

"Flipping Out" and preventive security

Maoist Information Web Site

[MIWS's advice to readers is to study as much literature about computer and Internet security until they understand anonymity on the Internet and basic networking security and privacy issues, and know where the gaps in their knowledge are. It isn't necessary for everyone to be a computer scientist, but one of the worst things that one could do is use a computer for politics for knowing the limits of one's knowledge about how things work and confining one's activity appropriately.

There are many articles about computer security worth reading. Below, MIWS talks about security in general, rather than specific steps or situations.]

Maybe MIWS's early articles on security were too hard to understand. Sometimes, MIWS writes to clarify things for itself and publishes the resulting documents because it doesn't hurt to, but they aren't what's most needed at the time. So let's dumb this down for any amerikans out there and use more familiar reference points for what MIWS would like to say about security in general.

On one of the last episodes of the real estate-themed amerikan reality TV show "Flipping Out," the boss Jeff Lewis relates how he suspected that an employee was using the computer on the job without permission and installed a "nanny cam." The camera confirmed that the employee, Chris, was using the computer and slacking off. Lewis fired the man, who happened to be married to his assistant, Jenni. Chris was also a friend of Jeff's. Jenni and Chris end up separating. The whole situation affects Jenni's performance at work, and Jeff has to replace Chris and try to do without him in the meantime.

Normally, communists' reaction to a lost personal relationship should be "big deal." In the big picture, these kinds of things are nothing, and this is absolutely the case when it is the lost friends, employees, etc., of random First Worlders. The show is a source of ideas about real estate and its place in the economy, but the premise of "Flipping Out" is typical in being another instance of apolitical individualism taken to extremes where people get worked up about interpersonal relationships and conflicts, personalities, style, other people's work and sex lives, and things that don't even really affect them.

MIWS's initial thought upon coming across the discussion of the computer and nanny cam experience was that it was just something silly, more TV garbage. However, there is a general lesson about security that can be drawn from "Flipping Out."

Jeff Lewis is known among his employees and "Flipping Out" fans as a crazy drama queen in general with idiosyncrasies that make working with him difficult, but another employee still expressed shock at Lewis' use of the nanny cam. The real shock for MIWS is that Lewis apparently didn't even bother to secure his computer. Even a three-character login password for the desktop would have sufficed to prevent casual unauthorized use. But, Jeff was either too lazy or ignorant to use a password. He chose to use technology, but did not use its security features or learn how to use it securely.

Since it is in fact Jeff's computer, and in business terms Jeff could reasonably expect employees not to spend a large part of the day using computers for personal use, MIWS would not call Jeff "crazy." What is ridiculous is that Jeff's security choices don't match what he wants with his computer. Jeff allowed a situation where someone was eventually and even likely going to use his computer. Additional problems were caused by Jeff's use of the nanny cam when he could have used a simple password instead that would have taken a minute to set up. It was one stupid choice after another, while Jeff could have easily prevented a lot of unnecessary grief for multiple people, himself included. It was a situation of Jeff's own creation as someone in a management position who should have known better. Jeff could have learned about desktop computer security in any computer user magazine.

There are people who think using a difficult-to-guess password or any password is "paranoid." Not having seen the rest of "Flipping Out," perhaps this is what Jeff was thinking. So maybe Jeff thought having a password was paranoid, but then he was willing to buy and install a nanny cam after he learned that one individual employee may have been on the computer, and the camera resulted in problems for Jeff's business and friendships. The general truth that applies here is that policies that work all the time are better than just having expectations and policies that are applied only to some individuals after they are discovered violating an expectation.

There need to be policies that prevent the inevitable. It's not always going to be possible to do that in every case. Eventually, Jeff Lewis will hire an assistant who happens to know more about computers and how to get around desktop passwords.

However, when there are policies that reduce freedom of action and reduce uncertainty, one can avoid many problems and headaches. Maybe Jeff wanted to make his computer available for clients and occasionally employees. In that case, he could have set up an account with limited privileges or that automatically logged out after a certain amount of time.

People laugh at Jeff Lewis' grooming routines. What's not funny is the kind of example he sets. He's not willing to spend even ten seconds a day on a security routine for his computer to avoid what could be thousands of dollars of lost value and having to spend days trying to figure out what the hell happened and why. Not surprisingly, Jeff calls himself a perfectionist, and he often micro-manages. Micro-managing may work in a small company, but when "perfectionism" appears in a security policy, the results can be more paralyzing than preventive security policies. The goal should not even be "perfection." Preventive security doesn't mean perfection. Perfectionism would be keeping things the most flexible and trying to control everything and handle all contradictions simultaneously with zero error, an impossibility and an approach that opens up endless and unmanageable problems in different areas and results in unforeseen errors. MIWS's alternative to Jeff Lewis security "perfectionism" requiring the use of constant extensive surveillance and scaring employees with threats is to have restrictions in place and implement limits with quantifiable measures.

