

The Only Immigrant Trying to Steal My Job Is Elon Musk

A Bus Driver's Perspective on Elon Musk's Austerity Measures

Crimethinc, Anonymous

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Introduction

In the following narrative, a bus driver describes how the cuts that Elon Musk is carrying out in the federal government are affecting ordinary public transit workers.

There is a poetic opposition between the figure of the anonymous bus driver and Elon Musk, the billionaire car mogul. The bus driver and the automobile profiteer represent different modes of transportation—public and private—that imply different models for society. On the one hand, a vision of collectivity emerging from common resources and public service; on the other, an unbridled profit motive justifying privatization, isolation, and immiseration. Everyone riding together—or the lone plutocrat speeding away from a betrayed community. Why else market the “Cybertruck” as bulletproof?

Elon Musk made much of his fortune from taxpayer-funded subsidies; now he is trying to delete all of the functions of the government except the ones that benefit him personally. The irony of a man who made his fortune selling cars implying that impoverished *bus drivers* are parasites on the public should not be lost on anyone. As much as Elon Musk pretends to be an enemy of big government, billionaires like him need the state more than anyone else does. It is easy enough to imagine public transit without the state—all it would take would be to abolish the mechanisms (such as property rights) that impose artificial scarcity, so that those who enjoy doing things for others’ benefit could do so without fear of going hungry. But it is not possible to imagine Elon Musk without a government forcefully extracting hundreds of billions of dollars of taxes with which to protect him from those he exploits and oppresses.

People around the country have begun expressing their displeasure against Elon Musk by demonstrating at Tesla dealerships. Another round of demonstrations is scheduled for March 1, this Saturday. Without further ado, the bus driver’s story.

“The Only Immigrant Trying to Steal My Job Is Elon Musk”

“Did you see that Facebook post about the budget cuts?” my co-worker asks. “What the fuck, no,” I reply. She hands me her phone. I see a headline announcing that, due to the push to slash basic services coming from Elon Musk and Donald Trump, 20% of our funding for local public transportation is now threatened. Lawyers are fighting it out in the courts, but if these cuts go through, it will mean less service, possible layoffs, and lots of people not having access to a system that is one of the few lifelines for poor people in our area. People depend on these buses to get to their jobs, to medical appointments, to programs for special needs adults, to court dates.

I sit back down, staring out the window at the cold, grey parking lot. I am waiting for a member of the morning shift to come in with a bus so I can take it out. A few buses dot the bus yard. They’re sitting idle because the parts on order haven’t come in for months—even years, in some cases—and because the city refuses to hire enough mechanics to keep up with daily maintenance. This means that drivers on night shift, like me, sometimes have to wait hours for a bus to arrive. Our transit agency, which contracts out to a huge multi-national corporation, is already dramatically underfunded. The new cuts will only compound our existing problems.

“Fucking Musk, man,” I say with a sigh. Another co-worker on the night shift agrees with me. He’s in his mid-70s, but he’s still working full time because he recently burned through all his savings burying his parents. I launch into a long rant about how both Musk and Trump

hate labor unions and workers and want to replace us all with artificial intelligence. A third co-worker, presumably a Trump supporter, grumbles about how “they” just want to blame the cuts threatening our jobs on the “administration.”

Who else would you blame it on?

It’s pitch-dark when I enter the trailer park, passing a metal gate, I drive slowly through the ever-growing rows of manufactured homes. Some of them have signs reading “For sale.”

“Lots of people moving out?” I ask my only passenger.

“Yeah, no one can afford to live here anymore,” she replies. As I turn the corner, she launches into a long tirade about the corporation who owns the trailer park and how they keep raising the cost of “space rent,” the monthly fee that mobile home owners pay to trailer park owners. “Every year the rent here goes up. New people move in from out of town and they can pay more, and that’s pushing us out,” she says, as I unhook her walker inside the cold, dark bus cab. “I don’t know why the landlords are so greedy. Do they just want everything?” I lower her and her walker down onto the pavement outside her trailer.

As the electronic ramp whirls its gears, I turn to my left. In her front window, there is a strange collage of images of Donald Trump. It is faded and worn from the sun. I shake my head and chuckle, resisting the temptation to point out the obvious. How can you complain about a corporate landlord ruining your life, but place all of your hopes in another landlord who is trying to become a dictator?

Perhaps she senses my disdain. “Trump is gonna fix it, you’ll see. Prices are going to go down once he starts drilling.”

My eyes narrow. “Biden was drilling more oil than any president before him,” I reply.

