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## MOTHERBOARD

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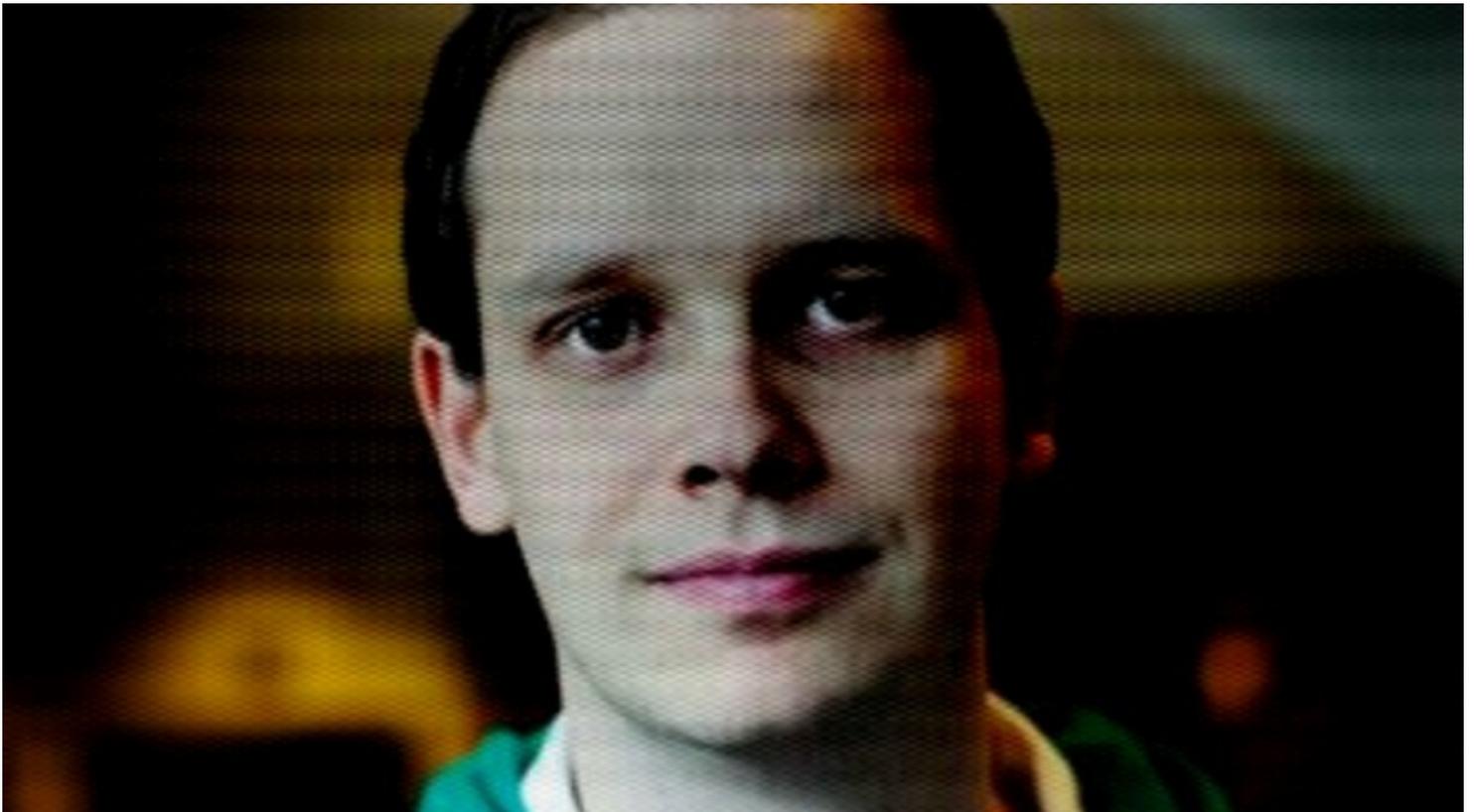
# Pirate Bay Founder: 'I Have Given Up'

The socialist and filesharing pioneer Peter Sunde is not optimistic about the open internet.

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By Joost Mollen

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PETER SUNDE. ADAPTED FROM [SHARE CONFERENCE/FLICKR](#)

"The internet is shit today. It's broken. It was probably always broken, but it's worse than ever."

