

# **What Work Steals from Us**

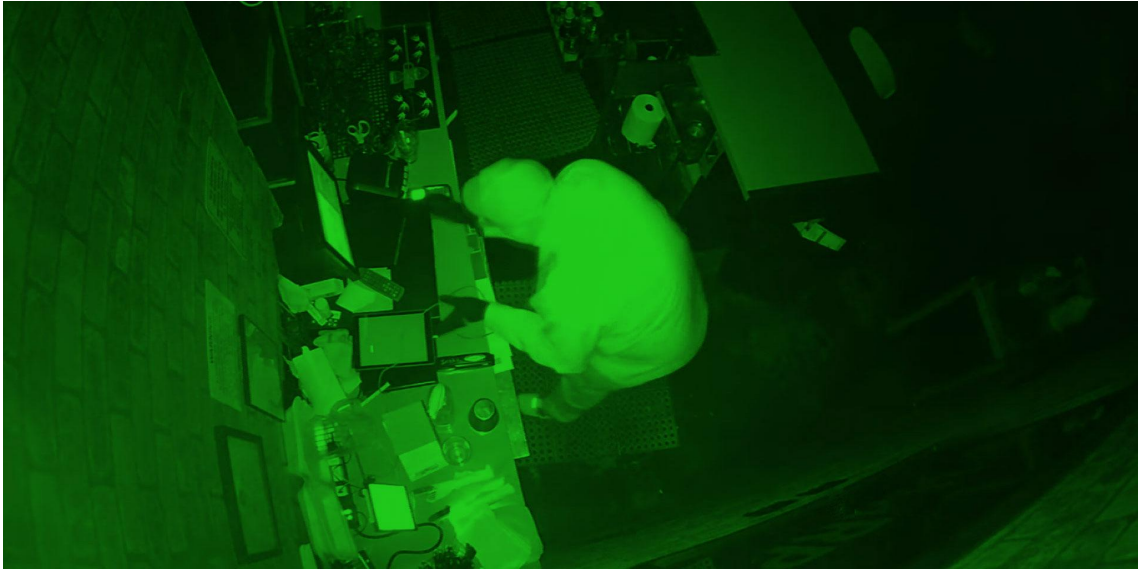
**Steal Something from Work Day 2021**

CrimethInc.

April 15, 2021

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Every year for over a decade, we have joined others around the world in observing April 15 as Steal Something from Work Day, a day to reflect on the reasons why workers steal from their workplaces.

Of course, during the COVID-19 pandemic, stealing from work has become more difficult than ever. Let's consider what this means for the future of humanity.

## What Work Steals

From a young age, we are told that work is what provides for our needs.

Yet everyone who has served as an employee—or who has labored, self-employed, at the mercy of the market—has had a very different experience: ***work steals from us.***

It steals the hours of our days, the time we would like to spend with our families and friends and lovers, the energy we would otherwise direct towards pleasurable, creative, unselfish pursuits. It steals our imaginations: even today's most innovative employees and entrepreneurs are still inventing inside the very narrow frame of what can *compete in the market* rather than, for example, what might bring joy to human beings.

It steals into our leisure hours, into our most intimate relationships: the *work* of competing for social capital, of performing unwanted *emotional labor*, of answering emails and text messages, of paying bills and taxes and insurance premiums and purchasing products in hopes that they will make us more employable (a power blouse, a ring light, a diploma)—and preparing ourselves, yet again, to go back to work.

Work—the aggregate labor of all humanity since the Industrial Revolution—has already done permanent harm to the biosphere we all depend upon for the air, water, and nourishment we need to stay alive. What hasn't work stolen from us?

Another century like this—another century of work—and our species will be done for, along with countless others. Work—which is to say, all activity that is determined by the necessity to make a profit for someone, rather than chosen on account of its intrinsic value—is precisely what *prevents* us from fulfilling our needs.







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A German group is calling on Pfizer employees to leak the recipe for the #COVID19 vaccine so people in the developing world won't have to wait years for it:  
[biontech-leaks.org](http://biontech-leaks.org)

How would we treat the pandemic without corporations and governments? Actually—they're problem #1!