“He needs to get his *head* drilled,” she retorts, making me laugh. Then she launches into another rant about DEI and how it ruined the schools she apparently taught at before she retired. As she hobbles inside, I cast one more glance over my shoulder. Trump’s smiling face leers back at me, ominous. The machine moans as the wheelchair lift cycles back into place.

I meet all sorts of people like this at my job. One guy smells like piss so bad while I strap in his wheelchair that I have to turn my head so I don’t gag. The car in front of the house where I pick him up has a bumper sticker on it reading, “I Don’t Trust the Liberal Media.” I wonder if the conservative media is telling him his healthcare is about to be nuked from orbit.

Another guy, as I load and unload his wheelchair, takes out his Trump hat, puts it on, and asks me what I think of it. I tell him Trump and Musk want to use the military to shoot protesters, destroy unions, and fire workers like me, so why would I give a fuck about them. He looks away, says, “Alright then,” and jets off on his electronic scooter. I wonder if he is looking forward to ICE deporting half of his neighbors.

On election day, I lost it and got into a heated back and forth with a pro-Trump guy. He rested his case by proclaiming that we need to make it easier on rich people so that the wealth will trickle down to the rest of us. I want to grab these people and shake them.

Trump represents the triumph of the nihilism of our age. The foreclosure of the idea that the working-class can take and shape its own destiny. Instead, apparently, we should throw ourselves at the mercy of a reality TV star who shits in a gold toilet, eats breakfast with billionaire pedophiles, and has dinner with neo-Nazis between rounds of golf. In the absence of the kind of social movements that could connect people and enable them to grow and change, Trump has built a mass parasocial spectacle that makes these isolated people feel like they are part of

something greater than themselves even as all of our lives become smaller and smaller, more and more impoverished and alienated.

There's an old saying that society get the villains it deserves. Perhaps our age is getting the fascists it deserves, too.

I shuffle into the union hall, past the placards reading "ON STRIKE" and faded signs several decades old. Almost fifteen years ago, during Occupy, I attended a meeting in this same room. I wonder what's changed since then. I find a seat and one of our union shop stewards slides a packet across the table to me. I open it up and start paging through it, looking at the spreadsheets and graphs.

We start to discuss the ins and outs of the proposed contract that our elected union representatives and corporate lawyers have been going over during recent meetings. One of the much-hated top corporate bosses was recently fired for corruption, much to the delight of the entire workforce. As one of my co-workers said, "Really tells you a lot about a place when motherfuckers are walking around singing, 'Ding-dong, the witch is dead!' and morale has never been higher!"

We go through the contract. Despite a few small improvements, things are mostly the same. "What about the pay?" I ask, fingers crossed. The shop steward cocks her head to the side and turns a page, pointing with her pen to a graph showing a dollar increase. She explains that the contract will be for *five years*, during which time we'll only be getting a few cents more each year. "This is literally what I was making ten years ago," I sigh, "and this contract will be valid for five years?"

I already can't save money. Imagine what things will be like in five years.

She shrugs. "We're encouraging you to vote "Yes," she says, and hands me a piece of paper on which to mark an "X" signifying yes or no.

If enough workers vote the contract through, the company will ratify it and it will govern my life for the next five years—presuming that I don't get downsized. Any strike or protest activity will be illegal, as per our "No Strike" agreement. If enough people vote no, it goes back to the union bargaining team, and they will continue to bargain for more changes in closed door meetings.

I head into another room, mark an X by "NO," and drop the piece of paper into a wooden box. I wave to a few co-workers on my way out. As I leave, I pass a portrait of Sean O'Brien, the president of the Teamsters union. *You smug bastard*, I say to myself. I remember his glasses and bald head on stage of the Republican National Convention last year, when he called Donald Trump a "Tough son of a bitch." What a dipshit.

I used to have a poster in my room many years ago, proclaiming, "The past doesn't pass." Next to the slogan was a photo of striking Teamster bus drivers—bus drivers, just like me—beating police officers with baseball bats during the general strike of 1934 in Minneapolis. That was one of the decisive labor battles that forced the ruling class to accept the New Deal in order to cool down the class war that was brewing on the streets.

The past doesn't pass, but the future can leave you behind.

At home, I look over a letter announcing that people in my neighborhood shouldn't drink the tap water because the levels of uranium in the river are too high. Sometimes I wonder what I would say to my children about this moment in history—if I could afford to have children. Probably the same things my parents say to me now: they're sorry we are inheriting this world. Sorry they didn't fix it. Sorry they didn't build strong enough movements to turn the tide against these monsters.

