

WE THANK THEE JOB CREATORS FOR OUR DAILY BREAD

Service with a Smile

ISSUE: 1



Service with a Smile

Hiding in plain sight is a powerful identity, a basic logic, a daily reality that unites most of us and yet is obscured by an arbitrary focus on a difference of colors—a difference in the color of our skin, a difference in the color of our collars, a difference in the color of our politics. But were we to strip society of the power of its pigments we'd see that whether we are black or white or brown, whether we button up the white collar or don the blue, whether we are on the red end of the political dichotomy or the blue, we are bound together by a profound similarity that is strikingly more compelling and foundational than any difference by which we define and distance ourselves. Hidden amongst the branches of materialist fanfare, this fruit ripe for the taking: It is that dreaded feeling of Sunday, the tyranny of another's to-do list, the 9 to 5 waned watching the clock. It is this that colors our collective existence. If we are anything, if we are the people, a people, it is because WE are workers.

Intrinsic to our humanity is an inborn desire to fulfill our unique capacities and central to our society is the reality that each morning when the majority of us wake up, we have not the luxury of setting about to realize those capacities. And so ensues the struggle to find meaning in 40 plus hours of a meaningless occupation, 40 plus hours of a meaningless existence that is the requirement of existence itself. And should you not feel this so explicitly then there is still that subtle gnawing during the day, that reluctance on a weekday evening, that gaiety that animates the office on a Friday afternoon. Or should you be so lucky as to be employed in a position that plays to your interests and talents, it is then still that unrelenting pressure, the phone that can never be ignored, that wish you had just a little more time to yourself.



And so on the eve of May Day, we invite you to join in our conversation, our imaginaries about work, this thing common to us all that structures our lives. We invite you to examine with us the history of May Day, celebrated as a labor holiday in remembrance of the struggle for an 8 hour work day and to hold this in conversation with our contemporary working conditions and their relative comfort, but a comfort that is, as we'll see, contested and complicated by the difficulty in gaining access to that workplace, the mythical job that is the false promise of the college education. We'll see how the market, when not stifling our creativity, usurps it for its own gain and how the early 20th century dream of a three day work week, predicated on technological advances, has warped into a nightmare that has us working longer hours at "Bullshit" jobs. We'll explore ways to cope with this reality, how to forgive ourselves and inscribe our own meaning upon the meaningless. And finally, we invite you to imagine something other, to imagine a society that structures production around needs and not profit, a society of workers who fulfill the American imperative of hard work and self-reliance while also fulfilling their own special talents and proclivities to their highest natural and beautiful realization.

In an essay delineating the tenants of Existentialism, French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre reminds us that we are nothing but what we make of ourselves, that the full responsibility of our existence rests on ourselves, that condemned to such freedom we have only to choose and to act, and that not choosing or acting is a choice and action in itself. Faced with the reality of a society it seems we had no say in the structuring of, we must remember this powerful idea, and remember that when we are too tired to fight, when we would rather indulge in the intoxication of consumerism, when we would rather slouch TV-dazed on the couch, we are choosing to reify the very things our hearts, our humanity, rallies against.



Should these readings stir something in you, please join us for further conversation, imagination, realization.

In solidarity,

The Flatirons Anarchist Alliance

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<https://we.riseup.net/flatironsanarchistalliancebc> >

CALL IN SICK TO WORK!

MAY 1ST

“FREEDOM IS JUST 7 DIGITS AWAY”

-WEIRD AL



The Brief Origins of May Day (International Workers Day)

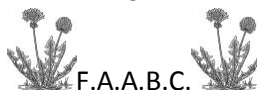
By Eric Chase

Most people living in the United States know little about the International Workers' Day of May Day. **Most Americans don't realize that May Day has its origins here in this country** and is as "American" as baseball and apple pie.

In the late nineteenth century, the working class was in constant struggle to gain the 8-hour work day. Working conditions were severe and it was quite common to work 10 to 16 hour days in unsafe conditions. Death and injury were

"Workers had seen first-hand that Capitalism benefited only their bosses, trading workers' lives for profit."

commonplace at many work places and inspired such books as Upton Sinclair's The Jungle and Jack London's The Iron Heel. As early as the 1860's, **working people agitated to shorten the workday without a cut in pay**, but it wasn't until the late



1880's that organized labor was able to garner enough strength to declare the 8-hour workday.

At this time, **socialism was a new and attractive idea to working people**, many of whom were drawn to its ideology of working class control over the production and distribution of all goods and services. Workers had seen first-hand that Capitalism benefited only their bosses, trading workers' lives for profit. Thousands of men, women and children were dying needlessly every year in the workplace, with life expectancy as low as their early twenties in some industries, and little hope but death of rising out of their destitution. Socialism offered another option.

A variety of socialist organizations sprung up throughout the later half of the 19th century, ranging from political parties to choir groups Tens of thousands of socialists broke ranks from their parties, rebuffed the entire political process, which was seen as nothing more than protection for the wealthy, and created anarchist groups throughout the country. **Literally thousands of working people embraced the ideals of anarchism**, which sought to put an end to all hierarchical structures (including government), emphasized worker controlled industry, and valued direct action over the bureaucratic political process. It is inaccurate to say that labor unions were "taken over" by anarchists and socialists, but rather anarchists and socialist made up the labor unions.

