

Financial Advice for the Working Class: Unemployment

Don't have a job? Most people think this is a disaster. Could it be the context for a post-capitalist society?

John Hardin

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You can't turn on the news these days without hearing about unemployment. The national unemployment rate hovers at about 8.3 percent, although experts agree that the number of people out-of-work far exceeds that figure.

The 8.3 percent figure only reflects the number of people actually looking for work. It does not count the growing number of people who have stopped looking for work.

This "not working, not looking for work" segment of the population might really be on to something. Jobs don't pay like they used to. Fewer jobs than ever actually provide a living wage. Housing costs came unhinged from wages years ago. Affordable housing used to mean that you had a decent place to live that cost no more than one-quarter of your monthly wage. How many of us can say we have affordable housing by that standard?

Most employers expect workers to have a phone, reliable transportation, and a presentable wardrobe whether or not the job pays enough to cover those costs. Workers often make these expenses a priority over their physical needs, sacrificing their own health for their employers profit.

A full time job scarcely leaves workers enough time or energy to prepare healthy meals, further compromising health. For this meager existence, workers trade roughly half of their waking hours, and 60 to 80 percent of their life energy.

When you think about it that way, it's a wonder anyone wants a job. Let's look at the people who have stopped looking for work. How do they do it? How do they get by? What are they doing that's working for them? Are they dealing drugs, robbing banks or hacking computers? They can't all have the talent to deal, rob, and hack profitably.

Half of the world's population lives on less than \$1 a day. Why can't we? If living in a storm sewer and eating spit-roasted rat isn't better than working for a living, it's gotta be close. Life is too short to spend it in self-imposed slavery chasing an elusive, and mostly extinct middle-class illusion.

Most of us already know that we're never going to be super-rich, but if you no longer aspire to be middle-class, a job no longer seems like such a necessary evil, and evil it is. If you can get out from under your job, you can reclaim your time, your energy, and your freedom. Three things working people have sold too cheaply for too long, all of them more valuable than money.

The biggest problem the world faces right now is too much money. Too much money caused the housing meltdown. Too much money caused the Fukushima meltdown, and too much money caused the polar ice-cap meltdown. We've really got to stop thinking about how to make more money, and figure out how to live without it.

We've got about seven billion people on the planet, and right now, damn near every one of them wants to make money. So, they all start making stuff out of the rocks, trees, and animals they find around them, to sell for money. People who do well at this soon have more money than they need, but they don't stop making stuff. Instead, they expand. They buy machines that help them make more stuff faster and cheaper.

Soon, they have even more money, so they loan it to other people to expand their businesses, so they can make more stuff faster and cheaper. That way, they make even more money, but nobody wants their money just sitting around doing nothing. Everyone wants their extra money to make even more money, and most people don't care how it happens, as long as it happens.

All of this money really, really, wants to make even more money out of whatever rocks, plants, and animals that are still left on the planet, creating our present situation: We have rapidly increasing amounts of money chasing dwindling numbers of rocks, plants, and animals, all over the world.

Today, this money exerts tremendous pressure on all of us. It constantly works to find new ways to extract more from us, and the planet, every day. It never rests and does not care about anything else but making more of itself. Money has become a monster. Stay away from it.

From this perspective, unemployment is not our most serious economic problem. Unemployment is the solution to our most serious economic problem. Don't try to make money; that just exacerbates our global problems. Just find someplace to live and something to eat. If you can't find a better way to do something than with money, consider that a failure of imagination.

We cannot afford to be productive workers any longer. Our own industriousness got us into this mess. The more productive we become as workers, the faster capitalists extract resources from the commons, and the more pollution the whole process creates. As a result, the whole world becomes impoverished, polluted and enslaved, while a few people live ridiculously opulent lifestyles.

We deserve a planet full of trees, rocks, and animals, and we deserve the time and energy to enjoy them.

Let them keep their soul-sucking, planet-raping, low-wage, no-benefit, endless grind of a job to themselves.

Do something different with your life.

Spit roasted rat is not half bad.

John Hardin lives off-the grid, in an unpermitted structure, on land he doesn't own, deep in the woods of Northern California. He has no job, phone, credit cards or presentable clothes. He emerges from the woods most Wednesdays long enough to upload weekly posts to his blog, "Like You've Got Something Better To Do," at lygs-btd.wordpress.com, where a version of this essay appears.

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