D E M O C R A T I C C O M M U N I Q U É

# The Alt-Right's Platformization of Fascism and a New Left's Digital United Front

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*Platforms constitute a political communications battlespace in which a plurality of social actors—from Left to Right—struggle for recognition and attention, try to organize consent to their ideologies, and seek to influence how people think and behave. In the spirit of this special issue's investigation of the tactical political uses of new media to bring about social change, this article demonstrates how contemporary platforms are a space of battle, fought over by the alt-right's white nationalist fascists and a new Left's "digital united front." Drawing upon numerous examples of fascist and antifascist tactical interventions across the platforms, this article is optimistic that the power of the alt-right to win hearts and minds may be waning due to the growth and widespread support for the Left's digital united front. To this end, this article's first section contextualizes the revival of the hard Right's "authoritarian populism" under the auspices of the US Trump presidency and defines the contemporary "alt-right." The article's second section surveys the alt-right's political uses of platforms, and highlights some of these platforms' affordances to the alt-right's reach and ideological influence. The third section conceptualizes the Left's "digital united front," and catalogues some of its tactics for countering platform fascists: no-platforming, doxing, video ideology critique, and memes. This article's overview of the alt-right's platformization of fascism and the Left's digital united front is not comprehensive, but aims to highlight some salient instances of "what's being done" by the alt-right to platform fascism, and "what's being done" by the Left to disrupt this threat. By scrutinizing the alt-right's platformization of fascism and championing the Left's digital united front, this article aims to contribute to knowledge about the politics of tactical media in the age of platforms, and be a praxiological primer for battling the alt-right. The conclusion critically assesses the notion that the US has become a "fascist" country.*

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In the 20th century, the global rise of fascist parties — from Benito Mussolini's Partito Nazionale Fascista ("National Fascist Party") to Adolph Hitler's Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei ("Nazi Party") — was met with local antifascist resistance, both violent and peaceful. On October 4, 1936, thousands of socialists, communists, anarchists, and working class residents of London's East End gathered to shut down the rally and parade by Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists. The ensuing "Battle of Cable Street" involved a large number of people uniting in a street blockade to beat back Oswald's thugs with their fists, rocks, bats, and even pieces of excrement from nearby chamber pots. Skip ahead three years to February 20, 1939, and on the other side of the Atlantic, a large crowd of American antifascists encircled Madison Square Garden in New York City to disrupt a massive meeting of 20,000 American Bund members, of Nazis. In Britain and the USA, antifascists also gave speeches at rallies and produced and distributed media (e.g. newspapers, magazines and pamphlets) that condemned fascism's rise, explained it with regard to capitalism, and called for a movement to go beyond these two fetters on human freedom.

In the 21st century, social conditions are considerably different from those in which history's first fascist movements emerged and captivated and coerced the consent of millions to their rule. Nonetheless, in our time, an openly fascist Right is again on the global march, and it is gaining ground. A few weeks prior to Donald J. Trump's descent down Trump Towers' golden elevator to announce his run for the US presidency, Panitch and Albo (2015, p. x) declared "we are in one of those historical moments" that compels everyone on the Left to "undertake a serious calibration of the political forces amassing on the right." This is certainly the case. Incubated in the aftermath of the 2007-2008 global capitalist crisis, a neo-fascist Right broke in to mainstream politics and news media alongside Trump's bombastic 2016 "Make America Great Again" election campaign, which propelled this billionaire real estate mogul and reality TV celebrity to the commanding heights of the most powerful Empire on the planet. Over the past few years, the radical Right has grown more vehement in its cause and violent in its action, and a significant force in this movement's popularization is the "alt-right." This largely leaderless, somewhat de-centralized and mostly online hate movement is pushing for an authoritarian ethno-state to secure an ill-defined entity called "white European identity" against he supposedly culturally diluting "threat" of non-white Others (Hawley 2017; Nagle 2017; Neiwert 2017; Wendling 2018).

Currently, the historic battle between fascist barbarism and democratic socialism rages on, in the US, in Canada, and worldwide, but what is especially new and different in our era is the digital communications space of the Internet, World Wide Web and social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube in which it is being fought. The Silicon Valley corporations that preside over so much of the global Internet and social networking sites and services advance a contentious new business model called "platform capitalism" (Srnicek 2017). While platforms provide users with opportunities to express their thoughts and feelings, interactively share ideas, selfies and videos with their friends, and virtually commune at a distance, they also exploit them as a source of data in pursuit of their bottom line (Fuchs 2018; Jin, 2017; van Dijck, Poell & De Waal, 2018). Platforms are sometimes imagined to be neutral and passive intermediaries, but in a time when the "world's most valuable resource is no longer oil, but data" (*The Economist* 2017), the infrastructure, mechanisms, algorithms, networks and sites of platforms are consciously designed by their owners to actively collect, analyze, process and monetize user data (Fuchs 2018; Jin 2017; van Dijck, Poell & De Waal, 2018). Apropos "platform capitalism," the

"platform has emerged as a new business model, capable of extracting and controlling immense amounts of data" about users, commercializing this data and parlaying it into profit (Srnicek 2017, p. 6). Concomitantly, these platforms constitute a political communications battlespace in which a plurality of social actors—from left to right—struggle for recognition and attention, try to organize consent to their ideologies, and seek to influence how people think and behave.

This article focuses on the recent convergence of platform capitalism with the movements, propagandists and ideologies of the alt-right, and also, highlights how Left actors are confronting and challenging the alt-right through the platforms. While platforms are routinely used by the alt-right to freely produce, spread and consume hateful and racist content that threatens the psychological and physical well-being of others, this article will show how the current merger of Facebook with fascists, Twitter with the new terror, and YouTube with "race war" is being resisted by a plurality of actors that constitute a "digital united front." In the spirit of this special issue's investigation of the tactical political uses of new media to bring about social change, this article demonstrates how contemporary platforms are a space of battle, fought over by the alt-right's fascists and the Left's "digital united front." Drawing upon numerous examples of fascist and antifascist tactical interventions across the platforms, this article is optimistic that the power of the alt-right to win hearts and minds may be waning due to the growth and widespread support for the Left's digital united front.

