Discussion 8 General Comments

The political change via social media question

Use a critical theory approach and assess the ability of social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook to bring about political change. Make sure that you are taking into account Fuchs position on this but also to make sure that this is extended/challenged.

1. Look around for how many people in the world actually have access to the Internet (and don't just take the first answer you find, here's a place *to start*). Use this reality to ground your arguments. And don't just stop at the numbers. Consider the living conditions many face. Granting that Internet access *is* a right and that this can be fulfilled by walking to the local library or community centre makes sense in our community but offering it as a global solution shows a very narrow view of the world.
2. You will need to define what a right is (simply asserting a dictionary definition isn't going to cut it). Some of you want to go farther and distinguish between different sorts of rights that Internet access might belong to (or not), such as basic rights. If you are going to do this then you need to be clear about what distinguishes each type of right from the other(s) and why you are considering Internet access as a right of this type.
3. It does seem to currently be the case that the Internet is not needed to survive, in general. You need to press farther than this though. Consider that it *might* be needed to participate within certain societies. Government service are increasingly being offered over the Internet to the point that alternative methods are being curtailed such that not having access further drags you down. Also consider whether or not there might be a reasonable future where not having access meant not participating in society. This isn't survival per se but it seems really important. Point being, more needs to be done than just saying "humans got by without the Internet for most of their evolution so it can't be a right" isn't enough. You need to show that it isn't somehow now a right or a future right.
4. Having other rights that are more primary (say a right to clean drinking water) and which are not being met does not seem to be a reason to say that a right that is less primary (say a right to access the Internet) is not a right.
5. Not being able to provide a right (say there is no clean water and no way to make it) also doesn't seem to be a reason to have something not be a right. Rather, we might just have to bite the bullet and say there is a right and it is being violated. Some of the arguments being made amount to "that would be tough to do right now/always (aka I, and people like me, would have to give up a lot, maybe even change our lifestyle) so it isn't a right". This also seems odd, especially in regards to water. Perhaps a bullet needs to be bit in the other direction to hold this line of argument: there are no rights, only things that we conveniently talk of a being rights when in serves those who are already well-off/in power. Put another way, rights are ideological constructs.
6. If you are wondering about the capitalization of "I/internet" then this Wired article may

help clear things up.
7. Be very clear about what constitutes Internet access.
8. Why have so few of you actually drawn on the UN declaration that was shared in class? When it is referred to it is usually rather clear that it has not been reviewed in detail. What is it *actually* supporting?
9. If you are going to argue for privatization then you need to keep in mind the critical theory framework which this question is being raised in. Fuchs' arguments still matter.
10. Even if Internet access is a right of the type that humans create through legislation and we can't provide it now it does not follow that it should not be declared/legislated as a right. Declaring something a right before it can be provisioned can be an important way to lead legislation.
11. You may need to be clear about where rights come from, especially regarding the natural vs. artificial distinction.
12. Controlling the access of those who need it for free but not those who pay for it seems to be an implicit argument in more than one draft (and explicit in at least one). Given that we've just done a month using critical theory to investigate the political economy and power assymetry within social media this should *at least* have some pretty strong justifications placed around it.
13. You need to consider arguments against your position (this is part of being dialectical *and* being a good reasoner in general). You've already been given one in an article that you were to read before class. Use it.