 <p><b>1</b> <b>Leak production instructions</b></p> <p>It is essential to share the <b>knowledge and technology</b> for producing the mRNA-vaccine publicly.</p>	 <p><b>2</b> <b>Worldwide production is possible</b></p> <p>Countless pharmaceutical companies worldwide could enter the vaccine production chain if the knowledge and technology, i.e., the recipe for the BioNTech vaccine is shared. Several of them would be ready to start with the factory conversion immediately.</p>	 <p><b>3</b> <b>Suspend patent protection!</b></p> <p>Even if the knowledge for the production is in the public domain, <b>patents can block the way</b>. In situations of emergency, governments can suspend patents, thereby making themselves more independent from the profit-led interests of the pharmaceutical industry.</p>	 <p><b>4</b> <b>Worldwide vaccination</b></p> <p>Increased capacities worldwide will make the vaccine available to everyone more quickly. In this way, people in the Global South also have a <b>chance of receiving the important vaccination</b>.</p>
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1:45 AM - 12 Feb 2021

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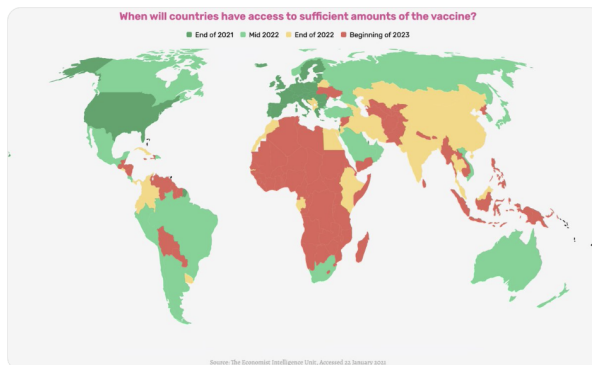
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CrimethInc. @crimethinc · Feb 12

Corporate intellectual property rights and profit-driven economies have been implicated in mass deaths for centuries. The idea that science and medicine are inseparable from these is a capitalist myth.

We need new models for research and health care. A better world is possible.



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For Steal Something from Work Day ([cwc.im/StealfromWork](http://cwc.im/StealfromWork)), we recall this project calling on biotech employees to leak the recipe for a #COVID19 vaccine.

Hundreds of thousands of people may die in Brazil and elsewhere as a consequence of corporate intellectual property rights.

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A German group is calling on Pfizer employees to leak the recipe for the #COVID19 vaccine so people in the developing world won't have to wait years for it: [biontech-leaks.org](http://biontech-leaks.org)

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10:13 AM - 15 Apr 2021

“What does it really mean to be useful? Today’s world, just as it is, contains the sum of the utility of all people of all times. Which implies: the highest morality consists in being useless.”

-Milan Kundera, *Immortality*



A tip of the hat to phryk.net.<sup>2</sup>

## A World Stolen by Work

Not long ago, the workplace was a clearly distinguished zone in which capitalists paid workers a wage to operate the privately owned means of production. In those conditions—which still prevail in many places, though they are fewer and better policed than before—a rebel worker could surreptitiously *hunt and gather* resources belonging to the boss, acting in a rash moment of freedom the way her nomadic ancestors might have acted at all times. Pilfered by wage laborers, a tub of ice cream could reenter the gift economy that sustained our species for over 200,000 years. Workers were compelled to sell their labor for a pittance, but they could sometimes fight back in ways that rejected the logic of the market.

But as the emergencies of late capitalism grow ever direr, even that situation is eroding.

“Today, rather than speaking of the working class, it might be more precise to speak of the **endangered class.**”

-“All We Have Is Us: A Call from a Delivery Driver in Manhattan”

The COVID-19 era has normalized stark class relations between the *vulnerable* and the *protected*. Last year's celebration of the "essential worker" served to frame *work itself* as essential while treating the laborers who perform it as expendable. Rather than basing our economics on the premise that society is divided into *those who work* and *those who profit*, today we could begin from a different distinction, implying a different politics: there are *those who profit* and *those who die*.

For hundreds of years, workplace theft has helped workers to survive. Think how many more people from the laboring classes would have died of malnutrition or other avoidable causes if they had *not* been sustained by the resources they were able to purloin in addition to their salaries! Yet a workforce of self-employed food delivery workers and Uber drivers can hardly steal from their workplaces. This is indicative of a larger shift towards precarity among all workers; it also indicates an expansion of the terrain of work, which is currently most visible in the ways it is impacting the middle class.