At its national convention in Chicago, held in 1884, the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions (which later became the American Federation of Labor), proclaimed that



"eight hours shall constitute a legal day's labor from and after May 1, 1886." At first, most radicals and anarchists regarded this demand as too reformist, failing to strike "at the root of the evil." A year before the Haymarket Massacre, Samuel Fielden pointed out in the anarchist newspaper, *The Alarm*, that "whether a man works eight hours a day or ten hours a day, he is still a slave."

Despite the misgivings of many of the anarchists, an estimated **quarter million workers in the Chicago area became directly involved in the crusade** to implement the eight hour work day. With the involvement of the anarchists, there seemed to be an infusion of greater issues than the 8-hour day. There grew a sense of a greater social revolution beyond the more immediate gains of shortened hours, but a drastic change in the economic structure of capitalism.

In a proclamation printed just before May 1, 1886, one publisher appealed to working people with this plea:

- **Workingmen to Arms!**
- **The wage system is the only cause of the World's misery. It is supported by the rich classes, and to destroy it, they must be either made to work or DIE.**
- **One pound of DYNAMITE is better than a bushel of BALLOTS!**
- **MAKE YOUR DEMAND FOR EIGHT HOURS with weapons in your hands to meet the capitalistic bloodhounds, police, and militia in proper manner.**

Not surprisingly the entire city was prepared for mass bloodshed, reminiscent of the railroad strike a decade earlier



when police and soldiers gunned down hundreds of striking workers. On May 1, 1886, more than 300,000 workers in 13,000 businesses across the United States walked off their jobs in the first May Day celebration in history. In Chicago, the epicenter for the 8-hour day agitators, 40,000 went out on strike with the anarchists in the forefront of the public's eye. With their fiery speeches and revolutionary ideology of direct action, anarchists and anarchism became respected and embraced by the working people and despised by the capitalists.



Parades, bands and tens of thousands of demonstrators in the streets exemplified the workers' strength and unity, yet didn't become violent as the newspapers and authorities predicted.

More and more **workers continued to walk off their jobs** until the numbers swelled to nearly 100,000, yet peace prevailed. It was not until two days later, May 3, 1886, that violence broke out between police and strikers.

For six months, armed Pinkerton agents and the police harassed and beat locked-out steelworkers as they picketed. Most of these workers belonged to

the "anarchist-dominated" Metal Workers' Union. During a speech near the McCormick plant, some two hundred demonstrators joined the steelworkers on the picket line. Beatings with police clubs escalated into rock throwing by the strikers which the police responded to with gunfire. At least two strikers were killed and an unknown number were wounded.



Full of rage, a public meeting was called by some of the anarchists for the following day in Haymarket Square to discuss the police brutality. As the speech wound down, two detectives rushed to the main body of police, reporting that a speaker was using inflammatory language, inciting the police to march on the speakers' wagon. As the police began to disperse the already thinning crowd, a bomb was thrown into the police ranks. **No one knows who threw the bomb**, but speculations varied from blaming any one of the anarchists, to an agent provocateur working for the police.

Enraged, the police fired into the crowd. The exact number of civilians killed or wounded was never determined, but an estimated seven or eight civilians died, and up to forty were wounded. One officer died immediately and another seven died in the following weeks. Later evidence indicated that only one of the police deaths could be attributed to the bomb and that all the other police fatalities had or could have had been due to their own indiscriminate gun fire. Aside from the bomb thrower, who was never identified, it was the police, not the anarchists, who perpetrated the violence.

Eight anarchists - Albert Parsons, August Spies, Samuel Fielden, Oscar Neebe, Michael Schwab, George Engel, Adolph Fischer and Louis Lingg - were arrested and convicted of murder, **though only three were even present at Haymarket and those three were in full view of all when the bombing occurred.** The jury in their trial was comprised of business leaders in a gross mockery of justice similar to the Sacco-Vanzetti case thirty years later, or the trials of AIM and



Black Panther members in the seventies. The entire world watched as these eight organizers were convicted, not for their actions, of which all of were innocent, but for their political and social beliefs. On November 11, 1887, after many failed appeals, Parsons, Spies, Engel and Fisher were hung to death.

The remaining organizers, Fielden, Neebe and Schwab, were pardoned six years later by Governor Altgeld, who publicly lambasted the judge on a travesty of justice. Immediately after the Haymarket Massacre, big business and government conducted what some say was the very first "Red Scare" in this country. **Spun by mainstream media**, anarchism became synonymous with bomb throwing and socialism became un-American.



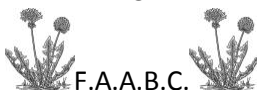
Today we see tens of thousands of activists embracing the ideals of the Haymarket Martyrs and those who established May Day as an International Workers' Day. Ironically, May Day is an official holiday in 66 countries and unofficially celebrated in many more, **but rarely is it recognized in this country where it began.** Over one hundred years have passed since



that first May Day. In the earlier part of the 20th century, the US government tried to curb the celebration and further wipe it from the public's memory by establishing "Law and Order Day" on May 1.