If Jeff can't or doesn't want to stop people from using his computer for some reason, something else he could do is require a certain measurable amount of work or identifiable product from his employees. They may slack off, but Jeff will eventually figure out how much he can expect employees to do as new employees who may slack off less are added.

Any large company in the First World knows that a large number of employees will eventually use unrestricted Internet access for pornography or social networking sites. The stupid way to handle this would be to install cameras to catch people in the act and possibly put the company in the position of having to interrupt operations. Jeff Lewis doesn't have a large company with experience with a large number of employees working independently like Chris, but he can learn from one. Contrary to suggestions that First World capitalism can be reformed to benefit a non-existent service sector proletariat with greater freedom at the workplace, it may make sense for a corporation that doesn't need social networking sites to block social networking

sites outright, or limit use of them to X minutes or X megabytes of transfer per day to be competitive with other employers, instead of risking scandal that only benefits the competition. What MIWS is saying is not that capitalist interests should be defended, but that firms may know something about long-term security that the average person may not. In different ways, the notion that a communist organization in the First World can have less security than a small corporation is wrong. Not participating on a high level in a power struggle, most First Worlders may need no more than keys for their home and car (though they also have PINs for ATM cards, IDs for transactions, etc., etc., and still identity theft is common), but nobody would suggest that a corporation should have nothing to hide or be worried about.

Most First World communists don't have workplaces to regulate, and they have to deal with enemy government and police infiltration, and degeneration, not YouTube infiltration. However, the principle is the same: Establish preventive policies, instead of obsessing over who is responsible for what and to what degree, not too much unlike "Flipping Out" fans acting like Chris' firing is some historic event requiring extensive exploration and discussion when it is something that could have been avoided.

There are different security models. A Liberal one, one of the most common ones in politics in practice, is to build oneself up as a popular individual with a loyal following or network of friends. But, there is generally no mass of people in the First World who can support a proletarian leader reliably. Even there were, the security model would tie the success of a communist movement to an individual, but a communist movement involves more than the leadership or heroism of one individual.

Since communists are mainly fighting repression at this time in a broad sense, not building a communist society in a position of power, security for communists and communist advances at this time in general are closely related. Security for a small corporation is usually just economic, not political, often involving theft, espionage, and threats to employee personal safety, that may decrease the corporation's competitive position, employee performance, and profit. However, even a corporation does not depend on the popularity of individuals. Some well-known CEOs have a reputation with the public, in addition to making shareholders and business partners feel confident, but that isn't enough to prevent theft of trade secrets, notwithstanding government cooperation with corporations with respected executives and

spokespeople.

First World politics as a whole is imperialist and parasitic, and internally much of it is a popularity contest involving personality and image. Corporations, on the other hand, are not competing as individuals with other individuals, but with other products and entire brands, even where monopolies are involved. A communist organization is more like a non-profit corporation that might want to exist independently of particular individuals than a politician seeking office.

Corporations do use individuals, in advertising. These individuals are disposable. If it isn't Tiger Woods, it could be any other celebrity on the market in a different sport or profession. A major corporation like Nike can buy a Michael Jordan or Tiger Woods partly for security-related public opinion purposes involving exploitation and repression in the Third World. When its brand is viewed as cool or hip, a corporation like Coca-Cola can get away more easily with murdering workers in the Third World with death squads. Although, Coca-Cola's most influential endorser may be Santa Claus, not a real individual. Who could hate him? Instead of signing endorsement contracts with celebrities, nowadays corporations are buying rights to use Spider-Man and other superheroes in advertising. It's a safe way to go when scandal has affected perceptions of celebrities. There are benefits in long-term investments in images that aren't tied to certain individuals.

It is possible to be more backward than capitalists in other ways. Just calling the practices of capitalists "alienating" and "dehumanizing" would be the wrong way to go here even though what corporations do formally obviously has nothing intrinsically to do with scientific communism. Elsewhere, MIWS has discussed anonymous reasoning in the context of communist science. Some might argue that anonymous reasoning belongs only to the socialist period and not to the capitalist period. But, anonymous reasoning isn't new; the most well-known example in the United States is the Federalist Papers, which appeared in a period of capitalism. Thinking that centers on individuals belongs to the struggle against feudalism, a pre-capitalist period. Of course, individualism is dominant in the capitalist First World today and anonymous reasoning outside of scientific disciplines is not that common, but the issue is how does one struggle in a proletarian way in the First World and not let bourgeois dynamics, which generally have reactionary results under moribund, imperialist capitalism, become overpowering. It is not by making individuals and following them more important than independent rational thought. When even

americans more than two hundred years ago are more advanced than revolutionaries supposedly fighting capitalism, that is an indication that something is wrong. If MIWS is wrong about the particular need for anonymous reasoning at the present time, it would be because a form of monarchy may still exist in the united States. However, MIWS believes that the preoccupation with individuals is outmoded. It persists because capitalism continues to exist, but communists have no use for it except where it is necessary to utilize it consciously in intra-bourgeois struggle. The bourgeois cannot advance beyond individualism, but individual-focused thinking becomes more and more backward. This is why there is a focus on the sex appeal of Barack Obama and the Kennedys, for example. Instead of even comparing the ideas of individuals, people openly compare Barack Obama and John McCain in terms of physical attractiveness. McCain just let the cat out of the bag with his campaign ad comparing Obama to celebrities. McCain is wrong, but only because he thinks First Worlders can advance beyond things like the "viral" YouTube video "I Got a Crush... on Obama." They cannot.

