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Empire of the Rising Scum

(Apologies to R.A. Wilson)

Kevin Carson

June 7, 2006

More on *Who Moved My Cheese?*, for those not thoroughly sick of the topic. Crooked Timber links to an article by Barbara Ehrenreich, cleverly titled “Who Moved My Ability to Reason?” It skewers not only *WMMC?*, but the whole genre of books designed to motivate worker bees into producing more honey:

When the cheese is moved, the tiny people waste time ranting and raving “at the injustice of it all,” as the book’s title suggests... In the mysteriously titled “QBQ! The Question Behind the Question,” we are told that questions beginning with “who” or “why” are symptoms of “victim thinking.”... That may be why we never learn the identity of the Cheese Mover; the who-question reveals a dangerous human tendency to “overanalyze,” which could lead you to look upward, resentfully, toward the C-suites where the true Masters of the Universe dwell...

Maybe the books tell us what these fellows want their underlings to believe. Be more like mice,

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for example. Or — and this is the truly scary possibility — maybe the principles embody what the C.E.O.'s themselves believe, and it is in fact the delusional, the immoral and the verbally challenged who are running the show.

(Hence the title of this post). The comments at Crooked Timber included this interesting exchange, provoked by another observation in the same vein:

Once you get comfortable with the fact that the management is your worst enemy, it all becomes clear and simple. **–Posted by abb1**

And yet my worst enemy appears to be signing my checks. I could sure use more enemies like that. **– Posted by asg**

Asg, today they are signing your check and tomorrow they'll sign your death warrant if it adds a nickel to their bottom line.

As long as you understand it — you're fine.

But if you think (or feel) that they give you those checks out of the goodness of their hearts or that they have some kind of sympathy for you or that they bound by human decency in their dealings with you — then sooner or later you'll be severely disappointed and possibly psychologically traumatized. Get real, man. **–Posted by abb1**

At Auschwitz, the inmates' worst enemies were their sole source of watery cabbage soup. A low blow, I suppose, and probably leaving me open to sanctioning under Godwin's Law. But despite the hyperbole, I think it makes a valid point. I often hear facile quips to the effect that some brand of radical hates big business, despite the fact that they "provide the jobs." Well,

duh. So what does that prove? The class that controls access to the means of production in *any* society, whether justly or unjustly, can be said to "provide jobs." In the old Soviet Union, a conservative Party apparatchik might have said "You hate Gosplan and the state economic ministries, but they provide the jobs." A feudal landlord might have claimed, with equal validity, to "provide jobs" by allowing the peasants to work "his" land in return for part of what they produced on it. The very fact that we tend to think of work as something that we're *given*, in the form of "jobs," rather than something we *do*, is for the most part taken for granted. But Albert Nock considered it a state of affairs that called for an explanation:

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.

If the means of production are justly owned, their owners can be legitimately said to "provide jobs." If not, or if the rules of the "market" are rigged in favor of employers, then it's more accurate to say they rope off the jobs and *charge admission* to them. The question that should be asked, and almost never is, is *why is the employer in a position to "give work" in the first place?*