Today, for hundreds of millions of workers and students worldwide, the home itself *is* the workplace. A year ago, at the outset of the pandemic, we considered this development as it relates to the expansion of surveillance; in the year since, it has become clear just how far this can go. Fear of surveillance presumes an "authentic" and free self that can be stunted by too much scrutiny; but replacing the office with the zoom meeting and embodied social life with digitized social media is rendering it increasingly difficult to imagine such a self in the first place.

If employers once feared that employees would smuggle resources from the workplace into their homes, now it is work itself that steals into our homes, narrowing the distance between the two meanings of "occupation"—employment and annexation—turning the bedroom into a factory churning out alienation *in its pure form* with hardly a physical product to show for it.

In these conditions, time is almost the only thing left to steal. But it is not stealing that time back to wander TikTok or Amazon Prime when you're supposed to be paying attention in class or delivering an order. Those activities still amass profits for the capitalist class while immiserating us. For time theft to *steal from work*, we have to be able to spend that time outside the logic of the workplace and the world it has reshaped in its image.

The colonization of our homes, hearts, and fantasies by work perfectly illustrates the difference between what some Marxists call "formal subsumption" and "real subsumption," though this distinction has become as redundant as the word "Kafkaesque." When *everything* has been subsumed into the logic of capitalism, the only remaining question is what could lead us out of it. Transposing Hegel's account of the development of ideas into an *idealized* historical progress narrative, Marx sought to solve this problem with barefaced accelerationism—the worse things get, the closer they are to changing. The idea that it's always darkest before the dawn may make for good punk songs, but—like all Marxism—it's bad science.

The penetration of work into our homes doesn't bring us any closer to a revolution that will supersede capitalism. If anything, it only brings us closer to extinction. But in rendering old forms of small-scale rebellion impossible, it forces us to put everything at stake if we want to resist at all. We should remember what was beautiful about workplace theft—honoring the petty courage of centuries of small-time thieves who stole from their employers when they could—while recognizing that, like many other elements of the tenuous *rapport de force* that existed between employers and employees in the 20th century, it is likely to become harder, not easier, from here. If we want to continue to act outside the logic of capitalism, in the 21st century the name of the game is *double or nothing*—and no guarantees.



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Every year for over a decade, we join others around the world in observing April 15 as Steal Something from Work Day—a day to reflect on all the reasons workers steal from their workplaces.

You can find a wide range of material about this holiday here:

[cwc.im/StealfromWork](http://cwc.im/StealfromWork)



3:32 AM - 15 Apr 2021

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## So What Is the Best Thing to Steal from Work?

“Looting is good but it’s only a small glimpse of what we can all share. If you think the retail stores are good, wait until you see the distribution centers. Hell, we could not only control what is already made—we could decide what is made.”

-Anonymous participant in the George Floyd Rebellion

The looting of dozens of businesses in the Twin Cities in response to the police murdering Daunte Wright takes on additional dimensions when we view it in the context of precarity and unemployment and the increasing difficulty of previous forms of resistance that served as pressure valves. In the conflict between *those who profit and those who die*—between the murderers and the excluded—it is not a rearguard struggle, but an image of the future.

Some whose imaginations are still shaped by the 20th century want to see the unemployed return to the space of production to take over and self-manage the factories, in order to produce a slightly more ethical version of the current post-industrial global order. But our wildest dreams go far beyond the vision of “fully automated luxury communism,” understood as the communist fulfillment of all the consumer desires produced by capitalism and its enforced artificial scarcities. What we want most is to destroy the order that produced those desires, not to reorganize it. We want to create conditions that will produce *different* desires, to steal the world back from the logic of the market and from work itself, in order to create a society in which we can all explore our collective potential on our own terms.

At base, workplace theft is not about acquiring objects. It’s about establishing a new relationship to our agency. It implies the possibility of a *totally different way of living*.

**“Desertion begins as flight, but with practice, moves to retrieval.”**

-Bernard Maszalek, introducing Paul Lafargue’s “The Right to Be Lazy.”

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