Can Pirates Save Democracy?

The Case for Pirate Politics and Pirate Parties

Hein Htet Kyaw

December 28th, 2024

Historically, anarchist and libertarian ideologies have often been situated outside the traditional political spectrum due to their emphasis on individualism, direct action, anti-capitalism, and the pursuit of a stateless society. However, the emergence of American libertarianism, particularly its pro-capitalist free-market variant, has challenged this traditional alignment. Historically, there has been limited collaboration between left-libertarians and right-libertarians, despite instances of both groups cooperating with authoritarian factions on the left and right, respectively. This divergence, particularly given the potential for shared goals in areas such as individual liberty and limited government, represents a missed opportunity.

Despite ideological differences, various anarchist and libertarian factions, including social anarchists, individualist anarchists, left-libertarians, right-libertarians, and anarcho-capitalists, have seldomly found common ground in their opposition to state authority and corporate power. One of such rare incidents was the crypto-anarchist movement which was born out of the cypherpunks. Timothy C. May, the founder of the crypto-anarchist movement, explained in one of his famous texts,Cyphernomicon, that wobblies, along with left-wing libertarians and anarcho-capitalist radicals, worked together in the cypherpunk movement against the state and the big corporates. Another notable example of such cross-ideological collaboration includes the establishment of Pirate Parties, which represent a new political paradigm.

Pirate politics can be categorised as a new political paradigm that underwent the dialectical synthesis of both left-libertarianism and right-libertarianism. As a result, pirate politics hold the cross-spectrum original libertarian values from both left-libertarianism and right-libertarianism. It holds the uncompromising position on both digital and civil liberties from the civil libertarianism, social justice values from social liberalism, direct democracy and open government positions from left libertarianism, hacktivism ethos from digital socialism (cyber-utopianism), and anti-corporate activism along with voluntaryism from anarcho-capitalism. Pirate politics believes in civil rights and inclusivity for every individual across the gender, race, ethnicity, and other spooks. Those individuals who believe in pirate politics are the proponents of free and open-source software, freedom of information, protection of individual privacy, and a decentralised internet as much as they believe in the transparent and open government system where participatory democracy flourishes.

Pirate parties were a success as a third party in some parts of the world. The Pirate Party is currently the most popular party in Iceland, with 23.9% of the population supporting it, according to a recent poll conducted by Market and Media Research MMR. The Pirate Party of Berlin, a state branch of the Pirate Party Germany, received 8.9% of the vote in the 2011 Berlin state election to the Abgeordnetenhaus of Berlin, earning them 15 seats. Three members of the Pirate Party of Iceland were re-elected in 2013 after the Icelandic Pirate Party received 5.1% of the vote in the country's parliamentary election. Jonsdottir, one of the three members of the Pirate Party of Iceland elected, who also was sympathetic to WikiLeaks, called on Iceland to offer citizenship to NSA leaker Edward Snowden. In the 2018 Prague municipal election, the Czech Pirate Party received 17.1% of the vote, placing them in second place. Zdeněk Hřib, a representative of the Czech Pirate Party, was chosen to serve as Prague's mayor. This was most likely the first time a member of the Pirate Party was elected mayor of a major global city. Pirate Parties International, the international alliance between the pirate parties across the globe, was granted special consultative status by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 2017. Such electoral success of the pirate party tradition did, in fact, surpass all the electoral success of the old third-party right-wing libertarian parties and classical liberal parties, as well as the far-left Trotskyist groups and traditional third-party left-wing democratic socialist parties.

Pirate parties are susceptible to being appropriated by the very structures they aim to overthrow, even in spite of their anti-establishment rhetoric. Pirate parties sometimes focus too much on technology, given that most of their membership base is dominated by the people who work in the IT industry. Given that the workers in the IT industry are more likely to earn higher wages than the industrial workers and the IT workers enjoy a gig economy-style work structure over a traditional work structure, they tend to be pretty petit-bourgeois. That sometimes makes the Pirate parties out of touch with the lowest poor communities. The fractional disputes between the ideological groups, such as social anarchists, libertarians, and anarcho-capitalists, could hinder not only the electoral success but also the grassroots activism. In addition, the bigger the anarcho-capitalist faction and the right-libertarian faction, the more pirate parties sometimes openly endorse or support the free-market capitalist agenda, which alienates most of the radical anti-capitalist anarchists and libertarians from the grassroots working-class left. Furthermore, even libertarian and anarcho-capitalist movements are susceptible to infiltration by millionaires and big corporations who may adopt libertarian rhetoric to advance their own self-serving interests.

In conclusion, while Pirate parties have demonstrated the potential for cross-ideological collaboration between left-libertarians and right-libertarians in their shared opposition to state and corporate power, their political platform often leans towards anarcho-capitalist and civil libertarian principles. This ideological tilt risks marginalising the concerns of social anarchists and left-libertarians, who may find their anti-capitalist agendas compromised and ultimately absorbed into a broader, more right-leaning libertarian framework. Even though Pirate Parties have the potential to be petit-bourgeois, they can nevertheless be a useful counterpoint to authoritarian left and right inclinations, especially when it comes to corporate monopoly and statolatry. The Pirate parties are a more reliable option than the majority of right-wing nationalist parties and left-wing statist socialist parties. Furthermore, the Pirate parties are indeed effective in creating a more decentralised and egalitarian economic and political environment as they hold civil liberties and anti-corporate activism firmly.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright

Hein Htet Kyaw
Can Pirates Save Democracy?
The Case for Pirate Politics and Pirate Parties
December 28th, 2024

hackernoon.com

theanarchistlibrary.org