Truly, history has a lot to teach us about the roots of our radicalism. **When we remember that people were shot so we could have the 8-hour day**; if we acknowledge that **homes with families in them were burned to the ground so we could have Saturday as part of the weekend**; when we recall 8-year old victims of industrial accidents who marched in the streets protesting working conditions and child labor only to be beat down by the police and company thugs, we understand that our current condition cannot be taken for granted - people fought for the rights and dignities we enjoy today, and **there is still a lot more to fight for**. The sacrifices of so many people cannot be forgotten or we'll end up fighting for those same gains all over again.

This is why we celebrate May Day.



Free Labor and Creative Work

The conceptual role of "creativity" in our age of austerity has blurred and diverged and appeared in a strange array of contradictory positions. On the one hand, there is the opposition between art and work: Young people all want to be artists, but the economy needs engineers. Students of literature forfeit their future; they should have studied something more practical. Entitled millennials all just want to be artists-- it's no wonder the economy falls to pieces in their soft, uncalloused hands. On the other hand, there is the identity between art and work: Just as modernists innovated, so too do the tech startups. The creative work of "writing" is absolutely necessary for the writing of advertisements or technical manuals. What was once the day job has become its own creative reward.



On the one hand, making art is positioned as a defiant or stupid gesture against nine-to-five existence and white-collar respectability; on the other, it is used by the economic machine to remarket itself as hip and fun, and to justify existing distribution of rewards.

But this is not particularly new. Before tech startups merged with indie rock to solidify claims of being [hip and creative](#), before the ideals of 1960s radicals were consummated in a [Levi's commercials](#), new industrial rich took the architecture of European aristocracies to [affirm their social authority](#). Political-economic elites appropriate the cultural and symbolic languages of their rivals, as new outsiders and opponents articulate new forms of resistance or differentiation. Hence, perhaps, the hipster who denounces the band as soon it gains mainstream recognition.

This sense of art as reappropriated legitimization is nothing new: As Soviet rulers adapted paradigms of Orthodox Christian religious authority, so too do contemporary political-economic elites adopt signifiers of social authority pioneered by their rivals. The architecture of the classical academy or paideia, where the distinctions between [chrematistics](#) or usury and useful work were formulated, are repurposed to lend grandeur to the [bastions of the financial sector](#). The abstract expressionist aesthetic, pioneered by leftist radicals, was [used by the CIA as Cold War propaganda](#),



before a more general modernist aesthetic emerged as a [reliable indicator of class](#), and Rothko and Pollock's paintings became speculative canvasses over which the financial speculators could stretch their profession.

But this role of legitimization becomes doubly important in this era of bubble capitalism. If the halls of power have long borrowed social authority along with architectural forms, the possibility of leveraging others' creative work directly for profit has only recently come into its own. With [money entering the economy](#) increasingly taking the [form of debt leveraged by investors](#), keeping investors excited is the single most important feat in many industries-- even more so than making a profit. An image of being creative and exciting will keep money flowing in-- [even if very little in the way of monetizable products flow out](#).

If the value of corn or t-shirts can be measured in a meaningful way, the production of art, iphones, or property values cannot be. In a bubble economy or in non-commodity exchange, the worth of a firm or product depends much more on its social esteem or the hype surrounding it than on any stable metric, such as a firm's physical capital or the difficulty of a product's manufacture. As such, cultural reappropriation of the sort I've been talking about is not just ironic or propagandistic-- it's directly economically exploitative. Uncompensated creative labor becomes the basis for huge profits extracted from political-economic elites. "Free

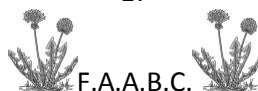


labor" (the term was popularized by Italian theorist Tiziana Terranova) could crowdsourcing, domestic work, and unpaid internships. A housewife washes dishes out of social expectation or patriarchal arrangements of power; Linux is used in Android smart phones, and the freely developed software becomes a major source of revenue for a for-profit corporation; user jokes or innovative uses become sources of billions for investors in web services like Twitter or Instagram. As theorist Adam Kotsko tells ["The Story of Twitter,"](#)

Some guys came up with a web service called Twitter that would facilitate sending group text messages. They imagined people would use it to help coordinate in-person socializing — for instance, you could send a message to your group of friends saying you were at a certain bar, and they could come by. In principle, that seems like a useful service.

As it turns out, though, people started using that service for completely different purposes, because it turned out to be a flexible and convenient way to communicate brief thoughts, links, etc. Often the platform actively impeded the uses people were finding for it, and the implementation of supplementary features (such as discussion threading) was slow and inconsistent.

Now there's been an IPO and the people who created this service are multi-millionaires. The people who actually turned



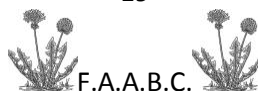
Twitter into what it is, however, get nothing — unless you count the increased number of ads.

