

Commodified Rebellion for the Wage-Slave

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Via Ross Heckmann on the Distributism yahoo group. A quote from the Agrarian Wendell Berry's book *What Are People For?*

Women have complained, justly, about the behavior of "macho" men. But despite their he-man pretensions and their captivation by masculine heroes of sports, war, and the Old West, most men are now entirely accustomed to obeying and currying the favor of their bosses. Because of this, of course, they hate their jobs—they mutter, "Thank God it's Friday" and "Pretty Good for Monday"—but they do as they are told. They are more compliant than most housewives have been. Their characters combine feudal submissiveness with modern helplessness. They have accepted almost without protest, and often with relief, their dispossession of any usable property and, with that, their loss of economic independence and their consequent subordination to bosses. They have submitted to the destruction of the household economy and thus of the household, to the loss of home employment and self-employment, to the disintegration of their families and communities, to the desecration and pillage of their country, and they have continued abjectly to believe, obey, and vote for the people who have most eagerly abetted this ruin and who have most profited from it. These men, moreover, are helpless to do anything for themselves or anyone else without money, and so for money they do whatever they are told. They know that their ability to be useful is precisely defined by their willingness to be somebody else's tool. Is it any wonder that they talk tough and worship athletes and cowboys? Is it any wonder that some of them are violent?

A related phenomenon is the manufactured "rebellion" of teens in high school and college, who know that forty or fifty years as docile "human resources" looms ahead, as surely as Thanksgiving looms for the condemned turkey. How many frat boys pose as Blutto Blutarsky as a way of pretending they won't be a brown-nose Darren Stevens in five years? Likewise the "alternative" culture adopted by young adults as an over-compensation for their working life as white collar drones.

This insistent denial, this clutching at any psychological defense against the sheer repugnance of a "job," this desperate need to believe that "this is not really us, this is not what we really

do,” is quite understandable. We don’t cut loose our values, our priorities, our judgment, and our dignity, and leave them at the door when we enter our homes; but that’s exactly what we do in our existence on the job. For the majority of people throughout history, for the majority of Americans until around a hundred years ago, “work” was something we did on our own turf: the farmer or tradesman planned the order of his tasks as he saw fit, and carried them out from beginning to end in accordance with his own judgment and sense of workmanship. A “job,” on the other hand, amounts (as Berry said) to being somebody else’s tool. And the main reason for the change, a dead horse I’ve spent a considerable amount of time beating in this blog, is: We Was Robbed!

What’s more, it’s utterly unnatural. As a commentator on the local public access channel recently pointed out, we’re biologically designed to respond, when somebody won’t stop following us around and bugging us, by either kicking the crap out of them or getting away from them. But for eight hours or more at a time, we’re put into a situation where we’re expected to smile and nod, instead. No wonder so many people who get tired of smiling and nodding show up on the six o’clock news.

But less dramatically, it’s no wonder so many people drag themselves to their jobs every day with a sense of dread, and spend their lives in the real world attempting to prove that those jobs have nothing to do with who they really are.

It’s not by accident that the main lesson taught in the publik skools is the skills necessary to survive and advance in a hierarchy: to identify the person in a position to benefit us, identify what that authority figure expects and then do it, to feel a temporary easing-up of our permanent state of unfocused anxiety whenever that gold star is stuck on our paper or that extra item is added to our resume. Those are exactly the skills a job calls for. A job, as opposed to work, involves infantilization: a man with a job is, while on his employer’s turf, a glorified third-grader trying to win Teacher’s approval.

The sooner we restore a society where work is something we do, and not something we’re “given,” a society where we’re in control of our working lives, the sooner we can do away with fake machismo, commodified rebellion, and going postal.

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