To this end, this article's first section contextualizes the revival of the hard Right's "authoritarian populism" under the auspices of the US Trump presidency and defines the contemporary "alt-right." The article's second section surveys the alt-right's political uses of platforms, and highlights some of these platforms' affordances to the alt-right's reach and ideological influence. The third section conceptualizes the Left's "digital united front," and catalogues some of its tactics for countering platform fascists: no-platforming, doxing, video ideology critique, and memes. This article's overview of the alt-right's platformization of fascism and the Left's digital united front in the age of Trump is not comprehensive, but aims to highlight some salient instances of "what's being done" by the alt-right to platform fascism, and "what's being done" by a broad Left to disrupt this threat. By scrutinizing the alt-right's platformization of fascism and championing the Left's digital united front, this article aims to contribute to knowledge about the politics of tactical media in the age of platforms, and be a praxiological primer for battling the alt-right. The conclusion critically assesses the notion that the US has become a "fascist" country.

**"Authoritarian Populism," the Trump Presidency, and the Alt-Right**

In the late 1970s, the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies' director Stuart Hall coined the term "authoritarian populism" to address the politics of Thatcherism in the UK, and to some extent, Reaganism in the US. Hall conceptualized "authoritarian populism" as an ideology and rhetoric that was integral to the New Right's project of undermining the post-war "Keynesian compromise" between labor and capital by winning the consent of mostly white working class people to a new governmental regime that weaved together the free-market fundamentalist or "monetarist" philosophies of Friedrich van Hayek and Milton Friedman with "traditional conservative themes" of "nation, family, duty, authority, standards, and individual self-reliance" as well as meritocratic "competition and personal responsibility for effort and reward" (Hall 1979, p. 17).

In the UK and US, the new Right's "authoritarian populist" discourse buttressed the powers of capital and the State, deflected public attention away from real material conditions—a division between owners and workers, inequality between the rich and the poor, de-unionization, precarious work and so on—and stymied collective solutions to these social problems by creating "moral panics" and distractions, such as the "image of the over-taxed individual, enervated by [racialized] welfare coddling," the subversion of the nuclear family by women's rights and alternative partnering arrangements, the dilution of a "traditional" national culture by immigration and racial integration, and threats to "ordinary people" by local gangs and global terrorists (Hall 1979). With help from this rhetoric, Thatcher and Reagan expanded State "Law & Order" agendas and policing and war-making apparatuses while cutting back public agencies and programs that provisioned social goods. All in all, authoritarian populism helped the Right build a new neoliberal "national consensus" by destroying the "consensus" associated with social democracy (Hall 1979, p. 16).

Following the 2007-2008 global financial crisis, the old Right's "authoritarian populism" was not only revivified but radicalized by new political actors that scapegoated racial and religious minorities and immigrants for social problems stemming from the previous four decades of capitalism and neoliberalism's class project. From the appeal of hard Right politicians (e.g., France's Marine Le Pen, and the Netherlands' Geert Wilders) to the electoral success of openly neo-Nazi parties (e.g., Hungary's Jobbik, Italy's Lega Nord, and Greece's Golden Dawn), to the shocking 2016 election of Trump, the authoritarian populist Right returned to global history with a vengeance, and it has subsequently expanded its influence, in governments, on the streets, in the news, and across the Internet. Around the world, this Right pushes to decimate the "national" redistributive policies and programs of social democracy and delegitimize the "international cosmopolitan" front of neoliberalism. It aims to replace these "residual" and "dominant" formations with an "emergent" ethno-nationalist capitalism that fuses capital to race, race to territory, and territory to state.

In the US, President Trump has brought a powerful authoritarian populist regime to the fore. Trump's campaign for the presidency masterfully exploited the anxiety and angst of working class and petite bourgeois white people by deflecting blame for years of downward mobility, joblessness, and social crisis onto even more socially disenfranchised Black people, Mexican immigrants, Syrian refugees, and Muslims, groups that were supposedly being pandered to by the "liberal elites" and "corrupt" politicians who rule the Wall Street-backed Democratic Party "establishment." Remarkably, Trump, himself an "elite" who inherited a family fortune and who profited from exploitative and often racist and sexist business practices, packaged himself as a man of the "people" and represented himself as a benign leader who would fight the corrupt "elite" (on behalf of certain people), to "Make America Great Again." Trump's presidential win did not cause white supremacy; racism has been part of the United States since it was founded. Nonetheless, Trump's use of cable TV and Twitter to circulate images and messages that pandered to white racists during his run for the White House energized and expanded the reach of this backwards movement. After all, Trump's authoritarian populist bombast struck a chord with white nationalists in the US, and apropos the "Trump effect," worldwide (Neiwert 2017).

As Trump battled for the White House, the alt-right's young lions rallied behind him, hoping that if elected, Trump would use his executive powers to "Make America Great Again" by making their ethno-State come true. As the alt-right congealed around the Trump campaign, it was given the media coverage and visibility it so desperately craved by the edgy journalists who warned the public of its threat, and by the politicians such as Hillary Clinton, who framed Trump and alt-right "deplorables" as one and the same. [D]espite its lack of organization, formal political channels, official candidates or party membership", the alt-right "burst into mainstream consciousness in 2016" (Wendling 2018, p. 3) and its acolytes quickly moved from marginal websites on the political fringes of society, into "mainstream public and political life" (Nagle 2017, p. 27). When Trump won, the alt-right was ecstatic. The former Ku Klux Klan grand wizard David Duke tweeted to his followers: "our people have played a huge role in electing Trump!" Richard Spencer wrapped up a speech celebrating Trump's win by shouting: "Hail Trump, hail our people, hail victory!" The neo-Nazi Andrew Anglin called upon his legion of trolls to intimidate "brown people" and bully anti-Trump liberals until "some of them killed themselves." Trump and the alt-right won the day.

