

How To Justify Workplace Theft

CrimethInc.

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Contents

“My Boss Isn’t Like That”	3
“I Don’t Have To Work Here”	4
Defending Yourself From Workplace Theft	4
Abolishing Capitalism	5

Whether aware of it or not, your boss is stealing from you every paycheck. Employers profit off of the “excess” wealth that you, as an employee, produce. There are two ways to get paid in America: make money off the work you do, or make money off the work that other people do. Employees generate wealth, employers collect it.

We live in a capitalist society. We all know that. Most people are okay with it, too. After all, the competition (state communism like the USSR) doesn’t have such a good reputation.

But what exactly does capitalism mean? Our good friend the dictionary says capitalism is “an economic and political system in which a country’s trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state.” This definition is a bit deceptive, but let’s run with it for now.

The word I care about in that definition is “profit.” Profit is the extra money at the top after all your expenses are paid out. You buy ten apples from the farmer for ten cents each and sell them in town for twenty cents each, leaving you with an extra dollar. Hurrah! You make enough of those dollars, and you can pay your rent and afford to eat. Both things you might need.

But you can only carry so many apples, and you can only sell them so fast. You could make more money if you hire other people to sell the apples for you. You pay them an hourly wage, or take a cut off of every apple they sell. Multiply this by enough people, and suddenly you’re quite wealthy. The people you hire only have enough to pay rent and eat, but you get to drive a hummer-limo and smoke cuban cigars or whatever. Why? Because you stole from your employees. You aren’t working harder than them—in fact, you’re probably working less—and derive your income from the excess wealth generated by their labor.

And that is capitalism. When rich people steal from poor people through the legal process of wage labor. Capitalism is based on “capital.” Capital is wealth that can be used to generate more wealth. If capitalism was about getting rewarded for working, we’d be all about it. But it’s not. It’s about getting rewarded for other people working. It’s about letting money (and people) make your money for you.

If you, as a wage laborer, didn’t create more wealth for your boss than your hourly wage, you wouldn’t have a job. What we’re calling workplace theft is actually a bit of a misnomer. Workplace theft is the norm: your bosses are stealing from you every day. They’re living off your sweat. When you take money out of the register and put it into your pocket, that’s not workplace theft. That’s workplace justice.

“My Boss Isn’t Like That”

This isn’t the Gilded Age of the late nineteenth century, you could argue. Your boss might not be buying diamond-studded collars for his dog, might not be throwing \$20,000 dinners for all her friends. It could be said that most employers aren’t in it for the top hats and monocles. They’re in it because they care about culture or books or food or whatever it is they promote through their store. Good for them.

There’s no use arguing that store owners need to be thrown up against a wall and shot. That honor is reserved for the rich bastards who really do run world politics for their own ends regardless of the ecological or social atrocities they leave in their collective wake—the billionaires, the heads of major industries, the corrupt politicians. Hell, small business owners probably don’t

even need to be seen as villains. They're just petty thieves—and they might even be petty thieves who don't know they're stealing.

If a business isn't doing so well, it's run by petty thieves who are failing. They would like to steal your money by paying you less than you earn them, but they can't, not yet. I don't know about you, but a burglar who can't figure out how to open the window of my house still isn't my friend.

“I Don't Have To Work Here”

Sure, you don't have to work any given job. But you've got to work somewhere.

Bosses like to sleep at night, just like everyone else. Bosses like to think that people need jobs, that they provide jobs. “If you don't like the pay, don't work here.”

It's a shame that the modern labor movement is a shambles, that the most of the existing labor unions are hopelessly bureaucratic and lily-livered, because a hundred years ago they showed the world the falsity of that claim with remarkable articulateness. The short of it is: you gotta work or you don't eat. There are ways around it that individuals will find, but by and large, you don't have a choice. You need a job. If it's not one crummy job, it's another. And most anywhere you go, there will be bosses. There's an entire class of professional thieves just waiting to siphon away the products of your labor, ready to buy your time (let's be honest, your life) for as little as they can get away with.

Defending Yourself From Workplace Theft

If you're ready to defend yourselves from these thieves, these bosses, then there are a few ways you can go about it.

Not Working: The purest and, at first glance, simplest solution. Stop selling your time. In the US at least, there is plenty of edible food thrown out each night by grocery stores. Or you can grow food in empty lots. There are abandoned buildings to live in. You and your friends can teach each other the skills necessary to live, to thrive. Some stuff, though, like dentistry, is going to be hard. And squatting is usually frowned upon by property owners (they would much prefer that you paid them for the honor of residing on their property, once again trying to make a buck off of you without lifting a finger). But at least no boss will get to steal from you.

Collective Bargaining: You and your co-workers can organize with unions. You can stand up for yourselves, you can show your employer that the system only works because of your input. The reason you might have an eight-hour work day (though it seems most Americans don't anymore) is because union members refused to work endless hours and were shot or hanged for it. If you want a chance to argue for your fair share of the wealth that you have created, you won't be able to do it alone. You'll need your friends. You'll need solidarity from folks you've never met before. Try the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) for a union that isn't just trying to create a comfortable niche for itself within capitalism.

Worker Cooperatives: We don't need bosses. You can set up your own businesses and organize without artificial hierarchy. There are worker cooperatives all over the world, and most would be excited to help you understand how to set up your own.

Theft: If you don't have the nerve (or have too many responsibilities, or are really quite fond of your teeth) to drop out of capitalist society entirely, you're no good at organizing or your co-workers are apathetic, and you don't have the capital or commitment to start your own cooperative, then, well, just take back what's yours. It's simple. Steal from your bosses, because your bosses are sure as hell stealing from you.

Abolishing Capitalism

None of these options are long-term solutions. We live in a civilization based on the separation of society into haves and have-nots. This cannot be allowed to continue.

The entirety of potential political and social structures don't balance on the axis of capitalism (and democracy, somehow always lumped with capitalism) and state communism. Capitalists would love for you to believe that, of course, because state communism is so clearly a terrible idea; they would love for people to think capitalism is the only alternative to Stalinist atrocity.

Capitalism is an atrocity, however, as a quick survey will let us know. Capitalism (the idea of not working for your money, but instead siphoning the wealth produced by others) has led us to the very brink of planetary ecocide with its mindless search for profit (a feature included even in the dictionary definition!).

Many people have theorized ways of eradicating the rampant criminality of capitalism. Socialism isn't actually a dirty word, and can mean a whole host of things, many of which are as far from Stalinism as a system could possibly be.

But the simplest one is this: we, as small communities (often overlapping ones), can make decisions for ourselves by the means we best see fit. We can feed and care for ourselves and each other. We can work in ways that make us happy, we can work for projects that actually concern us. If we don't let the ruling class rule us, we won't be ruled. If you ask me, I'd call this system anarchism. Other people might call it different things like autonomism or horizontalism or just decentralization, direct democracy, or common sense.

But in order to do this, we have to take back the means of production. The rich have the things they have because they are dirty stinking thieves, whether they know it or not.

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