At work, as I drive, I begin to notice that there are fewer Trump flags and signs out. Resentment is rising. A joke by a cashier here about being replaced by AI, a comment there about Trump cutting programs. I walk into the break room and someone is shaking their head angrily while watching a video of Musk on their phone. They mutter something about tariffs and rising prices.

The tension in the air is palpable. It is similar to how things felt at the start of the economic crisis in 2008, when many of the homes in my neighborhood were foreclosed on and many people lost their jobs. It also reminds me of the start of the pandemic—how at first, I thought it wouldn't be so bad, only to watch in horror as our family members and friends succumbed to the virus.

In 2008, many people thought that crowds would flood the streets immediately when the administration bailed out the banks while leaving the rest of us high and dry. That didn't happen. It took years for resistance to grow. In Chicago, workers occupied their factory when they were terminated without pay. In Wisconsin, workers occupied the capitol building against government attacks on collective bargaining. In California, students occupied universities to protest budget cuts. The Occupy movement began in the fall of 2011 and rapidly built to massive occupations of city squares across the US, coordinated port shut downs, and a general strike in Oakland, California. With Joe Biden as vice president, the federal government helped to coordinate violent raids targeting the movement in order to break it apart.

In 2020, on the other hand, things didn't fester—they exploded like a bomb. Millions of people across the country mobilized in response to the pandemic, providing mutual aid in the face of government inaction and right-wing disinformation, and then hit the streets in the George Floyd uprising.

Who knows how things will evolve this time. It will probably be different from both of those scenarios, but it could be similar in some ways. What is clear is that *things are not as people expected them to be*. Many people on the left thought—or at least hoped—that Trump would govern the way he did the first time, constrained by mass protest, the courts, and his own party. Many who voted for him honestly did not expect him to follow through on many of the policies he explicitly promised to carry out. Those who were not paying attention are surprised that suddenly, jobs are disappearing and services are being cut while prices only continue to rise.

The material conditions are forcing people to reckon with the fact that the state is attempting to reshape our lives for the sake of an authoritarian project. As we speak, thousands of people are flooding town halls across the United States, screaming at their so-called representatives about the plan to gut programs like Medicaid—only to hear the bureaucrats repeat a slew of MAGA talking points. Anger is brewing. Hopefully the MAGA strategy of “flooding the zone” with shit will produce diminishing returns as people turn towards their neighbors and co-workers and away from their phones and YouTube.

This is an opportunity for us to call out the authoritarian project of the Trump administration, the techno-dystopian fantasies of billionaires like Musk, and the complicity of the Democrats who helped make all of this possible. Beyond naming the systems that we are up against, we also need to be clear about our position as workers and how the billionaires running the country want both to hurt us and to weaponize our anger, turning us against each other through propaganda and fearmongering. This is why it's important to stand in solidarity with everyone attacked by the Trump administration, whether trans folks, migrants, prisoners, or beyond. We can't leave anyone behind. The only immigrant trying to steal my job is Elon Musk. It's time to be clear that our interests are not theirs; we must develop and promote our own vision of a better world in total opposition to the ruling class, the billionaires, and their fascist puppets.

Moreover, it's time for action. We need to give expression to these antagonisms while revealing the poverty of the institutional forms currently at our disposal—the Democratic party, the ever-shrinking union bureaucracy, the non-profits. We can show examples of past struggles and resistance from the mass wildcat strikes by teachers in West Virginia and the fierce anti-fascist mobilizations against the alt-right to the airport shutdowns following the Muslim Ban. We can support and expand the existing fronts that are already breaking out around us: protests against Musk outside of Tesla, rallies to demand that hospitals continue to treat trans people, community defense and rapid response networks to address ICE attacks, bashing back against the violence of the far right. We can demonstrate the utility of tactics and strategies that others can take up and expand on as all of us figure out how to fight in the new reality.

It's hard to look at the news without imagining tanks on the streets or scenes out of *V for Vendetta*. But the scenario I worry about most is that this will simply become *the new normal*. That we will accept this just as we accepted the last round of attacks. As we accepted the genocide in Gaza. As we accepted the ecological gun to our heads that is climate change.

While people are angry and energized, we have a chance to push in a new direction. Let's use this moment to foster broad and popular networks of resistance that improve our lives, strengthen our communities, and enable us to meet our needs directly. At this point, we don't have much of a choice.

Like it or not, this is life now—and it is coming for all of us.

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