But what exactly is the alt-right? The term "alternative right" was initially coined by the white nationalist Richard Spencer back in 2010, when he founded the website Altright.com. Generally, the alt-right is cross-border network or assemblage of politically radicalized white individuals and groups that see themselves as the vanguard of a struggle to protect and promote a socially constructed (and specious) entity called the "white European race" or "white identity." The alt-right is against non-white immigration and opposed to racial equality and cultural mixing because they perceive this integration to be disempowering to white people and putting them on the path to "white genocide." The alt-right wishes to build a territorial ethno-State that compels all of society's institutions to protect and promote the values of an idealized "white European race" at the expense of all peoples they believe are incompatible with their racial identity (Hawley 2017; Nagle 2017; Neiwert 2017). In this regard, the alt-right is against everyone and everything that supports racial, ethnic, and cultural co-existence in one country. It harks back to the racialist bourgeois nationalism of the past.

For the alt-right, Jews, Muslims, Black people, establishment Democratic and Republican Party politicians, mainstream liberal and conservative pundits, and so-called "cultural Marxist" proponents of "multiculturalism," "social justice" and "political correctness," are "threats" to white people, the "white race" and a white homeland State. This is perhaps why the Southern Poverty Law Centre (2017) defines the alt-right as "a set of far right ideologies, groups and individuals whose core belief is that 'white identity' is under attack by multicultural forces using political correctness and social justice to undermine white people and their civilization." To be sure, some alt-righters call for the "peaceful" removal of non-white people from the US; others more inclined to terrorism and violence openly call for genocide. All in all, the alt-right wishes to smash the remnants of capitalism's "liberal" superstructure, and negate the US's (unrealized) promise of freedom and equality for all people, regardless of their race, gender, class or creed. Clearly, the alt-right is a neo-fascist movement.

The alt-right's centre of gravity is the United States, the global system's economic, military and media superpower (Boyd-Barrett and Mirrlees 2019), and the alt-right's reach extends across borders, linking with likeminded white nationalist and white supremacist groups around the

world. In terms of its demography, the "alt-right" is mostly constituted by white cis gender men, some wealthy, some poor, some in between, but all who adhere to a patriarchy-supporting "toxic masculinity." The alt-right also depends upon women and a "toxic femininity" just as invested in the idea that "whiteness" is "victimized, at risk, and requiring protection" (Gordona 2018). Lauren Southern and Faith Goldy tweet alt-right conspiracy theories such as "cultural Marxism" and live-stream stories about "white genocide." Advocates for "traditional wives" such as Lana Lokteff, Tara McCarthy, and Ayla Stewart, push for "white separatism" on Instagram and launch "white birthing challenges" on YouTube. Amanda Barker, an Imperial Kommander in the Loyal White Knights, spreads fantasies of white dispossession and white empowerment on KKK blogs (Stern 2019). Alt-right women share with their boyfriends, husbands and followers a belief in securing a future for white folk, family, and community that excludes non-white minorities. These women do much unpaid (reproductive) labour for the alt-right men atop the movement, and at the helm of its violence. As Gordona (2018) explains, "for every media report about a white male terrorist who is portrayed as a 'lone wolf' or a 'madman,' there are many untold stories about the women who provide support for, nurture, and connect these groups and individuals."

Whether male and female, young or old, rich, middle class or poor, anyone who identifies with the alt-right perceives themselves to be an agent for and representative of a radical social movement that is protecting and promoting the "racial" interests of supposedly oppressed or victimized "white people." In this respect, adherents to the alt-right are quite vangaurdist. Many of those who live and act through this identity imagine they are on the frontlines of a world-historic struggle for the future. But white supremacism has always been part of US history, so the alt-right is mostly "old wine in new bottles." After all, the US territorial State was founded by white colonial settlers and racist slavers. And white power groups—the Ku Klux Klan, the American Nazi Party, and the National Alliance—have always existed, in the post-Civil War Jim Crow era, in the age of Civil Rights, and in our time too.

The "alt-right" nonetheless represents itself as a novel "alternative" to history's earlier white power movements. Using the moniker of the alt-right, its adherents distinguish themselves from "establishment" Republicans and "mainstream" conservatives, which they malign as "cuckservatives" who have been co-opted by some (fantastical) "Jewish globalist multicultural elite" or see as dupes of an "anti-white" agenda." Additionally, by dressing like small business suburbanite conservatives, or by fashioning themselves as urban hipsters, many on the alt-right have produced a new style for white power distinct from the Klan robe-wearing and swastika tattoo-bearing hate mongers of the past. The alt-right has "rebranded" white power for a new generation of disaffected, destitute and disgruntled white people, and this rebranding has camouflaged what is at the core, an authoritarian ideology and racist movement to radically change society for the worse.

The alt-right's militancy for a white ethno-State threatens the foundations of liberal (bourgeois) democracy, its actions terrorize already vulnerable minorities, and its ideology undermines intersectional solidarity. The alt-right pits ethnicity against ethnicity, man against woman, and worker against worker, and it perpetuates biologically essentialist and simplistic notions of race, gender, and class hierarchies. It affronts the collective potential of the human species and is a fetter on social progress. It draws vital energy away from projects to reform and go beyond

capitalism, and seems to accept that "there is no alternative" to capitalism and the many social divisions and inequalities it relies on to flourish. In this regard, the alt-right is conformist, compliant with the colonial past and the present's inequitable status quo: it does not offend the one percent's concentration of wealth and power, go against reigning private property laws, or subvert the forces compelling workers to sell their labour power to a firm for a wage as the only way to survive this system.