Free-market bureaucrats extract immense profits from the incidental work of others leading a social existence (telling jokes, creating fashions, making music). Commie hippie pioneering leads to markets for [\\$800 hippie dresses](#), a modernist aesthetic emergent from various anti-capitalist creative groups sets the design foundation for Apple's fortunes. The cultural language of white hipness is [transplanted from working class or creative groups](#) to the realms of business and finance in order to keep investors excited-- and in speculative finance, investor excitement translates directly into profit. The unpaid work of aspirants or hobbyists, the diffuse work of cultural pioneers, or the expected work of feminized labor is extracted or harnessed to facilitate the fortunes of rich white dudes; ditto the government: Economist Mariana Mazzucato documents how government research is used by private companies like Google and Apple, who did not make the investment, and do not share the returns. This is another instance of the "socialization of risks, privatization of profits" that describes bailouts of the financial sector.

We see creative work become free labor in marked up hippie dresses or inflated stock prices for Twitter, but the phenomenon becomes more diffuse and more dramatic in the gentrification



process. Artists, hipsters, or punks-- some rebellious, probably white subcultural variant-- moves into or emerges from a poor, probably colored city or neighborhood. Attracted by a low cost of living, and therefore partial liberation from the demands of the market, incomers are able to live for some time without rents going appreciably up; though, eventually, a good music or arts scene, a general "hip" reputation, will emerge: Brooklyn, Austin, San Francisco, will become more "hip" than "dangerous," and companies will move in, relying on the city's reputation to help them attract employees, establish a brand, and foster hype. Real estate speculators buy up properties, increasing land values in anticipation of the process's continuation, and the area's original inhabitants are forced into financial difficulty or made to move to the periphery of their developing city. Tech companies brand themselves as innovative, creative, and spontaneous as they [kick out the beat poets](#) who vaulted these into the pantheon of American values in the first place. "Keep Portland Weird" is taken as a slogan for firms in marketing, tourism, and services that target new monied workers in tech as these phenomena make the city demonstrably less weird. The cheap rent that had facilitated free time for the creation of music, or the possibility of low-income work in independent art is undone by the creation of music and independent art. Speculators are able to profit from the hype around the hip area, tech companies are able to attract employees

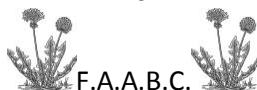


and build hype, and banks benefit by creating new money as investors leverage debt for all these exciting new investment opportunities. Political-economic elites are able to extract money from others' free labor due to their privileged position in the mechanism of money-creation in financialized capitalism, and the process will continue until even the first-wave artist-gentrifiers are [expelled for the very development they incurred!](#)

This process highlights not only the uncompensated nature of creative work under financialized capitalism, but also the arbitrary nature of monetary worth. In a bubble economy, the only value is "being exciting to white

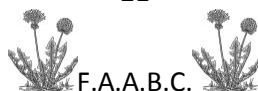
“Tech companies brand themselves as innovative, creative, and spontaneous as they [kick out the beat poets](#) who vaulted these into the pantheon of American values in the first place.”

people." Banks create money by getting others to take out debt, and as alternative forms of money creation (most obviously, government spending) are stripped away, banks are given a greater share of socioeconomic power. Additionally, as markets for basic commodities are saturated (one can only eat so much corn, buy so many cars), non-commodities and investment



bubbles come to pose new avenues to profit; but these things derive their worth from hype or social esteem rather than any stable or intrinsic measure of value. The free labor of an uncompensated creative class bases financial growth, but a culture's worth is only determined by its relatability for the arbiters of value. If hipsters are harbingers of "development" or marks of "[revitalization](#)," these are just euphemisms to mean that they create environments amenable to those-with-money, or those able to create it. White artist-gentrifiers set the stage for tech companies because [SXSW](#) is more exciting to Silicon Valley than Atlanta trap music; but, in either case, the vast majority of creative workers (musicians, organizers critics, scenesters) responsible for these movements will not be compensated by the money-extracting elites who will force them to work more hours at the coffee shops, fast food restaurants, or retail outlets that employ them, before they are eventually driven out of their native or adopted neighborhoods entirely.

As I've emphasized, this process rests mainly on the money-creating privilege of financial elites. The simplest, most direct solutions then, are obvious: create money in different ways. This would lessen the amount of private debt, decrease the likelihood and destructiveness of bursting financial bubbles, and potentially reward more socially valuable work than the money-creation and wealth-extraction of free-market bureaucrats. Courses of action



could include: more publicly-funded services and ventures, more income for government workers, a universal basic income, or minimizing taxes on consumption. If someone says "there isn't enough money," they either want to maintain money-creation privileges for themselves, or they've been duped by those who do.

"The creative life" is posited as both the remedy for and the actuality of market life. One sense turns to the other as political-economic elites repurpose cultural forms and symbolic languages created through the free (in both the sense of voluntary and unpaid) creative work of others' incidental social existence.

Ciphers of hipness developed mostly by working class, radical, or other creative or outsider groups, are harnessed to create a sense of social legitimacy by political-economic elites and foster hype that is leveraged to inflate prices of non-commodities and create money for banks and speculators. Artist-types make a neighborhood appear hip and attractive to the money-creating classes, and those beneficiaries will leverage the neighborhood's new appeal for immense profit before kicking out those to whom they owe their fortunes. The work of creative outsiders to the economic processes of money-creation and value-extraction is capitalized upon by the very elites to whom the outsiders stood opposed, even as creative workers are reconceived as subordinate to and derivative of political-economic elites in popular narratives: Entitled millennials forfeit their future studying



art, but entrepreneurs are the true creatives anyway. In reality, an alliance of business, finance, and real estate utilize a privileged political-economic position to extract money from the unpaid outsiders on whom they depend for their fortunes.

