

AFD 267 BS Jobs Links and Notes

- <https://strikemag.org/bullshit-jobs/>

Over the course of the last century, the number of workers employed as domestic servants, in industry, and in the farm sector has collapsed dramatically. At the same time, 'professional, managerial, clerical, sales, and service workers' tripled, growing 'from one-quarter to three-quarters of total employment.' In other words, productive jobs have, just as predicted, been largely automated away (even if you count industrial workers globally, including the toiling masses in India and China, such workers are still not nearly so large a percentage of the world population as they used to be.)

But rather than allowing a massive reduction of working hours to free the world's population to pursue their own projects, pleasures, visions, and ideas, we have seen the ballooning of not even so much of the 'service' sector as of the administrative sector, up to and including the creation of whole new industries like financial services or telemarketing, or the unprecedented expansion of sectors like corporate law, academic and health administration, human resources, and public relations. And these numbers do not even reflect on all those people whose job is to provide administrative, technical, or security support for these industries, or for that matter the whole host of ancillary industries (dog-washers, all-night pizza delivery) that only exist because everyone else is spending so much of their time working in all the other ones.

While corporations may engage in ruthless downsizing, the layoffs and speed-ups invariably fall on that class of people who are actually making, moving, fixing and maintaining things; through some strange alchemy no one can quite explain, the number of salaried paper-pushers ultimately seems to expand, and more and more employees find themselves, not unlike Soviet workers actually, working 40 or even 50 hour weeks on paper, but effectively working 15 hours just as Keynes predicted, since the rest of their time is spent organizing or attending motivational seminars, updating their facebook profiles or downloading TV box-sets.

There's a lot of questions one could ask here, starting with, what does it say about our society that it seems to generate an extremely limited demand for talented poet-musicians, but an apparently infinite demand for specialists in corporate law?

(Answer: if 1% of the population controls most of the disposable wealth, what we call 'the market' reflects what they think is useful or important, not anybody else.)

But even more, it shows that most people in these jobs are ultimately aware of it. In fact, I'm not sure I've ever met a corporate lawyer who didn't think their job was [BS]. The same goes for almost all the new industries outlined above.

If someone had designed a work regime perfectly suited to maintaining the power of finance capital, it's hard to see how they could have done a better job. Real, productive workers are relentlessly squeezed and exploited. The remainder are divided between a terrorised stratum of the, universally reviled, unemployed and a larger stratum who are basically paid to do nothing, in positions designed to make them identify with the perspectives and sensibilities of the ruling class (managers, administrators, etc.)—and particularly its financial avatars—but, at the same time, foster a simmering resentment against anyone whose work has clear and undeniable social value.

- <https://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/21134/capitalism-job-bullshit-david-graeber-busy-work-labor>

A subsequent YouGov survey found that [37 percent](#) of British workers believe their job makes no “meaningful contribution to the world”—more than Graeber expected. So, he dug deeper, soliciting testimonials and researching the political, cultural and economic structures that encourage millions of people to effectively waste 40 hours a week. Capitalism treats blue-collar and white-collar wage earners differently than salary earners. Since the 1980s, anybody who has a non-[BS] job, who is doing actual work, has seen their work downsized, sped up and Taylorized.

Simultaneously, capitalism has produced endless [BS] white-collar jobs, which are designed to make you identify with the sensibilities of managers. I call this managerial feudalism, whereby they keep adding more and more and more levels of intermediary executives. If you’re an executive you need to have an assistant or else you’re not important, so they hire these flunkies. It has to do with power, really.

What are some of the ways out?

DG: I’ve been working with people who’ve become big advocates for a universal basic income. It’s not the only solution, but it conforms with my political instincts. People think that is odd because I’m an anarchist. Why would I want a policy where the government would just give people money? Isn’t that giving power to the government? I say, no. A basic income would be the perfect leftist antibureaucratic policy. It would not only reduce the number of bureaucrats, but it would get rid of the worst of them, the annoying ones who decide whether you’re really poor enough to deserve this, or whether you’re really married to that person or whether you really live in that room.

Besides, they’re unhappy, those intrusive bureaucrats about whom you wonder, “How can they live with themselves?” Well a lot of them can’t. Those guys would be off the hook. They could go form a rock band or restore antique furniture or do something nice.

- <https://www.vox.com/2018/5/8/17308744/bullshit-jobs-book-david-graeber-occupy-wall-street-karl-marx>

I’m an anthropologist, and I can tell you there are plenty of societies where people work three or four hours a day. Most peasant societies worked that. You’d work 12 hours a day during harvest time and in the off-season you’d work two or three hours. The average medieval serf worked way less than we do, and the same is true of tribal societies around the world.

We imagine that if we take people’s work away, they’ll just sit around, drink beer, watch TV, and be depressed all day. But we just don’t have any experience of having time, but societies that do come up with all sorts of things to do.

We need to change what we value. I thought Occupy Wall Street might have been the beginning of something like this. People were really waking up and realizing that they wanted to do something useful, wanted to help others. They were realizing that something is wrong, that if you go into a profession like education or social services, they treat you poorly and pay you little.

I think we need a rebellion of what I call the “caring class,” people who care about others and justice. We need to think about how to create a new social movement and change what we value in our work and lives.

People have a sense of what makes a job worthwhile; otherwise, they wouldn’t realize that what they’re doing now is [BS]. So we need to give this more articulation, and we need to unite with other people who want the same things. That’s a political project we can all get behind.

- <https://www.theverge.com/2019/3/10/18258134/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-automation-sxsw-2019>

“We should be excited about automation, because what it could potentially mean is more time educating ourselves, more time creating art, more time investing in and investigating the sciences, more time focused on invention, more time going to space, more time enjoying the world that we live in,” she said. “Because not all creativity needs to be bonded by wage.”

Ocasio-Cortez didn’t put forward a specific plan for dealing with automation at SXSW. But her answer placed it in the familiar context of a larger fight against economic inequality and corporate greed. “We should be working the least amount we’ve ever worked, if we were actually paid based on how much wealth we were producing,” she said. “But we’re not. We’re paid on how little we’re desperate enough to accept. And then the rest is skimmed off and given to a billionaire.”

- <https://data.oecd.org/emp/hours-worked.htm>
- <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-04-09/college-grads-sell-stakes-in-themselves-to-wall-street?srnd=premium>