To fight for its "white future," the alt-right has pooled resources and built groups, institutions and organizations such as the National Policy Institute, Identity Evropa, The Right Stuff, and Patriot Front. Movement intellectuals include: Richard Spencer, a white nationalist who runs the National Policy Institute and editor of the journal *Radixx* and others; Jared Taylor, founder of the New Century Foundation and the publisher of *American Renaissance* magazine; Kevin MacDonald, the anti-Semite white nationalist who edits the *Occidental Observer*; Greg Johnson, who created Countercurrents and edits *Occidental Quarterly* (Hawley 2018, p. 28). Although the alt-right does not have one big political party, movement figureheads like these seek to pull the Republican Party, conservative politicians and right-wing media ever more rightward. In Gramscian terms, the alt-right struggles for moral leadership ("hegemony") in civil society ("war of position") and seeks to climb to the commanding heights of the US State ("war of maneuver") using instruments and tactics of violence and persuasion, brute force and popular consent building.

The alt-right's violence is of growing concern to researchers, security officials and journalists, and for good reason. From 2011 through 2017, there were nearly 350 white nationalist terrorist attacks across Europe, North America and Australia (Cai & Landon, 2019). In 2018, people either motivated by or attracted to white nationalist ideologies linked to the alt-right killed at least 40 people in North America (Morlin 2019). An average of 250,000 people are afflicted by hate crimes every year in the US. Most of the victims of these are Black people, Muslims, Jews, and other minority groups. Most of the perpetrators are white racists. In just one month after Trump's 2016 election, there were more than 1,000 hate incidents (SPLC 2019). At right-wing rallies, alt-right fight clubs such as The Proud Boys regularly brawl with ANTIFA and their liberal opponents. The alt-right has furthermore attacked people in the streets. At the August 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, James Alex Fields, Jr. weaponized his automobile and drove into a crowd, killing Heather Heyer and injuring nineteen others. In Portland, Oregon, the Patriot Prayer rally turned violent.

The alt-right is a violent movement, but it is also engaged in a "war of ideas." Each day, its pundits and propagandists struggle to get people to perceive the world in the same way they do, and they are in engaged a continuous ideological battle to redefine the popular "common sense" to accord with their fascist worldview. When Web 2.0 sites launched over a decade ago, they were frequently framed as uplifting agents and tools of civic empowerment, multicultural pluralism and participatory democracy. The hope was that platform architecture would itself foster a liberal ethos and that the affordances of platforms would bring about a material and moral uplift for all. To the chagrin of technological optimists, the Internet, websites and platforms have become the primary battlespace of the alt-right's war to persuade and influence people to think like they think and do as they do. During the Obama era, platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were praised for putting power in the hands of the people, but

nearing the end of the Obama era, it had become clear that they also empowered "alt-right" people to "create an Internet-culture and alternative media of their own from the ground up" (Nagle 2016, p. 41). Remarkably, while these platforms had supported the decentralized and horizontal Occupy Wall Street movement, they were also being occupied by the alt-right to build diffuse and vertical networks of neo-Nazis, and a dense and expansive web of hateful profiles, pages, and channels.

The following section probes the white power movement's significant platform presence, highlights the uses and affordances of these platforms to the alt-right's persuasive power to platformize fascism.

**The Alt-Right's "Platformization of Fascism"**

Facebook, the social media and social networking company with a market capitalization of $541.5 billion and a user base of 2.27 billion people worldwide, is frequently used to platform the alt-right and related white power movements. In 2018, the Southern Poverty Law Centre (2018a) identified 51 active "hate groups" in the US. On January 15, 2019, I did a Facebook search for all of these groups, and found that 28 had active Facebook pages. At that time, 54 % of US-based hate groups were present on Facebook, and in effect, had a virtual presence all over the world. As of July 1, 2019, one could "like" the page for "White Lives Matter," which the SPLC identifies as "a racist response to the civil rights movement Black Lives Matter," and hateful front "group that is growing into a movement as more and more white supremacist groups take up its slogans and tactics." With nearly sixteen thousand followers, "White Lives Matter" is cause for concern. On Facebook, one can also "follow" Generation ID-Canada, a national branch of the transnational Generation Identity movement. With over 750,00 members and 1,000 chapters, ACT for America, is "the largest anti-Muslim group in America." It has over 220,000 Facebook followers.

Twitter, the US online news and social networking service on which users post and interact with "tweets," hosts a handle for many major American alt-right influencers. On January 15, 2019, I searched Twitter for some of the alt-right's most prominent ideologues and I identified over 100 profiles with substantial followings. For example, Richard Spencer had over 78.2 thousand Twitter followers. Ronny Cameron, a prominent alt-right organizer in Toronto, Canada, is today followed by almost 2000. Twitter has become a cross-border bridge for alt-right propagandists to unite around hashtags such as #SiegHeil, #Whitegenocide, #HitlerWasRight and #WaronWhites. In this context, it is unsurprising that a recent Anti-Defamation League (2019) study identified over 4.2 million anti-Semitic tweets, written in English, between January 2017 and January 2018. Many alt-right Twitter users support the Trump presidency and white nationalism, vehemently oppose immigration, and use their accounts for "transgressive trolling and harassment" (Berger 2018).

With over 1.9 billion users worldwide, the Google-owned video-sharing website YouTube has developed into an entrepreneurial space and tool of persuasion for alt-right influencers. Lewis (2018) identified 65 far right YouTube personalities across 81 YouTube channels, and those behind this Alternative Influence Network (AIN) have adopted techniques of digital media-making, corporate brand advertising and product differentiation to "sell" audiences their ideology. The YouTube channel for Richard Spencer's The National Policy Institute and its

*Radix* journal have over 18 thousand subscribers (see https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_NPMpK-gZVIKqvDRljgbBA) and features videos such as "National Cuckservatism." Another show, *This Week on the Alt Right* (https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLCQiNgHXtWQ1wJkTssJmzN0fHEHJgTytD), enticed a new generation of white men to buy the brand of producer Mark Collet, a one-time British National Party insider (and focus of the 2002 television documentary *Young, Nazi and Proud*). Collet's YouTube venture seems to have succeeded. More than 80 thousand subscribed to his weekly live stream show to watch almost every significant movement figurehead (e.g., Greg Johnson, Roosh V, Jared Taylor, Mike Enoch) espouse their white identitarian views and racist "dog whistles."