My conversation with [Peter Sunde](#), one of the founders and spokespersons of The Pirate Bay, did not start out optimistically. There's good reason for that: In the last couple of months, the contemporary download culture shows heavy signs of defeat in the battle for the internet.

Last month we saw [Demonii](#) disappear. It was the biggest torrent tracker on the internet, responsible for over 50 million trackers a year. Additionally, the MPAA [took down](#) YIFY and Popcorn Time. Then news got out that the Dutch Release Team, an uploading collective, made a [legal settlement](#) with anti-piracy group BREIN.

While it might look like torrenters are still fighting this battle, Sunde claims that the reality is more definitive: "We have already lost."

Back in 2003 Peter Sunde, together with Fredrik Neij and Gottfrid Svartholm, started The Pirate Bay, a website that would become the biggest and most famous file-sharing website in the world. In 2009, the three founders were convicted of "assisting [others] in copyright infringement" in a highly controversial [trial](#).

**"Stop treating internet like it's a different thing and start focusing on what you actually want your society to look like."**

Sunde was incarcerated in 2014 and released a year later. After his time in jail he started blogging about the centralization of power by the European Union; ran as a candidate for the Finnish Pirate Party during the elections to the European Parliament; and founded Flattr, a micro donation system for software developers.

I wanted to speak with Sunde about the current state of the free and open internet, but this conversation quickly changed into an ideological exchange about society and capitalism—which is, according to Sunde, the real problem.

*The following interview has been edited for clarity and length.*

**MOTHERBOARD:** Hey Peter, I was planning on asking you if things are going well, but you made it pretty clear that that isn't the case.

**Peter Sunde:** No, I don't see any good happening. People are too easy to content with things.

Take the net neutrality law in Europe. It's terrible, but people are happy and go like "it could be worse." That is absolutely not the right attitude. Facebook brings the internet to Africa and poor countries, but they're only giving limited access to their own services and make money off of poor people. And getting government grants to do that, because they do PR well.

Finland actually made internet access a human right a while back. That was

a clever thing of Finland. But that's like the only positive thing I have seen in any country anywhere in the world regarding the internet

### **So, how bad is the state of the open internet?**

Well, we don't have an open internet. We haven't had an open internet for a long time. So, we can't really talk about the open internet because it does not exist anymore. The problem is, nobody stops anything. We are losing privileges and rights all of the time. We are not gaining anything anywhere. The trend is just going in one direction: a more closed and more controlled internet. That has a big impact on our society. Because they are the same thing today. If you have a more oppressed internet, you have a more oppressed society. So that's something we should focus on.

But still we think of the internet like this new kind Wild West place, and things are not in chains yet, so we don't care because everything will be OK anyhow. But that is not really the case. We have never seen this amount of centralization, extreme inequality, extreme capitalism in any system before. But according to the marketing done by people like Mark Zuckerberg and companies like Google, it's all to help with the open network and to spread democracy, and so on. At the same time, they are capitalistic monopolies. So it's like trusting the enemy to do the good deeds. It is really bizarre.

### **Do you think because a lot of people don't consider the internet to be real or a real place, they care less about its well-being?**

Well, one thing is, we have been growing up with an understanding of the importance of things like a telephone line or television. So if we would start to treat our telephone lines or TV channels like we treat the internet, people would get really upset. If someone would tell you, you can't call a friend, you

would understand then that this is a very bad thing that is happening. You understand your rights. But people don't have that with the internet. If someone would tell you, you can't use Skype for that and that, you don't get the feeling it's about you personally. Just by being a virtual thing, it's suddenly not directed at you. You don't see someone spying on you, you don't see something censored, you don't see it when someone deletes stuff out of the search results out of Google. I think that's the biggest problem to get people's attention. You don't see the problems, so people don't feel connected to it.



SCREENSHOT FROM THE DOCUMENTARY TPB - AFK (THE PIRATE BAY - AWAY FROM KEYBOARD). FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: GOTTFRID SVARTHOLM, PETER SUNDE AND FREDRIK NEIJ.

I would rather not care about it myself. Because it's very hard to do something about it, and not become a paranoid conspiracy person. And you don't want to be that. So rather just give up. That's kind of what people have been thinking, I think.

## **What is it exactly that you have given up?**

Well, I have given up the idea that we can win this fight for the internet.

The situation is not going to be any different, because apparently that is something people are not interested in fixing. Or we can't get people to care enough. Maybe it's a mixture, but this is kind of the situation we are in, so its useless to do anything about it.