Even under a contemporary monarchy in the First World, elites may need to struggle using anonymous speech. Where there is opposition to anonymity, one should ask themselves who benefits from that and who can afford to do without anonymity. The answer is clear: the imperialist state in the form of public individuals or the imperialist state under cover (but needing to maintain some identity), and privileged white people, who do use security consciously or unconsciously but oppose it for others. Euro-Americans are oppressors and have different security needs than the proletariat. Opposing anonymity has sinister implications in paving the way for white lynch mobs and elites, themselves not always known or whose activity is not fully public, to attack proletarians and oppressed nationalities. There is one way imperialist country people can go "beyond" individualism, and that is with fascism. Militant so-called radical leftists who put mobilizing white petty-bourgeois people on an emotional basis above anonymous reasoning are fascist in nature regardless of how correct and radical-sounding some of their words are. Fascists do have a mass of people who can support them in the First World, and that is exploiters and petty-bourgeois people. They are not oppressed masses.

In addition to having scientific, ideological benefits, anonymity to a great extent involves preventive security. It is relatively easy to tell if someone is practicing good security. Either they are or they are not doing certain things. In Jeff Lewis' case, either

he does or does not have a password. Lewis may not be able to totally prevent unauthorized use of his computer, but he can limit what he puts on it, such as sensitive business records. Either he does or does not have that information on his computer. Except for traces of business-related Web browsing activity remaining on the computer, there isn't much room for uncertainty. Either one is or one is not practicing anonymity in certain ways, such as not using a name, for starters. Opposing preventive policies in general, and emphasizing an approach where people deal with things case by case as they arise unexpectedly, often accompanies opposition or reluctance to using anonymity. In a fluid situation where one has the support of a mass of people, there may be justification for having fewer limitations, but there is no such situation in the First World.

A telltale sign of white nation politics is rhetoric against restrictive security and for more flexibility in interacting with Euro-Americans. If one is going to say the imperialist state does not exist to the extent that people say it does, one should acknowledge the degree to which it does exist or admit to not being Leninist. Otherwise, one is just discouraging a lack of attention to security and putting preconceptions in command. One of the most dangerous practices is to substitute vague discouragement and bullshit rhetoric for objective statements on issues involving security. Preventive security is inherently objective as it involves actions corresponding to specific calculations.

Since few publish anything substantial about security for people learning about communism on the Internet, readers should be vigilant about studying security on their own. Lack of attention to security belongs to a larger pattern. Those not practicing preventive security or only paying lip service to it and not practicing it in earnest typically also act to move things in a right/white direction in general, by supporting opportunism in recruiting for a communist organization, for example. Since limits aren't specified and the movement is in a direction away from security and advancement of scientific communist practice in general, the results are inevitably counterrevolutionary.

In this article, MIWS has talked about computers because of the "Flipping Out" show, but the same ideas could be extended to any situation where there needs to be security. Not everything will be as easy as clicking on a button to enable security for a computer, but the approach of establishing limits will apply. At least Jeff Lewis "purged" Chris after crossing a line, though it seems that there was still room for Jeff

to vary his response to violations of the computer rule. The idea of purges and formal structure in an organization with explicit policies implemented consistently is offensive to people with ingrained individualist and anti-proletarian sentiments. In Marxist language, what it is is Liberalism getting in the way of security.

MIWS is not in a rush to see organizations arise in the First World. However, security is one thing that people thinking about organizing need to pay attention to. To have preventive security in an organization, one would need to have clear policies known throughout the organization or to the organization members to whom the policies are relevant. So, much of what MIWS has said above is related to the old essay on organization "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" (use a search engine). People wanting to maintain existing friendship networks of a bourgeois nature and existing informal organization would have an interest in opposing an expansion of some preventive security of the kind that involves constraints and limits. On the one hand, it is natural for organizations in the Third World, where there are masses to swim in, to start with friends with similar ideas and abilities, but friend and acquaintance Liberalism can interfere with security. In a way, this may also be why Jeff Lewis left his computer unprotected. He was around people -- friends, employees, etc.; so, he trusted them after just communicating his wishes to them verbally. Jeff Lewis is working on being more calm. Nobody seeking a stress-free life likes to think of themselves as being surrounded by bad people. However, it's not an issue of how bad or good people are, but preparing for predictable occurrences.