In addition to using the major platforms, white power propagandists and entrepreneurs are building their own websites and digital networks (Barnett 2007), and amassing tens of thousands of followers or "users" in the process. As Nagle (2017, p. 53) pointed out, the "Gramscians of the alt-right" have had "remarkable success in spreading their ideas through their own alternative and almost exclusively online media content." For example, The Daily Stormer (https://dailystormer.name/) traffics in anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim conspiracy theories on a daily basis, and generates revenue with help from user subscriptions and bitcoin exchange markets. The Daily Shoah (https://therightstuffbiz.libsyn.com/) is a podcast that monetizes holocaust denial and anti-Semitism (and one can link to it via YouTube). Red Ice's Radio 3Fourteen (https://redice.tv/radio-3fourteen) platforms episodes with titles like "Attacking on Europeans: White Genocide 1010" and "Adolph Hitler: The Greatest Story Never Told." The Right Stuff (https://therightstuff.biz/), GoyTalk (http://goytalk.com/), Radical Agenda (https://radicalagenda.com/) sites, along with American Renaissance (https://www.amren.com/) and The Occidental Observer (https://www.theoccidentalobserver.net/), promote "white interests," frequently with help from user subscriptions. The alt-right has also fundraised and solicited donations through Patreon, Hatreon, and SubscribeStar. Clearly, the Internet and platforms empowered the alt-right, and its influencers have capitalized on these digital technologies' many affordances. In what follows, five uses and benefits of platforms to the alt-right are summarized.

First, the platforms are used by the alt-right to become visible and audible in "mainstream" digital media spaces. When the major platforms launched over a decade ago, they were championed by a Californian ideology touting Silicon Valley digerati for liberating all kinds of political speech from control by the gatekeepers of the news media and regulation by Federal governments. With billions of users and ever-increasing "network effects," the major platforms enable white power activists who were once kept out of the public mind by the Big Media "filters" to make themselves, their ideology and their movement visible and heard, far and wide. In North America, TV and radio broadcasters still do not permit the flow of hate due to a combination of industry self-regulation and governmentalized broadcasting law and policy. But as they developed, the platforms drastically lowered "legacy media" barriers to the alt-right's hate, and placed many alt-right leaders before the public mind. Jenkins, Ford and Green (2007) say that platforms are of value to users because they allow for content "spreadability," not "stickiness." By spreading their content across Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, sites which allow users to share and reshare content across many other networks, alt-right activists hitherto on the margins of the media moved into a digital media spotlight, and got their radical messages and images into the screens of "normie" sites and smartphones. In sum, the platforms provide

alt-right insiders with a space to introduce outsiders to their movement, and these spaces for "inter-ideological mingling" have supported the merger of extremist political ideology with mainstream media culture (Graham 2016).

Second, the platforms enable alt-right activists to construct anonymous digital identities that let them perform, express and spread their hateful ideology in public while concealing the private identity behind this mask. All social media platforms are spaces where people from around the world engage in the virtual work of identity-construction, presentation and performance, and through these sites, a plurality of users—including alt-right activists—construct and perform digital personas to themselves (privately) and to others (publically). To become active on these platforms, alt-right influencers create accounts and then "sign in" to start using the service. They may create a personalized Facebook page, Twitter handle or YouTube channel, and then give it a name (it can be their birth name, or a pseudonym). This affordance empowers alt-right activists to interactively spread their ideology in public but anonymously and from behind a digital persona. The anonymity afforded by the platform enables the alt-right activist to spread white nationalist ideology around the world, but frees them from taking personal responsibility for what they are saying and assuages the fear that what they say will one day be used against them.

Third, the platforms enable alt-right activists to construct and participate in transnational nationalist virtual communities of hate (Ekman 2014; Perry & Scrivens 2016). While physical locations have long been significant places of social interaction between individuals and sites of community formation, the Internet, websites and platforms enable social interaction to occur and communities to form without the constraints of physical place and propinquity. White power activists have long relied upon a de-territorialized digital communications environment to connect and construct communities without territorial propinquity, within and across national borders (Barnett 2007; Ekman 2014; Perry & Scrivens, 2016). Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are global, and these are important spaces where alt-right actors from around the world construct and participate in virtual as opposed to face-to-face communities. Nowadays, many alt-right activists from many countries virtually connect and commune on Facebook pages, Twitter feeds, and YouTube channels and video comments sections. In this regard, US "platform imperialism" (Jin 2015) has helped the alt-right go global. As US-centered platform imperialism expands, the alt-right's platform fascism spreads alongside it, and as it crisscrosses borders, it appeals to and integrates a transnational nationalist Right.

Fourth, the platforms' algorithmic recommendation and feed systems work to expand and reproduce the alt-right's ideology. The links and connections that bind the alt-right's transnational nationalist community together are not only forged by the alt-right activist's will to reach out and connect with comrades, but are also shaped by algorithms. All major platforms rely upon algorithmic systems to expose their users to posts, tweets and videos that they deem will be relevant to the user's preferences or interests, as deduced from the data about the user they've aggregated (e.g., a user's search history, viewing history, channels subscribed to and click behavior). For example, a user who repeatedly searches for, watches, likes and comments on white power music videos on YouTube will likely be exposed to more and more similar videos by the site's recommender system (O'Callaghan et al. 2015). A Facebook user who has a lot of alt-right friends and who likes and follows a lot of alt-right pages, is likely to be exposed to more of these in their news feed. By reproducing the pre-existing ideologies of users by exposing

them to content it infers they will already relate to or desire to see, these platforms may algorithmically entrap people in fascist "filter bubbles," or, a personal-political ecosystem of white nationalist (dis)information that's been created and curated for the user by a computer program. These may have the consequence of excluding information that is not aligned with the user's interests and separating them from other ideological bubbles (Graham 2016; O'Callaghan et al. 2015; Parriser 2011).