Life After a College “Education”

- **CU BOULDER GRADUATE**

The university is a great place to learn neat things in the field(s) that you’re interested in and can be the medium through which you find kick ass parties and grow as an individual. These stories of college life are generally true, but there is one myth that is told over and over again and is the sole reason kids sign up, and that is the myth of an immediate job in your dream career and a massive salary increase.

If you’re anything like the common adult after college, you have a piece of paper you paid around \$35,000 – 60,000 for and little to no experience for any job that is in your field. Now isn’t that funny? A person may argue that during your time at the university you should be volunteering at places to gain experience, which is what determined student should do, and not because she/he feels the need to, but because the person desires to chase their passion.



What's wrong with this picture? Well unfortunately there is a thing called rent that must be paid, as well as food and other things. So if you're like most students who join the herd to gain an "education", you have to work a service or labor job in order to continue supporting yourself. Obviously this is a disadvantage to the person who wants to get ahead of the pack, thus a disadvantage to a large herd. This enables the privileged class more time and effort towards real skills outside of the university through volunteer work, internship, etc. and also the connections they inherit through their parents 'legacy'. Looks like they got us (the proletariat) in quite the predicament.



This majority of students are saturated with "advice" telling them to 'dig in' or 'just work this crummy job until you're out of school' from parents, peers, and themselves. This gives the student a drive and feeling of accomplishment when finally graduated, but the student soon finds that each and every job they are interested in or need to get their foot in the door requires 1-5 years previous work experience for that specific job. So what you are left with is little hope for the career you dreamed of (unless you go deeper in debt by getting a masters or phd) and the already privileged class continues enjoying a

comfortable life. There is hope in getting your dream job, but it will take plenty of determination and time (mostly time) to acquire the real skills needed, such as learning another language, software program, permaculture, and other skills that often require even more money.

My situation isn't even close to the more intense struggles of families around the world working long days just to put food on the table. Unfortunately, they never had a chance given to them to afford a loan.

I suggest supporting collective living in cities, forming worker unions (whatever the scale), and setting up student demonstrations to gain a free education and most importantly one that gives us real fucking skills. Let's end this continuous cycle of debt and useless education!

Recommendation: Human Resources by Metanoia Films

Honey Badgers don't take no shit!



On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs

David Graeber.

In the year 1930, John Maynard Keynes predicted that technology would have advanced sufficiently by century's end that countries like Great Britain or the United States would achieve a 15-hour work week. There's every reason to believe he was right. In technological terms, we are quite capable of this. And yet it didn't happen. Instead, technology has been marshaled, if anything, to figure out ways to make us all work more. In order to achieve this, jobs have had to be created that are, effectively, pointless. Huge swathes of people, in Europe and North America in particular, spend their entire working lives performing tasks they secretly believe do not really need to be performed. The moral and spiritual damage that comes from this situation is profound. It is a scar across our collective soul. Yet virtually no one talks about it.



Why did Keynes' promised utopia – still being eagerly awaited in the '60s – never materialise? The standard line today is that he didn't figure in the massive increase in consumerism. Given the choice between less hours and more toys and pleasures, we've collectively chosen the latter. This presents a nice morality tale, but even a moment's reflection shows it can't really be true. Yes, we have witnessed the creation of an endless variety of new jobs and industries since the '20s, but very few have anything to do with the production and distribution of sushi, iPhones, or fancy sneakers.

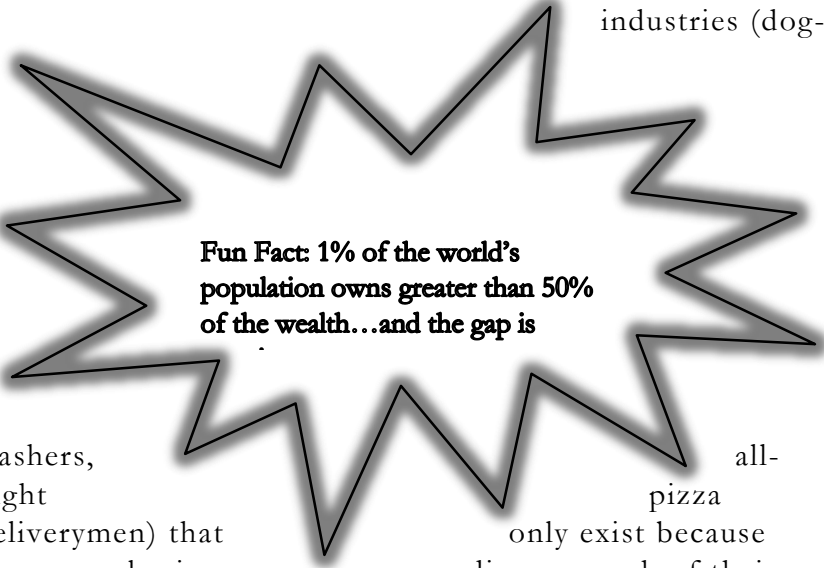
So what are these new jobs, precisely? A recent report comparing employment in the US between 1910 and 2000 gives us a clear picture (and I note, one pretty much exactly echoed in the UK). Over the course of the last century, the number of workers employed as domestic servants, in industry, and in the farm sector has collapsed dramatically. At the same time, “professional, managerial, clerical, sales, and service workers” tripled, growing “from one-quarter to three-quarters of total employment.” In other words, productive jobs have, just as predicted, been largely automated away (even if you count industrial workers globally, including the toiling masses in India and China, such workers are still not nearly so large a percentage of the world population as they used to be).

