to said issues could be found in reflecting on the upheavals of the past. The autumn of 2017 marks the 100th anniversary of the October Revolution—an insurgence of Russian Marxist workers, lead by Vladimir Lenin, that succeeded in installing a temporary socialist government. Today, a mention of Lenin and company is likely to raise a few eyebrows, or elicit an anti-Bolshevik lecture. Yet, those who study Marxism, be

it on an academic or personal interest basis, look at the events of the October Revolution with a more discerning eye, taking the greater picture of Russian society into account. While not offering a repeatable example, the actions of the October Revolution serve as an enduring reminder of what is possible when ideals are transformed into action.

At present, it feels as though the world is buzzing with the same revolutionary energy found in these early 20th-century Bolsheviks. People are eager for change and are involving themselves in the political process. The danger—to both ourselves and to the cause—comes when resistance is viewed as an end goal. So often in the past, movements have failed because the bulk of energy was placed into the organizing of the movement itself, and not into the world following the movement's success. We see this even today with events like the 2016 Women's March. Organizers were capable of rallying millions of women across the country, and while many brought their own agendas to the March, the event ultimately left many with lingering questions of what could have been had the organizers been more goal-oriented.

It seems fair to say that, whatever the shape of the vessel, change is coming. Capitalism is standing on shaky, weakened legs—simply read The Atlantic's 2017 reference guide to "late-stage capitalism"—and the revolutionaries are ready in the wings. Technology will no doubt play a major part in future political changes, and it already is—studies such as The Millennial Impact Project continue to concretize the connection between technology and activism. And while previous revolutions have succeeded with much less force and forethought, the large-scale organizing allowed by tools of mass communications may, finally, make way for the establishment of a peaceful, sustainable, leftist future. One need only respond to the friend request of progress.

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- 70% OF PEOPLE WHO ATTENDED THE DC WOMEN'S MARCH HEARD ABOUT IT ON FACEBOOK.
+ CHECK OUT THE WASHINGTON POST PIECE "A MAJORITY OF MILLENNIALS NOW REJECT CAPITALISM, POLL SHOWS".
△ OR JUST SKIM OVER THE PEW POLL.
+ SCROLL THROUGH @ SASSYSOCIALISTMEMES.
▣ GOOGLE THE ARTICLE "WHY ARE THERE SUDDENLY MILLIONS OF SOCIALISTS IN AMERICA?" FROM THE GUARDIAN.
- READ "WHY THE PHRASE 'LATE CAPITALISM' IS SUDDENLY EVERYWHERE" IN THE ATLANTIC.