For all of the above reasons, the alt-right "is able to punch above its weight in the political arena because it is very good at using the Internet" (Hawley 2018, p. 19), and it has been especially effective at platformizing fascism. The alt-right as has had the most political success, not in the State, the streets, or the public square, but through the Internet, websites and social networking platforms. It has amassed social media entrepreneurs and influencers adept at extolling the movement's virtue, deployed trolls to spread "red pills" across forums, and rallied cyber-armies to smash "cultural Marxism." The next section conceptualizes the rise of a "digital united front" that works with, upon and through major and minor platforms to resist the alt-right's platform fascism.

**The Digital United Front's Antifascist Platform Tactics**

Ever since Trump's election in 2016, a plurality of Left political actors—anarchists, democratic socialists, communists, social democrats and liberal-progressives—have come together in a broad front to confront and counter the alt-right's growing presence and popularity. Our conjuncture is not the first in which a broad Left is uniting to try to combat a fascist threat to a good society. In response to the first "fascist danger," the Comintern called for a "united front" of social democrats and Communists allied in a "common program of defending the economic and political interests of the working class"(Ottanelli 1991, p. 84). Early proponents of the united front agreed that fascism needed to be defeated to protect the working class and the broad Left, but they also understood how anti-fascism needed to transcend narrow class and political-ideological lines. Recognizing how factional infighting and atomized protests by radical sects would do little to roll back fascism's rise, the Communist Party USA and the American Student Union (ASU) encouraged "all socialist organizations and democratic forces" to join together "in an antifascist alliance" (Ottanelli 1991, p. 84). Mike Gold, the Jewish American Communist, author of the best-selling semi-autobiographical novel *Jews Without Money* (1930), and editor of the rabble-rousing magazine, *The New Masses*, called for "a united front of all the working class parties and liberal groups" (Ottanelli 1991, p. 58). Unfortunately, the united front did not defeat fascism, nor save the millions fascists murdered.

In the 21st century, social conditions are both similar to and different from those of history's first united front. Capitalism, class inequality, sexism and racism persist, as does ethno-nationalism and war, but the Internet, websites, and social networking platforms have enabled contemporary antifascists to form a new "digital united front." The first united front entailed the mobilization of large numbers of people in places like neighborhoods and cities, but the digital united front is constituted by large numbers of antifascist activists who converge, communicate and cooperate across platforms. Their work spreads across Facebook pages such as "Unite Against Fascism" and "Anti-Fascist Network," Twitter handles like Anonymous Hacker Antifascist Book Club (@YourAnonCentral), Three Arrows Down (@ArrowsDown161), and Antifa International (@antifaintl) and YouTube videos such as *The Antifascists* (Öberg & Ramos, 2017) and

Philosophy Tube's *The Philosophy of Antifa* (2017). Given that the "digital united front" exists and acts through platforms, participation in it relies upon computers and smartphones, Internet access, and importantly, digital literacy. Given that only a little over half of the world's population is online and less than half of the world's households own a PC or a smartphone, the "digital divide" is a barrier to mass participation in the digital united front. Also, while activism in the first united front was largely voluntary and not intertwined with business logics, the prerequisite to joining the contemporary digital united front is consenting to the "terms of service" administered by platform corporations. "Clicking to join" or "clicking to accept" turns antifascist activists into platform "users" who manifestly agree to abide by a corporation's terms of service, policies and community guidelines. To the extent that the political actions and interactions of those immersed in today's digital united front produce data that is aggregated and commercialized, they, like those they battle, are used as "prosumers" or exploited as "digital laborers" by corporations (Fuchs 2018; Srniceck 2017). Paradoxically, the Left's political battle against the alt-right's platformization of fascism feeds into the bottom line of platform capitalism. Furthermore, while history's first united front was largely called for and coordinated by political parties and big working class organizations, the digital united front does not derive from one central party or coordinating organization. Instead, it is constituted by a contingent alliance of many Left individuals, groups, and organizations that while different in political ideology, may be united when acting to smash fascism. All in all, the digital united front is resisting the alt-right's platformization of fascism, sometimes by no-platforming with support from platform corporations, and other times, with creative antifascist platform tactics. These are discussed further below.

The corporations that own the major platforms frequently used "no-platforming" as a way to enforce their terms of service agreements and policies, and the digital united front is pressuring and collaborating with them to "no-platform" alt-right users and the hateful content they prosume (Kraus 2018). The US government's embrace of a neoliberal approach to Internet communication law, policy and regulation empowered platform firms govern themselves, the conduct of their users, and the content flowing through their sites with "terms of service agreements" and "policies." In response to pressure by antifascists and advertisers to tackle the free flow of digital hate, the platform titans created a privatized form of policing the conduct of users and their expressions, especially as related to "hate speech." For example, Facebook's Community Standards section on "Hate Speech" (https://www.facebook.com/community standards/hate_speech), the Twitter Rules' "Hateful conduct policy" (https://help.twitter.com/en/ rules-and-policies/hateful-conduct-policy), and YouTube's "Hate speech policy" (https://support. google.com/youtube/answer/2801939?hl=en) are all privatized platform policies that bypass the role of the citizenry in publicly deliberating about and democratically making digital policy. Despite this problem, platform policies have empowered the digital united front to flag and report the alt-right personalities, pages, channels, posts and content it holds responsible for hate to the platform's waged workforce of "content moderators," who then review, assess and act upon the users and their content. If the content is found to be in violation of the policy, the moderators may delete it from the platform. If a user's conduct is determined to transgress the policy, they may issue a warning to the user, suspend them temporarily or ban them from the platform completely. This human-centric tactic of no-platforming is being coupled with R&D efforts to automate the hate speech policy enforcement process. As a result of no-platforming, quite a lot of white supremacist and white nationalist hate has been purged from the big

platforms. In early 2018, Facebook acted upon on 2.5 million pieces of hate content, up from around 1.6 million in the later part of 2017. In 2018, Twitter banned Jared Taylor. In three months of 2018, YouTube removed 8.3 million videos for breaching its community guidelines and on June 5, 2019, it took down thousands of alt-right videos (Chan 2016; Hern 2018).