**Going 'Postal' Is a
Mental Illness
Conceived from
High-Pressure
Monotonous Tasks
and the Greed of
Capitalism**



But rather than allowing a massive reduction of working hours to free the world's population to pursue their own projects, pleasures, visions, and ideas, we have seen the ballooning not even so much of the "service" sector as of the administrative sector, up to and including the creation of whole new industries like financial services or telemarketing, or the unprecedented expansion of sectors like corporate law, academic and health administration, human resources, and public relations. And these numbers do not even reflect on all those people whose job is to provide administrative, technical, or security support for these industries, or for that matter the whole host of

ancillary industries (dog-



Fun Fact: 1% of the world's population owns greater than 50% of the wealth...and the gap is

washers, night deliverymen) that everyone else is time working in all the other ones.

all-pizza only exist because spending so much of their

These are what I propose to call "bullshit jobs." It's as if someone were out there making up pointless jobs just for



the sake of keeping us all working. And here, precisely, lies the mystery. In capitalism, this is exactly what is *not* supposed to happen. Sure, in the old inefficient socialist states like the Soviet Union, where employment was considered both a right and a sacred duty, the system made up as many jobs as they had to (this is why in Soviet department stores it took three clerks to sell a piece of meat). But, of course, this is the very sort of problem market competition is supposed to fix. According to economic theory, at least, the last thing a profit-seeking firm is going to do is shell out money to workers they don't really need to employ. Still, somehow, it happens.

While corporations may engage in ruthless downsizing, the layoffs and speed-ups invariably fall on that class of people who are actually making, moving, fixing and maintaining things; through some strange alchemy no one can quite explain, the number of salaried paper-pushers ultimately seems to expand, and more and more employees find themselves, not unlike Soviet workers actually, working 40 or even 50 hour weeks on paper, but effectively working 15 hours just as Keynes predicted, since the rest of their time is spent organising or attending motivational seminars, updating their facebook profiles or downloading TV box-sets.

“Real, productive workers are relentlessly squeezed and exploited.”

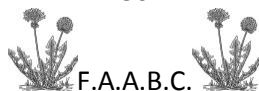


The answer clearly isn't economic: it's moral and political. The ruling class has figured out that a happy and productive population with free time on their hands is a mortal danger (think of what started to happen when this even began to be approximated in the '60s). And, on the other hand, the feeling that work is a moral value in itself, and that anyone not willing to submit themselves to some kind of intense work discipline for most of their waking hours deserves nothing, is extraordinarily convenient for them.

Once, when contemplating the apparently endless growth of administrative responsibilities in British academic departments, I came up with one possible vision of hell. Hell is a collection of individuals who are spending the bulk of their time working on a task they don't like and are not especially good at. Say they were hired because they were excellent cabinet-makers, and then discover they are expected to spend a great deal of their time frying fish. Neither does the task really need to be done – at least, there's only a very limited number of fish that need to be fried. Yet somehow, they all become so obsessed with resentment at the thought that some of their co-workers might be spending more time making cabinets, and not doing their fair share of the fish-frying responsibilities, that before long there's endless piles of useless badly cooked fish piling up all over the workshop and it's all that anyone really does.

*I think this is actually a pretty accurate description of the moral dynamics of our own economy.

Now, I realise any such argument is going to run into immediate objections: “who are you to say what jobs are



really ‘necessary’? What’s necessary anyway?

You’re an anthropology professor, what’s the ‘need’ for that?” (And indeed a lot of tabloid readers would take the existence of my job as the very definition of wasteful social expenditure.) And on one level, this is obviously true. There can be no objective measure of social value.

I would not presume to tell someone who is convinced they are making a meaningful contribution to the world that, really, they are not. But what about those people who are themselves convinced their jobs are meaningless? Not long ago I got back in touch with a school friend who I hadn’t seen since I was 12. I was amazed to discover that in the

#Fun #Fact

In academic economics, there is a nested assumption-- free markets maximize wellbeing *if and only if a benevolent dictator periodically redistributes resources in a perfectly egalitarian manner.*

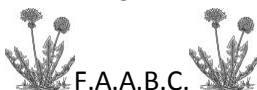
(<https://unlearningeconomics.wordpress.com/2012/12/03/debunking-economics-part-xvii-response-to-criticisms-12/>)

The idea that free markets maximize wellbeing is then used to legitimize the creation of markets in real life.

People pay hundreds of thousands of dollars to learn these conclusions without the assumptions they are built upon! Because this body of artifice is somehow seen as conducive to gainful employment! (See the post-graduation income for economics majors compared to those from more rigorous disciplines like history, anthropology, or comparative literature.)

