

Why Work?

S.L. Lowndes

1982

I'll get the dirt over with first, before it's thrown at me. I am an idler. A parasite. Unpatriotic. OK? Now that I have no secrets, let us begin. I wasn't made redundant; I gave up work voluntarily. For me, and people like me, the Protestant work ethic never existed. The problem is that to counter this apparently simple choice not to work, we have against us the whole of industrialised western society, and probably the east as well.

"So-and-So is doing well for himself." That sentence will always ring ominously in my ears. I know then, without a doubt, that I am about to be subjected to a catalogue of some imbecile's achievements. It's usually parents, in this case my parents, who take a sadistic pleasure in gleefully reciting the exploits of Mrs Whatsername's progeny. They appear to be under the impression that the result will be to inspire me to reach the top in the business world. No chance, Ma.

It's a confusing situation to be in. On the one hand I do want some of the material wealth a steady job could bring. On the other hand I already have some treasure of my own. I have empty tennis courts, long walks, the library, afternoon kips, peace and freedom. I thought for a long time that I was alone with this attitude towards work, success etc. However, on talking to friends I have discovered what could be a whole new social movement. There is a swing towards the opinion that work is for donkeys and cowards. Only fools work voluntarily, all the rest are bribed or black- mailed. As a rough guide I would say that single people are bribed and married people blackmailed.

Let's look at someone who fits into this world in the way expected of him. Bob is an accounts assistant. For six years he has worked faithfully for his employer, and for what? The commuting is exhausting and he's always overdrawn at the bank. To live up to the image a young working man is required to present, he is forced to live beyond his means. So why does he do it? He's not a fool, he's only like all the others on that morning train; he's a coward. The consequences of being a non- worker terrify him.

I can only feel sorrow for all those young school-leavers scouring the boards down at the jobcentre. They think a job will be the answer to all their problems. Someone has been misinforming them. Such dreams they have! The money, the friends, the clothes, a car, a flat! I would point out to them the drudgery of clerical work, the agony of labouring, and the unending grind of repetition. Work is not the answer to any problems, not even financial ones.

This may be only sour grapes because I am unemployable. There isn't a job good enough for me. There isn't a job good enough for anyone. It never fails to astound me that in this world where so much is possible, and where there is so much to take your breath away, so many are prepared to settle for so little.

It makes my day when I walk down the street on a hot afternoon. There I am in shorts and tee-shirt, and there are the beasts of burden. The men all sweaty in their crumpled suits, and the girls ridiculous in the latest fashion. Go on, buy that new car, get a "nice" home. You're quite welcome, but it's not for me.

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