

Big Tech's Playing Monopoly; It's Going to Lose

Over the years, I've written many columns concerning the war on Internet freedom. My usual targets are the politicians and government agencies who serve as shock troops for the Dark Side across fronts ranging from encryption to sex worker advertisements to darknet marketplaces.

On the "private sector" side of things, I've generally just noted that anti-freedom business practices are bad business practices, that bad business practices tend to be self-punishing, and that none of the Big Actors in Big Tech are, strictly speaking, monopolies.

Now the war's been tuning up into its next phase, and Big Tech is finally taking an open stand against, rather than for, freedom. Facebook and Twitter are cracking down on speech (of both "right" and "left" varieties). Google, Amazon, Apple et al. are trying to take down sites and apps on which speech can't be easily regulated.

Why is Big Tech finally showing us an anti-freedom face?

If you have to ask why, the answer is almost always "money." That's certainly true in this case. Most of the firms in question enjoy substantial revenue from government contracts. They want to keep their single biggest customer happy both to preserve those revenue streams and to avoid the imposition of regulations that might cut into their profit margins.

But at this point, it's also safe to say that they're looking for "regulatory capture."

They see the handwriting on the wall. Regulation is coming whether they like it or not, but they're big players with plenty of lobbying money. They expect to influence the coming regulation to their own advantage.

They don't want to be big fish in a small pond. They want to be the ONLY fish in a big pond. They don't want to beat new competitors on the merits of their product and services. They want to use government regulation to make it impossible for those new competitors to put up any competition at all.

They're not monopolies yet, but they want to be. And they're making their play right now.

But unlike previous instances of regulatory capture — such as that of electric power, which after a century of government-imposed "natural" monopolies imposed for the express purpose of benefiting Big Business, still has us over-paying to keep our lights on — this one isn't going to work.

Short of government simply cutting the Internet off entirely, there's only one way this

ends. If the Internet is allowed to survive at all, the would-be monopolies are going to come to grief. Even China's Communist regime and its quarter-century-old "Great Firewall" have proven inadequate to the task of separating users from the content and applications they seek.

The long-term result of American Big Tech allying itself with the state to suppress Internet freedom will be its withering as users desert it for offshore hosting and unstoppable peer-to-peer and distributed applications.

Yes, things are bad. They're going to get worse. But the outcome isn't in doubt. Big Tech can switch to the users' side, or it can go extinct.