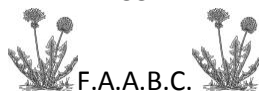


interim, he had become first a poet, then the front man in an indie rock band. I'd heard some of his songs on the radio having no idea the singer was someone I actually knew. He was obviously brilliant, innovative, and his work had unquestionably brightened and improved the lives of people all over the world. Yet, after a couple of unsuccessful albums, he'd lost his contract, and plagued with debts and a newborn daughter, ended up, as he put it, "taking the default choice of so many directionless folk: law school." Now he's a corporate lawyer working in a prominent New York firm. He was the first to admit that his job was utterly meaningless, contributed nothing to the world, and, in his own estimation, should not really exist. There's a lot of questions one could ask here, starting with, what does it say about our society that it seems to generate an extremely limited demand for talented poet-musicians, but an apparently infinite demand for specialists in corporate law? (Answer: if 1% of the population controls most of the disposable wealth, what we call "the market" reflects what *they* think is useful or important, not anybody else.) But even more, it shows that most people in these jobs are ultimately aware of it. In fact, I'm not sure I've ever met a corporate lawyer who didn't think their job was bullshit. The same goes for almost all the new industries outlined above. There is a whole class of salaried professionals that, should you meet them at parties and admit that you do something that might be considered interesting (an anthropologist, for example), will want to avoid even discussing their line of work entirely. Give them a few drinks, and they will launch into tirades about how pointless and stupid their job really is.



This is a profound psychological violence here. How can one even begin to speak of dignity in labour when one secretly feels one's job should not exist? How can it not create a sense of deep rage and resentment. Yet it is the peculiar genius of our society that its rulers have figured out a way, as in the case of the fish-fryers, to ensure that rage is directed precisely against those who actually do get to do meaningful work. For instance: in our society, there seems a general rule that, the more obviously one's work benefits other people, the less one is likely to be paid for it. Again, an objective measure is hard to find, but one easy way to get a sense is to ask: what would happen were this entire class of people to simply disappear? Say what you like about nurses, garbage collectors, or mechanics, it's obvious that were they to vanish in a puff of smoke, the results would be immediate and catastrophic. A world without teachers or dock-workers would soon be in trouble, and even one without science fiction writers or ska musicians would clearly be a lesser place. It's not entirely clear how humanity would suffer were all private equity CEOs, lobbyists, PR researchers, actuaries, telemarketers, bailiffs or legal consultants to similarly vanish. (Many suspect it might markedly improve.) Yet apart from a handful of well-touted exceptions (doctors), the rule holds surprisingly well.

Even more perverse, there seems to be a broad sense that this is the way things should be. This is one of the secret strengths of right-wing populism. You can see it when tabloids whip up resentment against tube workers for paralysing London during contract disputes: the very fact that tube workers can paralyse London shows that their



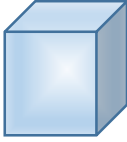
work is actually necessary, but this seems to be precisely what annoys people. It's even clearer in the US, where Republicans have had remarkable success mobilizing resentment against school teachers, or auto workers (and not, significantly, against the school administrators or auto industry managers who actually cause the problems) for their supposedly bloated wages and benefits. It's as if they are being told "but you get to teach children! Or make cars! You get to have real jobs! And on top of that you have the nerve to also expect middle-class pensions and health care?"

If someone had designed a work regime perfectly suited to maintaining the power of finance capital, it's hard to see how they could have done a better job. Real, productive workers are relentlessly squeezed and exploited. The remainder are divided between a terrorised stratum of the – universally reviled – unemployed and a larger stratum who are basically paid to do nothing, in positions designed to make them identify with the perspectives and sensibilities of the ruling class (managers, administrators, etc) – and particularly its financial avatars – but, at the same time, foster a simmering resentment against anyone whose work has clear and undeniable social value. Clearly, the system was never consciously designed. It emerged from almost a century of trial and error. But it is the only explanation for why, despite our technological capacities, we are not all working 3-4 hour days.

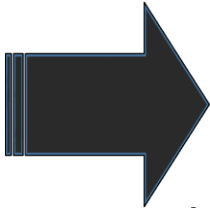
[David Graeber](#) is a Professor of Anthropology at the London School of Economics.



Mindful Cognitive Dissonance



By Daniel Pike



Cognitive dissonance refers to a situation involving conflicting attitudes, beliefs or behaviors. Currently, my life consists of all three. Most of the time, I am ignorant of this disconnect with reality (sometimes willfully).

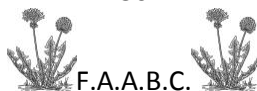
Often it is shrouded in the constant buzz of popular culture, menial life tasks and those ever present reminders that I am a cog in the machine; bills, trainings, tickets, rules, socially agreed upon obligations. But the truth is unavoidable and the truth will always make itself known. Whenever I am reminded of my humanity or brought back to the present, I come face to face with the truth. And the truth is that this way of living is not sustainable. This dissonance between how we naturally are and how we are expected to be slowly eats away and we are left depressed, anxious, stressed, sick, lonely,



“We are constantly looking for a way out and an improvement of our lives; given hope that once we attain that job, that house, that family, then our lives will be complete. That once we become those people we dream of being, then we will no longer have to participate and we can break free of the machine. What a dirty trick.”

and never satisfied. We are constantly looking for a way out and an improvement of our lives; given hope that once we attain that job, that house, that family, then our lives will be complete. That once we become those people we dream of being, then we will no longer have to participate and we can break free of the machine. What a dirty trick. What we don't realize is those dreams have been carefully fabricated and implanted into our psyche by society, governments and culture in order to entrap us in the machine for the entirety of our life cycle. From birth to death, we are literally chasing ideas that have been given to us by people who do not have our best interests and desire to keep us ignorant of our humanity; our true reason for existence.

