

Claire Wolfe vs. the Job Culture

Kevin Carson

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Claire Wolfe's got a new book out: *How to Kill the Job Culture Before it Kills You*. I haven't read it yet, but it went to my Top 10 must-reads the minute I first saw a reference to it. Apparently it develops the themes she touched on in these earlier articles: "How to Avoid Work," "How to Avoid Work, Part II," and "Dark Satanic Cubicles."

Meanwhile, here's a brief promotional article she wrote about it in the *Loompanics* catalog: "Insanity, the Job Culture, and Freedom"

The traditional case against jobs and the Job Culture comes from the left, which warns us of exploited workers, mindless consumerism, and environmental destruction. Meanwhile, the right cheers what it mistakenly calls free enterprise.

But if anybody should rail against the Job Culture and endeavor to bring it down, it should be libertarians, anarcho-capitalists, and true conservatives.

Free enterprise – if that's truly what we had – would be an overall good.

A true system of free enterprise is one in which the largest number of individuals are free to engage in the widest possible variety of enterprises, in the widest possible variety of ways.

In a system of genuine free enterprise, millions (perhaps even billions) of people could lead highly self-determined lives. Millions of free enterprisers could choose to set their own hours, make products of their own choice, trade with whom they wished, close up shop when they didn't care to work, bring the kids and dogs into the business, work from home, bring in helpers as needed, follow the rhythms of the seasons, or otherwise structure their own lives as they saw fit.

The cultural assumption of a true free enterprise system would be: "Individuals are responsible for their own lives and labors. They trade as equals, but are beholdin' to nobody."

Free enterprise isn't anything like big-corporate capitalism. We've been told the two are equivalent, but that's just another bit of cultural brainwashing.

Think about it. Job holders by definition aren't capitalists. Job holders, no matter how well paid they might be, function merely as the servants of capitalists, just as

medieval serfs functioned as the servants of lords. They are beholdin'. They function in a climate of diminished responsibility, diminished risk, and diminished reward. A climate of institutional dependency...

The daily act of surrendering individual sovereignty – the act of becoming a mere interchangeable cog in a machine – an act we have been conditioned to accept and to call a part of “capitalism” and “free enterprise” when it is not – is the key reason why the present Job Culture is a disaster for freedom.

James Madison, the father of the Bill of Rights, wrote:

“The class of citizens who provide at once their own food and their own raiment, may be viewed as the most truly independent and happy. They are more: They are the best basis of public liberty, and the strongest bulwark of public safety. It follows, that the greater the proportion of this class to the whole society, the more free, the more independent, and the more happy must be the society itself.”

Madison was speaking specifically about independent farmers, but he was also a believer in the independent entrepreneur – and for the same reasons.

Madison (and his like-minded friend Jefferson) knew that people who are self-sufficient in life's basics, who make their own decisions, whose livelihood relies on their own choices rather than someone else's, are less likely to march in lockstep. Independent enterprisers are far more likely to think for themselves, and far more capable of independent action than those whose first aim is to appease institutional gods.

Living in the Job Culture, on the other hand, has conditioned us to take a “someone else will deal with it” mentality. “I'm just doing my job.” “The boss makes the decisions.” “I'm just following orders.” But if someone else is responsible for all the important choices in life, then we by definition, are not.

An attitude and work-style of true free enterprise would leave millions spectacularly independent from both the juicy blandishments and the inhumane dictates of large corporate institutions (both governmental and private). It would leave millions free to say, “Screw you!” to institutional masters and “No thanks” to those who dangle tempting “benefits” in exchange for loss of personal autonomy. It would mean that more individuals dealt with each other on a more equal footing, with fewer corporate or political masters.

That's what both free enterprise and true freedom are all about.

Of course, as an individualist anarchist, I take issue with her use of the term “capitalism.” Although the Job Culture is the opposite of free enterprise, it's at the heart of historic capitalism. But why quibble about semantics? Whatever you call the present system—whether you call it simply “capitalism,” as I do, or add the “big corporate” modifiers as Claire does—we're agreed that it sure as hell ain't free enterprise. And we agree that *real* free enterprise would result in a drastic transformation of society for the better, with increased economic autonomy for the average person.

Albert Nock had this to say about the job culture, decades ago:

Our natural resources, while much depleted, are still great; our population is very thin, running something like twenty or twenty-five to the square mile; and some millions of this population are at the moment “unemployed,” and likely to remain so because no one will or can “give them work.” The point is not that men generally submit to this state of things, or that they accept it as inevitable, but that they see nothing irregular or anomalous about it because of their fixed idea that work is something to be given.

For more on the subject of why work is something we’re “given” instead of something we just do, check out my old post on “Contract Feudalism.” Or maybe just read this other great quote from Nock:

This imperfect policy of non-intervention, or laissez-faire, led straight to a most hideous and dreadful economic exploitation; starvation wages, slum dwelling, killing hours, pauperism, coffin-ships, child-labour — nothing like it had ever been seen in modern times...People began to say, perhaps naturally, if this is what State absenteeism comes to, let us have some State intervention.

But the State *had* intervened; that was the whole trouble. The State had established one monopoly, — the landlord’s monopoly of economic rent, — thereby shutting off great hordes of people from free access to the only source of human subsistence, and driving them into the factories to work for whatever Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. Bottles chose to give them. The land of England, while by no means nearly all *actually* occupied, was all *legally* occupied; and this State-created monopoly enabled landlords to satisfy their needs and desires with little exertion or none, but it also removed the land from competition with industry in the labour market, thus creating a huge, constant and exigent labour-surplus. [“The God’s Lookout”]

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