Au revoir Techno-Feudalism, bonjour Emancipated (Social) Web



BOF: FOSDEM AW1.121, Sun Feb 2nd 2025, 12:00

Interlude I: Why Feudalism?

- Cory Doctorow / Yannis Varoufakis[1]
- licensed rather than owned
- no appeal, no decision
- cloud rather than on-prem
- in short: billionaire websites

[1]: https://jacobin.com/2023/10/cory-doctorow-seize-the-means-ofcomputation-big-tech-democratization-infrastructure

Interlude II: root

- root is the initial, `privileged user` account on UNIX computers
- who of you is root on a host offering internet services?
- how many of your friends are?
- how many of your family? Neighbours?
- how many parents of your kids' classmates?

=> they can't even think about self-determined Social Web and that's a democracy issue.

what can non-roots do?

- accept having no claim
- become a root
- hire a root
- make do with shared hosting (no-root)

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Example: Seppo.social

works like that: 1. rent Shared Hosting

- no way as convenient as a sign-up button, but
- no privileged user (root) required
- no root know-how required either, copying is all
- around since long (unhip, stable, many vendors, affordable)
- fair business model

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2. download + copy 1 file

- statically linked CGI[1], no DB
- billionaires hate it (scales well to n=1)
- many young never heard of it (older than the web some say)
- no PHP updates etc.
- no SQL injection etc.

[1]: https://datatracker.ietf.org/doc/html/rfc3875

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3. done! You now have

- single-user, self-operated ActivityPub server
- your own (domain & user) name, full ownership
- few malicious users & small attack surface
- no database or scripting engines to tend
- unattractive attack target
- full control

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Welcome to my Seppo



This is your personal public page. Adjust it to your liking at

🕞 Timeline -> 🐝 Settings -> Edit my Profile 🎭

Use it e.g. to say some introductory words about you. However, don't be overly verbose or expose sensitive details. Once published, they may be impossible to purge from the internet.

Now feel free to look up some persons at [©] Timeline -> **P** People and maybe subscribe. Or just write a post to the public. It will appear below and be sent to all your subscribers. The author of #Seppo posts as @social@mro.name.

Some Design Decisions

- safety over simplicity over everything else
- statically linked binary (built in 🐫 OCaml)
- single user, easy operation
- no database, no server-side scripting
- persistence to plain, inspectable text files
- template rendering via browser-side XSLT
- javascript for convenience and eye candy, not mandatory

Some Painpoints

- plain text notes, no HTML/markdown formatting
- hacky background processing (maybe allow cron)
- alpha
- no fav/boost management, but fire + forget
- no account move so far
- no images so far

Inspired by

- <u>https://PermaComputing.net/Principles</u>,
- Occams Razor (William of Baskerville, ~1340),
- The Imperative of Responsibility (Hans Jonas, 1979),
- Tools for Conviviality (Ivan Illich, 1973),
- A Plea for Lean Software (Niklaus Wirth, 1995).

Merci bien for your attention!

https://seppo.social/development

Generously incubated as https://nlnet.nl/project/Seppo by 💟 NGI0