

# “Revolt Against Work” or the End of Leftism?

John Zerzan  
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FE Note. The December 1976 *Fifth Estate* carried a critique by Charles Reeve (see “The Revolt Against Work or Fight for the Right to Be Lazy,” p. 9) of the contentions of John and Paula Zerzan that the crisis point in capitalism today revolves around worker alienation, job refusal, sabotage, absenteeism, etc. Reeve asserted that on one hand, the significance of this phenomenon is overplayed by the Zerzans and on the other, that to the extent that it does exist, it represents nothing new in workers’ struggles.

The following is the Zerzans’ response to Reeve.

In an effort to exorcise the deepening crisis facing wage-labor, a crisis quite immune to leftism, Charles Reeve adopts two lines of approach.

The first is to assert that the (for lack of a better phrase) “revolt against work” does not exist. As moronic as it sounds, this is how our learned councilist begins his attack on us for having expressed some of the obvious facts of the matter. Industrial sociologists, who report much of the data on rising absenteeism and turnover rates, declining productivity, sabotage, anti-union feelings, etc. in the first place, are bourgeois lackeys and, hence, quite unreliable, according to Reeve. This is simply too goofy to merit serious comment.

It is unimaginable that anyone with an interest in the reality of industrial class society could be either so mentally deficient or so blinded by ideology as not to -see what is more than obvious to any normal observer.

It isn’t any longer merely the personnel and management journals that teem with new work reform schemes. The daily newspaper now constantly comments as well on the various “job enrichment,” “codetermination,” “industrial democracy,” “worker participation” plans, which by their continuing proliferation are perhaps the best testimony to the depth of the spontaneous opposition to wage labor. To a champion of the work ethic like Reeve, however, this is apparently all a dirty trick played by establishment social scientists!

Perhaps he only lacks a subscription to a newspaper, wherein he could read for himself, as we did on Dec. 18, for example, that English industrial relations are, according to the *London Observer*, characterized by “high absenteeism, a propensity to take industrial action for trivial reasons, and the ignoring of work procedures.” Or, for another random example, on Dec. 22, that the Insurance Information Institute estimated the U.S. property losses from arson to have doubled during the past two years. But why attempt the elementary education of one so resolutely self-bamboozled?

The second part of Reeve’s “argument” follows from the total failure of the first. Tacitly admitting, then, that the “revolt against work” does exist, he goes to great lengths to assassinate it as backward and contemptible.

In common with every other leftist, Reeve sees uncontrolled activity as a threat, to be either controlled or destroyed had he the means. This is the reason for the vicious charges of the workers’ “weakness and incapacity,” their lack of the necessary “mental qualities.” His elitist, collectivist schemes are ignored by the self-activity underway, the vital movement of the negative that will finish off bourgeois values such as sacrifice, discipline, and hierarchy.

The growing crisis and the “privatistic individuals” creating it, call to mind the breakthroughs enacted in Watts, or in France in '68—or in a very important sense, in any office, factory or bar today—where no one has time for academics or antique dealers who trade in stifling, inert theories. The reckless abandon and brazen expectations of those “non-schooled” may leave all ideological achievers back in caves, tooled only with religious hieroglyphics.

# fifth Estate

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