We have become somehow the Black Knight from Monty Python's Holy Grail. We have maybe half of our head left and we are still fighting, we still think we have a chance of winning this battle.

## **So what can people do to change this?**

Nothing.

## **Nothing?**

No, I think we are at that point. I think it's really important people understand this. We lost this fight. Just admit defeat and make sure next time you understand why you lost this fight and make sure it doesn't happen again when we try and win the war.

## **Right, so what is this war about and what should we do to win it?**

Well, I think, to win the war, we first of need to understand what the fight is and for me it's clear that we are dealing with ideological thing: extreme capitalism that's ruling, extreme lobbying that's ruling and the centralization of power. The internet is just a part of a bigger puzzle.

And the other thing with activism is that you have to get momentum and attention and such. We have been really bad at that. So we stopped ACTA, but then it just came back with a different name. By that time, we had used all our resources and public attention on that.

The reason that the real world is the big target for me, is because the internet is emulating the real world. We are trying to recreate this capitalistic society we have on top of the internet. So the internet has been mostly fuel on the capitalistic fire, by kind of pretending to be something which will connect the whole world, but actually having a capitalistic agenda.

Look at all the biggest companies in the world, they are all based on the internet. Look at what they are selling: nothing. Facebook has no product. Airbnb, the biggest hotel chain in the world, has no hotels. Uber, the biggest taxi company in the world, has no taxis whatsoever.

**"I have given up the idea that we can win this fight for the internet."**

The amount of employees in these companies are smaller than ever before and the profits are, in turn, larger. Apple and Google are passing oil companies by far. Minecraft got sold for \$2.6 billion and WhatsApp for like \$19 billion. These are insane amounts of money for nothing. That is why the internet and capitalism are so in love with each other.

**You told me the internet is broken, that it was always broken. What do you mean by that and do we have extreme capitalism to blame for it?**

Well, the thing is the internet is really stupid. It works really simply in a simple manner and it doesn't take any adjustments for censorship. Like, if one cable is gone, you take the traffic through some other place. But thanks to the centralization of the internet, (possible) censorship or surveillance tech is a whole lot harder to get around. Also, because the internet was an American invention, they also still have control of it and ICANN can actually force any country top level domain to be censored or disconnected. For me that's, a really broken design.

But it has always been broken, we just never really cared about it, because there always have been a few good people that made sure that nothing bad happened before. But I think that's the wrong idea. Rather let bad thing happen as quick as possible so we can fix them and make sure it does not happen in the future. We are prolonging this inevitable total failure, which is not helping us at all.

**So, we should just let it crash and burn down, pick up the pieces and start over?**

Yes, with the focus on the big war on this extreme capitalism. I couldn't vote, but I was hoping Sarah Palin won last time in the US elections. I'm hoping Donald Trump wins this year's election. For the reason that it will fuck up that country so much faster then if a less bad President wins. Our whole world is just so focused on money, money, money. That's the biggest problem. That's why everything fucks up. That's the target we have to fix. We need to make sure that we are going to get a different focus in life.

**"We don't have an open internet. We haven't had an open internet for a long time."**

Hopefully technology will give us robots that will take away all the jobs, which will cause like a massive worldwide unemployment; somewhat like 60 percent. People will be so unhappy. That would be great, because then you can finally see capitalism crashing so hard. There is going to be a lot of fear, lost blood, and lost lives to get to that point, but I think that's the only positive thing I see, that we are going to have a total system collapse in the future. Hopefully as quick as possible. I would rather be 50 than be like 85 when the system is crashing.

**This all sounds quite like some sort of Marxist revolution: a total crash of the capitalist system.**

Well, yeah, I totally agree with that. I'm a socialist. I know Marx and communism did not work before, but I think in the future you have the possibility of having total communism and equal access to everything for everybody. Most people I meet, no matter if they are a communist or a capitalist, agree with me on this, because they understand the potential.

**So, is there like a concrete thing we should focus on? Or do we need to aim for a new way of thinking? A new ideology?**

Well, I think the focus needs to be that the internet is exactly the same as society. People might realize that it's not a really good idea to have all of our data and files on Google, Facebook and company servers. All of these things need to be communicated all the way to the political top, of course. But stop treating internet like it's a different thing and start focusing on what you actually want your society to look like. We have to fix society, before we can fix the internet. That's the only thing.

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