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Elon Musk is trolling on twitter. A celebrity billionaire wasting his time making inane provocations would hardly be worthy of note but in the process Musk has declared that his politics are in line with Iain Banks' anarcho-transhumanist utopia and that he aspires to see a world of direct democracy. There's few spectacles like a billionaire in a labor dispute essentially fronting as a proponent of fully automated luxury communism. Yet when a number of his statements wander close to left wing market anarchist takes it may be worth responding.

In particular I want to focus on the line, *"Socialism vs capitalism is not even the right question. What really matters is avoiding monopolies that restrict people's freedom."*

There's a lot to pick apart here, and it's not remotely clear how much historical context Musk is aware of. Free market libertarians like Bastiat sat on the left of the French assembly and many advocates of free markets that modern Libertarians see as forefathers like Lysander Spooner and Benjamin Tucker considered themselves and were seen as socialists. There is a long and storied

history of those who would problematize the terms "socialist" or "libertarian" and "capitalism" or "markets", putting forth myriad conflicting definitions and frameworks, each in hopes of illuminating something lost in partisan tribalism.

But Musk is a billionaire and in any coherent libertarian analysis a plutocrat whose success is in no small part dependent upon his collaboration with the state. Most self-identified socialists, not to mention the chattering classes of twitter, despise him.

There are basically three core claims widely made against Musk. 1) That he occupies a tyrannical position over his workers. 2) That the seed wealth that enabled him to become a billionaire in the first place was unjustly acquired. 3) That his act of holding onto his wealth in the face of far more beneficial investments is unethical.

It's this latter charge that I want to explore, in part because the former are so clear cut. But let's hit them briefly: Musk faces charges of unsafe conditions and terrible demands at his plants. And despite his attempts to sound open to unionization Tesla has harassed, intimidated, and fired workers for expressing pro union sentiments. He claims workers prefer to have no negotiating capacity, supposedly recognizing the benevolent benefits of his absolute dictatorship, and yet in the same breath Musk has threatened workers' benefits should they unionize and recently initialized mass layoffs without warning. Musk has started to claim he built his fortune from pocket change, but it's worth remembering that as a teenager, his white south african family was so rich Musk casually walked around with emeralds in his pocket. One is reminded of nothing so much as Trump's claim that he built his fortune of a *mere* few million dollar loan from his dad (and countless risk assurances). I've known single mothers that worked longer hours and homeless heroin addicts that made smarter stock investments, but below a certain threshold of wealth the barriers are just too great. Musk has some talent and commitment, to be sure, but he has hardly made his fortune in fair competition with the billions without his privilege of birth.

money at open source hardware projects that face incredible barriers to entry in the market?

There are countless unsung heroes around the world working tirelessly to combat power, to erode the centralized systems that constrain freedom. And most of them do it without trying to accumulate yachts. What they understand is that heroism isn't a zero sum game. We can each of us revolutionize the world, we can each find exploits to change everything. The anarchist insight is that the most potent and lasting change comes from the bottom up, rather than being imposed from the top down.

Figures like Lenin will never see this, so enraptured are they with their own status, their own profile, their own absolute rulership, their own brand-building. And so trapped are they in the same cycle of false opposition, the empty revolutions that are structured to merely replace one monopoly with another. Many of the radical science fiction authors Musk claims to love knew this, but it sadly seems to be a lesson he failed to grasp.

tunism or innocent ignorance. Yet if I had to the opportunity to turn his ear I would encourage him not just to fight monopolistic power within his own organizations by allowing and collaborating with unionization efforts, but to invest more of that wealth on projects that Iain Banks would actually recognize as anarchistic.

Hey Elon, why not donate a million dollars to something like the IWW, a scrappy, idealistic & anti-state union that organizes where no other union will go? It's nothing to you and will affect the lives of thousands while enabling labor to help compete against giant corporate monopolies. It'll rile the commies on twitter and maybe allow Grimes to show her face in public, but mostly it'll help real existing people.

I ask sincerely.

If you need more examples we at C4SS have helped coordinate donations to a host of small highly efficient activist efforts before and we can point you towards myriad projects like community centers, mesh wifi projects, indigenous radio stations, etc. I'm not interested in showboating or tribal purity. I'd take a million dollars from the devil if I could redistribute it to the tens of thousands of activists working themselves to the bone around the world, using the smallest scraps of income to make a huge difference in combating power and expanding the freedom of everyday people. You want to talk about effective altruism? Small direct payments to activists across the global south who already work for free and stretch what funds they have to absurd lengths are by far the most efficient means of seeding liberty. No NGO bureaucratic oversight and a fierce anarchist resistance to corrupt state regimes that would try to steal those funds.

You want to talk about decentralizing infrastructure? Throw some of that money at the cypherpunks and hackers keeping cryptographic tools and free software afloat. I'm dead certain that your company depends upon cryptographic libraries that are maintained on a shoestring budget by a small number of idealists. You want to talk about resisting monopolies? How about throwing

But however you acquire wealth, once you have it there is a certain ethical obligation to wield it towards good ends.