The great modern philosopher Alan Watts described existence in this way, “the meaning of life is just to be alive. It is so plain and so obvious and so simple. And yet, everybody rushes around in a great panic as if it were necessary to achieve something beyond themselves.” Imagine living in a society based solely on being alive! A society that values mindful living, being present and being satisfied with what we have. A society that values life instead of administering death. People working together for the improvement of all instead of the self. I am not abdicating for Utopia and understand that we live in a world of balance. But I implore my friends, family and neighbors to take a five minute break off



of the hamster wheel, get some water and look beyond the cage and what could be instead of what is. We have agency to reach our full potential. Not potential in terms of material gain, but potential to fully self-actualize and become conscious humans who truly embrace humanity. To live free of the cognitive dissonance that encapsulates us.

Like most 25 year olds, I have a useless college degree and tens of thousands of dollars in student loan debt. When I went to college, it was only because I was doing what was expected of me rather than what I wanted to do. I did not know how to think critically and frankly, I had no idea what I wanted to do at that time. My worldview was small and I could not see beyond my own ignorance. The fact is that I cannot go back and change the path that I have taken to get to this point. The debt that I have acquired influences that path that I am currently on. I forgive that younger version of myself because mistakes make us who we are. Like most 25 year olds, I am stuck working in jobs that I am over qualified to make money to pay off debt which never physically existed. Nothing more than numbers in a computer screen. But I am not going to go into the magical world of the monetary system that we were born into. Instead, I am going to focus on how I cope with the cognitive dissonance of working in order to function in our fabricated world of enslavement.

Forgive yourself. I once read our current life experience described in this way. When we are born, our legs are intentionally broken and we are no given any resources to fix them. We are then expected to walk by those same people who broke our legs and it is our fault that we cannot. So we are the problem.

It's easy to believe that you are at fault for all of your problems. We are taught from a very early age to self-sufficient and to "get it together." That we are the only ones who can help ourselves. And to an extent, that is true. There is degree of responsibility that we have in our lives to ensure that we are living in a way which reflects our



values. However, we are also the products of our environments and we have been born into a world which worships money, death, greed, sex; the pursuit of personal pleasure over the common good. We are surrounded by the falsehoods of media, government, healthcare, education; systems operating under the guise of progress but are in actuality being used for the opposite of their proposed purposes. All of these fictions were in place before we got here and how lucky we are to be able to finally see them for what they are. Most people do not get to see cage let alone what's beyond the cage. That said, it is important to forgive yourself for your personal ignorance and for the subscribing to the cognitive dissonance our society perpetuates. This step is crucial because if we cannot forgive ourselves than we can never truly move forward beyond ourselves. We are our own best friends, our most trusted ally and we need to be able to look in a mirror and accept what we see; all aspects of complex selves (the subjectively "good" and "bad" sides we have).

Take responsibility. While we did not choose the environment we were born into, it is our responsibility to do the best we can with where we are. For me, this means setting realistic expectations for how I can live my life in way that does not compromise my values or impede the lives of other people. We will never be able to live perfectly or be the "ideal self" so it essential create a realistic idea of what I can right now to live as meaningful of a life as possible. This includes forgiving myself when I fail to live with integrity and accept the cognitive dissonance of our society.

We are also responsible for generating our own meaning and purpose out of what we do with our lives. I do not want to be working in the job I am currently in, but if I was to check-out and stop working, my family would be burdened with debt that they did not ask for and that they would feel obligated to pay because they are fully entrapped within the system. So because I am working, I try to create as much meaning out of my role as possible. How can the skills I am learning now be used to help people in the long run?



What little things can I do to continue growing and evolving as a human instead of becoming stuck in arrested development?

Mastering yourself. Every day, we can increase our levels of self-efficacy by mastering skills or having new experiences. The greatest factor in self-efficacy development is knowing that you have successfully accomplished something already before. Self-efficacy can be increased every single day if we have a goal in mind and a purpose for why we would like to increase our skill set or add to our experiences. Personally, I want to increase my communication skills in order to be more effective at getting information to people. This is a skill that I can work on every day, even while performing a job that I dislike. And why stop there? At work, I keep a list of “commitments” which I chose to work on every single day; accountability, efficiency, being present, integrity and honesty, to name a few. All of them are broad concepts but I try to apply them as much as possible to my life because they are values which reflect the person that I want to be. Each commitment has it’s own purpose for incorporation into my life.

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why does work m



why does work make me angry

why does work make me anxious

why does work make me feel sick

why does work make me depressed

why does work make me so tired

why does work make me tired

why does work matter