The tactic of no-platforming has effectively disrupted some of the alt-right's leading propagandist-entrepreneurs and denied them a platform to make money, spread their ideology, and engage and influence the digital mainstream. But this coercive tactic does not in itself solve the social problem of the alt-right, nor has it stopped the alt-right from continuing to build its movement, online and off. Digital repression has political limits. After being "no-platformed," the alt-right user whose profile or account is suspended or banned typically creates a new profile or account, but with a new name attached to. The cycle of flagging, reviewing and taking down begins again, and then repeats, as the digital united front races against the alt-right on the platform's treadmill of hateful expression and censorship. No-platforming in the digital age is like a never-ending game of "whack-a-mole": smash one alt-right Twitter handle down, three more pop up. Suspend one fascist's Facebook account, and they soon after create another. Take one YouTube hate video down, and more with different titles and descriptions appear. Also, when alt-right users are effectively banned by the major platforms, they just migrate to the market of a new and smaller platform such as Gab (https://gab.com/), SubscribeStar (https://www.subscribestar.com/?sref=7z2v) or Hatreon (https://hatreon.net/), corporations which are eager to capture footloose data and a slice of the alt-right's subscription and donation dollars. Additionally, after being no-platformed, alt-right acolytes may descend to the Dark Web, or flock to message boards like 4Chan /pol/ to recharge and regroup. At worst, no-platforming may work to confirm the alt-right's rhetoric of white male conservatives as "victims" of "liberal elite" and "politically correct" platform censors. Perhaps to elicit sympathy and support from his followers, Richard Spencer's Twitter handle declares he is "Banned in the UK" and his SubscribeStar page declares he is "one of the most de-platformed men on the Internet." All in all, "no-platforming" can have positive short term effects, but it is often a reactive and defensive tactic, especially in a digital communications environment where many of the alt-right's central personas, pages, handles and videos are nodal points in a de-centralized network of deeper fascist networks.

Repressive no-platforming is best when combined with a plurality of proactive and offensive platform power tactics that directly engage and act upon the identities, ideas and images of alt-right influencers. I now highlight three examples of these tactics: doxing, video ideology critique, and meme war.

Many alt-right social media influencers hide behind user profile names or crafty digital personae to conceal their actual identities. Go on Twitter, and you will find alt-right-aligned user profiles such as Good-Girl-Goy, RaceForever, Kek Lord Supreme, younghwhite, and PaddockSperg. Twitter masks such as these enables their wearers to perpetuate their hateful ideology with impunity, to troll and harass opponents, and do and say things that they would not likely do or say in the absence of their masks. In response, the digital united front has tried to reveal the identity of the person concealed by the mask, to make the identity of the fascist transparent, for all the world to see, with the hope that by doing this, the person will suffer real consequences for the hate they perpetrate, from stigma to being shunned or shamed by the wider community to

employment deprivation. When deploying this tactic, the actors of the digital united front conduct lateral-veillance by targeting their sights on an alt-right user's digital actions and interactions; they then search for, aggregate, analyze and assess an immense amount of digital material about the user, hoping to discover the person behind the persona. Once they do, they publish this information far and wide. For example, in January 2017, "Mike Enoch," host The Daily Shoah podcast, was doxed and revealed to be a tech worker named Mike Peinovich (Wilson 2017). Another white supremacist YouTuber, "Millennial Woes," was doxed and unmasked as Colin Robertson (Collins 2017). Logan Smith, an antifascist Twitter activist, publicized the identities of some of the hateful people at the 2017 "Unite the Right" rally who were captured on video carrying torches and chanting "Jews will not replace us" (Chan 2017). In July 2018, a joint investigation by the Canadian Anti-Hate Network and *VICE* magazine Canada exposed and shamed the two hosts of "This Hour Has 88 Minutes," Canada's largest neo-Nazi podcast (Lamoureux & Patriquin 2018). In sum, doxing defangs alt-right propagandists, and it may deter people from joining their cause.

A second proactive tactic for challenging the alt-right is by using the dominant platforms to produce and circulate videos that critique and dismantle its white supremacist and white nationalist ideology. With over 175,000 subscribers, the YouTube channel Three Arrows (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCT8a7d6S6RJUivBgNRsiYg) produces and circulates a large number of educational videos that directly take on the alt-right's ideology and rhetorical tactics using a rational and logical style. The Three Arrows name derives from Germany's Weimar period, when the German Social Democratic Party hired Sergei Chakhotin to develop social democratic propaganda to counter Nazi propaganda. At that time, the antifascist circle was used to cover and deface public expressions of Nazi swastikas (the three arrows symbolized a movement against "reaction," "capitalism," and "fascism"). Today, and on YouTube, the Three Arrows channel describes itself as a "HISTORY BALLER" and claims to do "stuff about the bad history on the far-right and more." Three Arrows creates and shares videos such as "Debunking the Alt-Right: The Myth of Peaceful Ethnic Cleansing" and "Debunking the Alt-Right: Twisting Words." Others include: "Denial as a Tool of the Radical Right," "How 'Cultural Marxism' became the Far-Right's Scapegoat," and "Jordan Peterson Doesn't Understand Nazism." Another prominent antifascist YouTuber is Natalie Wynn, a transgender woman who runs a 691,000 subscriber-strong channel called Contrapoints (https://www.youtube.com/user/ContraPoints). Wynn produces entertaining arguments against the alt-right such as "Decrypting the Alt-Right: How to recognize a F@scist" and "Why the Alt-Right is Wrong." The digital united front's antifascist YouTubers signal confidence in the idea that the better arguments can be made, and be made to win. Fighting the alt-right's falsity with the truth and combating fiction with the facts, YouTube educators produce creative and captivating videos that aim to deter people from succumbing to alt-right ideology and perhaps even set some of those currently in thrall to alt-right ideology, free.