Fans of Musk argue that he has done precisely this. The most common refrain is "*look he may not be perfect, but he's the only person with a shot at getting us to Mars*." There is, I will concede, a rather potent utilitarian argument that getting our species out into the stars is worth almost any price. This is an evaluation that weighs the potential lives of trillions of future people against the living today, that says we should do anything to ensure the survival and spread of the only known consciousness in the universe. But it is decidedly unclear that Elon Musk is truly our best shot at such. It is true that his wealth has enabled Space X to make serious strides, but it's hardly like the the scientists, engineers, and general workers of Space X didn't share such a vision before Musk. Rather, his wealth enabled them to get started. As a staunch proponent of our expansion to the stars I will happily concede that Space X is a more ethical investment than gold plated bath tubs. But these are hardly the only options.

Musk talks of supporting direct democracy, yet his projects are run tyrannically, hyper-centralized around him. One basic insight of free market economists is that there are limits to knowledge and calculation — in particular limits to what a single central planner is capable of. Musk may be talented, he may work 80 hour weeks, but he is limited, and a hierarchical centralized organizational structure is deeply inefficient, never mind the psychological damage it does. Indeed many of the early problems Tesla faced were reportedly a result of Musk suddenly showing up to make unilateral decisions while being stretched too thin to be constantly involved in every nook and cranny. In short his tyrannical position within the firm became an organizational bottleneck. They may have been insightful decisions, but Musk's distance from the shop floor and the absoluteness of his power caused deep organizational problems. Even the most intelligent and committed Soviet planner, running himself ragged attempting to oversee everything, will cause deep

inefficiencies. This is part of the reason why, when the playing field is fair, worker cooperatives do so damn well.

Musk talks of "decentralization" — of avoiding monopolies — and this is valorous, but anarchism extends deeper than the mere opposition to monopolies per se; anarchism opposes power, domination. Combating monopolies or oligopolies is necessary but not sufficient, because hugely abusive and scarring or enslaving power can exist in diffuse structures as well. Systemic racism for example, or normalized spousal abuse. But more to the point, an upstart firm may shatter an existing oligopolistic market, but itself reproduce the same structures it claims to oppose. Not just in terms of market position, but especially in terms of the firm's internal structure — the hierarchical and abusive organizational norms that the existing oligopoly was able to establish and defend.

There is a widespread tendency in silicon valley to diagnose the problems of the world in terms of centralization alone, and thus to fall into a kind of naive support for any and all underdog competitors.

In its most pernicious variant this looks like the neoreactionary prescription to shatter existing polities down to smaller competitive governments. As if small town police can't be more intimately oppressive and as though a single right of exit can supplant deeper issues with bargaining power or enable fluid responsiveness. Musk's ostensible support for direct democracy is better — although anarchists still have a critique of democracy — but his comments focusing on *monopoly* are suggestive of a broader naivety or get-out-of-ethics card for himself, so long as he can cast himself as an underdog to a bigger monopoly.

The naive decentralist take uncritically defends any and all upstarts to the dominant powers. The taxi medallion system for instance was one of the most abusive and horrifically clear-cut instances of state created capitalism, an almost feudal order, maintained by the state to the benefit of a few capitalists. Socialist taxi organizers were clear that the root injustice was the state's regulatory regime. Uber was able to leverage titanic investment wealth to fight and erode this unjust order, but it also utilized that capital to cement its position as a new monopoly, a rent-seeking middleman between drivers and riders. Consistent libertarians, anarchists, and socialists supported the overthrow of the medallion regime while *also* warning of the monopoly Uber was trying to establish. But throughout silicon valley culture Uber was presented as a noble upstart.

This story is replicated widely where new "disruptive" would be tyrants end up replacing those they set out to overthrow. What much of the self-congratulatory rhetoric in silicon valley amounts to in practice is a horde of Lenins out to overthrow Czars, but with barely concealed hunger to seize power for themselves.

Freedom, if it is to come, must come through their benevolence. Just don't ask when.

Musk might claim that his ends are socialistic in some utopian sense, but it's his means that give him the closest parallel to the tyrannies of "actually existing socialism." And those libertarians that cheer him on are much like those socialists that cheer on the despotic regimes of Assad or Kim under the illusion that these geopolitical underdogs in competition with the US empire represent the only practical hope of resistance.

I want to be clear: I'm as sympathetic to Musk's ostensible ends as you could ask for. We at the Center for a Stateless Society have studiously worked for over a decade to get past past the gridlock of socialist and libertarian rhetoric, to parse the value of markets and an egalitarian world of possibility where cancerous monopolies or oligopolies of capital don't constrain our freedoms. We come from a long and rich history of left libertarian crossover, of left market anarchists.

But there are a world of means that do not replicate the structures we seek to replace.

I cannot know the level of sincerity to Musk's comments, whether the obvious contradictions arise out of malicious oppor-