A third proactive tactic for battling the alt-right is the generation and viral circulation of antifascist memes. The meme is a usually an image and some text about something or someone that spreads rapidly from person to person via the Internet and platforms, for entertainment purposes, political purposes, or a combination of both. In the digital united front's contemporary meme war against the alt-right, decentralized networks of antifascists create and spread memes, or assemblages of text and images to attack, mock, embarrass or degrade the public image of

their opponents. For example, Richard Spencer was punched in the face at Trump's inauguration in Washington, DC, and this was caught on camera, and shared with the world by the news media and by activists. Soon after, this one video was creatively adapted, modified and remixed in hundreds of ways with a wide range of popular symbols, sounds, images and referents to create new antifascist memes (Sargent 2017). Some of the resulting "Richard Spencer Getting Punched" memes feature a GIF of the face punch set to a segment of popular American rock songs (Thin Lizzy's "The Boys are Back in Town," Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A.", and Neutral Milk Hotel's "Holland, 1945"). Others remixed the punch video sequence with cartoon images of Captain America punching Hitler, and scenes in which Indiana Jones punches a Nazi appropriated from the 1981 action film, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. "It was a literal and figurative punch in the face," said Spencer, adding that it would likely change his approach to public appearances (Wilson 2017).

Over the past decade, the alt-right has arguably had more influence in the digital communications space environment than the democratic socialist Left. But over the past few years, a transnational "digital united front" has emerged to counter the alt-right's platformization of fascism with tactics such as no-platforming, doxing, video ideology critique and memes.

**Conclusion: Authoritarian Fascism and Democratic Socialism in America**

In the United States, a fascist movement is again alive and growing, and it is called the alt-right. While the alt-right and the Trump presidency are not identical, Trump's White House is authoritarian populist and articulating a hard Right "America First" ideology compatible with fascism (Neiwert 2017). US President Donald Trump is at once cheered on and others lambasted by the alt-right. Hanging from one side of Trump's mouth is an alt-right "dog whistle" and from the other, flow soundbite-friendly disavowals of the movement. The growing fear of fascism in the US under Trump is understandable, given the rapid rise of the radical Right and authoritarian populism's enabling environment. Antifascist campaigns to contest, roll back, and put a stop to these hateful movements are essential to protecting everyone they threaten and important to preserving the redeemable facets of capitalism's liberal democratic superstructure. That said, it is a mistake to characterize Trump as an out and out fascist dictator and the US society as an emergent "fascist regime."

Trump's Republicans do not control the entirety of the US State apparatus, nor have they eliminated the existence of the parties, movements and ideologies that compete for power and influence in US society. The real separation of powers between the US government's various branches (House of Representatives, Senate and the White House) persists, as do the formal expressions of bourgeois democracy (e.g., regular elections, a plurality of parties and interest groups, the rule of law, and basic civil liberties, such as the freedom to vote, speak, publish, assemble, and so on). Moreover, challenges to Trump's authoritarian populist regime from within the US State are real, and these are coming from "elite" members of the security and intelligence agencies, and also, from rabble-rousing House politicians such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, and Rashida Tlaib. The "mainstream media" or corporate news outlets such as CNN, MSNBC, ABC, CBS are in no way illiberal mouthpieces for the Trump Administration, nor do they censor anti-Trump views. Each day, they publish investigative and critical stories about the Trump presidency, hoping to capture the attention and ad revenue deriving from an anti-Trump audience commodity. On the streets, grassroots protests against

Trump—from Resist Trump Tuesdays to Refuse Fascism—recur across American cities and communities. Each and every day, millions of people virtually assemble and dissent against the Trump Presidency through social media platforms.

At present, the rise of the alt-right and its platformization of fascism is a real threat, especially to those individuals and groups the alt-right says do not belong in America today and are barred from its ethno-state of the future. Fortunately, the US is not (yet) a fascist regime, as the alt-right is nowhere near being "hegemonic." Over the past few years, the alt-right insurgence has been beaten back by "lawsuits and arrests, fundraising difficulties, tepid recruitment, widespread infighting, fierce counter-protests" (McCoy 2018), and the digital united front's no-platforming and platform power tactics have banished alt-right movement leaders, bruised their public image, and battered the credibility and plausibility of the white nationalist-supremacist ideology they spread. At the same time, a democratic socialist Left is trying to defeat Trump's authoritarian populist regime and the alt-right, and it is making impressive headway in winning millions of people to a vision of a different and better world. The US presidential campaign by the "socialist" Bernie Sanders, "the Squad" (Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, and Rashida Tlaib), the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), the scrappy socialist influencers and entrepreneurs behind magazines and podcasts (*Jacobin*, *Catalyst*, *Current Affairs*, *The Bullet*, Chapo Trap House, Dead Pundits Society, The Dig, Working People, Oats for Breakfast), and millions of people online, across campuses, and in the streets, are fighting to reform and go beyond capitalism (Sunkara 2019). Right or the Left, the future is "without guarantees." That is why the democratic participation of the largest number of people in making history is so urgent, and so vital.

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