How I Spent My Permanent Vacation

CrimethInc.

1996

Contents

More than what I eat, whether or not I use drugs, and what bands I go to see, the bottom line for me as a member of the hardcore community and the counterculture in general is this: stay unemployed. Do whatever it takes, but keep my time and my labor to myself. I'm proud to say that it's been over three years now since I worked at any job for someone else. Here's why—and how.

WHY

First of all, and most importantly, there just isn't any other feeling that can compare with the sensation of complete freedom and self-determination. I wake up in the morning, when I want to, and make plans to do things that day—to do what I want to. Nobody can buy a beautiful sunny day away from me at seven dollars an hour. If I suddenly have a new inspiration or idea, I can pursue it spontaneously without having to worry about how it will reflect on my future employment. I'm free to suddenly go on tour with my favorite band, to accidentally run into an old friend and spend the day catching up on lost time, or to stay home all day and write the first chapter of a novel if I am moved to. So my life contains a great deal more diversity and spontaneous opportunity than it would otherwise. And because I don't have to do the same thing over and over every day, all day (for example, sell real estate, wait tables, or program computers), I can do enough different things to keep everything fresh and exciting.

And of course I do things! I don't just hang out or sit around—I have all the energy that would otherwise be drained from me at work free to use on all the projects I care about. I can go to the library here (it's only $10, for anyone, for a yearly membership at the university library here—that even includes their video and CD libraries) and read or watch old movies, I can exercise, I can play music, write, do all sorts of creative, self-improving, productive things. If I had been working the past three years, it would have been impossible for me to have made Inside Front what it is—I wouldn't have had the time or energy to research and write it, to organize and publish it, or to distribute it the way I have. The same goes for Catharsis, the band I play in; the music we have made and the experiences we have had traveling and performing mean more to me than any amount of money ever could, and Catharsis has taken up a lot of time that I wouldn't have had if I worked. The same goes for my involvement in CrimethInc.—because I don't sell my time to some office or business establishment, I have time of my own to dedicate to helping bands that I love get their music packaged the way it should be and available to others. The same goes for my involvement in other projects—writing for other magazines and pamphlets, fliering, and being active in my community in other ways. If I worked, even if it was at a job I liked (at a cafe with a relaxed atmosphere, etc.), I might not be unhappy, but my life certainly would not be as fulfilling as it has been with all of these activities in it in place of traditional employment.

Better yet, I get to work on these things that I care about however I see fit. I'm not following instructions, attempting to impress anyone who will be evaluating me for a promotion, or working within the confines of any restrictions on my efforts. I have completely free reign for my creativity. I can decide for myself how and when I will be most productive, rather than having to show up at work at 9 am every day whether that is good for my concentration or not. Thus I can make myself more effective and efficient than any boss ever could.

Finally, and most importantly, I'm voting both with my dollars and my time and energy against the existing system. I don't approve of the way most of my friends are treated in their places of employment; they usually have to deal with overbearing or incompetent managers, their tasks are often boring and repetitive, and they are typically not even given enough money to be able to take care of all their needs (many of which needs—nice clothes, transportation, etc.—are created by their jobs). I don't approve of the way many corporations conduct business (i.e. mistreating and slaughtering animals, destroying the environment, exploiting their workers, supporting governments that oppress and exploit their citizens, making products that are harmful to humans and the environment, etc.) and I also don't approve of the

way our economy functions (with so many companies being interconnected and owned by multinational corporations) to force us to practically support the entire system whenever we support any particular company. When I don't work for them, they don't get to use my labor to perpetuate the status quo. When I don't receive an income from them, I don't have capital to give back to them for them to use to perpetuate the status quo. And most of all, my time and energy are mine to be used to fight against them, rather than to support present conditions. For example—how many of you know vegans who work at places that serve meat and dairy products, or other people in similar situations? We have to get away from that sort of thing.

HOW

Really, everybody already knows everything I've just described. Most people, if they had the choice, would love to leave their jobs or at least get new ones. Well-publicized, reputable poles have estimated the proportion of Americans unhappy with their jobs to be as high as 90%. That's shocking, considering that our work is usually the most central and important thing in our lives. But people don't feel that they have any alternatives. The companies they work for will only let them have the goods and services they need to survive if they earn the money to pay for them.

My solution to that problem is to see which goods and services I can do without, and to look elsewhere for the others. I don't buy Pepsi to drink with every meal—that stuff isn't too good for you anyway, and Pepsi Co. is involved in some really bad shit. I don't spend a lot of money in bars or nightclubs; there are plenty of free activities I can do with my friends that are just as exciting. I don't buy fashionable or expensive clothing. I don't spend money on expensive amenities that are supposed to "save time"—because the truth is, they don't. Otherwise, where the fuck is all the time we should have saved up by now with our fast food, our microwave ovens, our automobiles, our fax machines, our computers? We're busier than ever today, overloaded with so many different demands on our time from these different "time-saving" devices and the jobs we work at to buy them.

So where do I get food, shelter, and other necessities? Food—I almost never pay for it. Here, even in North Carolina, which is not too diverse socially or culturally, we have this thing called Food Not Bombs. F.N.B. is basically a group of people who go to all the restaurants, grocery stores, etc. and collect the food they are going to throw away at the end of each day—because it's no secret that a LOT of perfectly good food goes to waste in those places. F.N.B. then serves this food downtown so that everyone who is hungry can have food to eat. I eat there twice a week, and each time they have a fair bit of food (bread, vegetables, canned food, etc.) left over that I can take home with me. Even if your town has nothing like Food Not Bombs, you can put the ideas into practice easily enough—before F.N.B. started here, I used to go to my friend's burrito shop and collect the beans, chips, and rice they would have thrown away at closing time. The Hare Krishnas serve free dinners here too, once a week, and I have no scruples about eating their food—who knows what they would do with those resources if they weren't spending them on keeping me fed? You can probably find similar opportunities that are unique to your area if you look. The consumer economy thrives on excess, so why not take advantage of it? Obviously this system wouldn't work if everybody in the world tried to do it, but that's not going to happen for a long time, if it ever does... so in the meantime we should get by however we can as individuals. We'll worry about arranging a completely work-free world when that actually looks like it might be in range.

Far too many useful things besides food are thrown away in our conspicuously consuming society, for that matter. You can get nice furniture that college students leave by the dumpsters at the end of the school year when they move out of their apartments. I have friends who have found everything from working clocks, stereos, and vacuum cleaners to new athletic shoes in dumpsters. And if you find the right thrift shop (not "vintage clothing" shop) you can dress yourself pretty well for less pocket change than you can scrape out of a public fountain in one night.

Shelter is the second most serious challenge to a person who wants to avoid working (health care is the most serious, and I don't have any easy answers for that one yet). In Europe and, to a lesser extent, New York, squatting is a possibility. People often complain to me that squats are too dirty and dangerous for them, but I think if the people who do not choose to live under dirty and dangerous conditions normally were to organize squats of their own, that (obviously) their squats would not be too dirty or dangerous. Think how much fucking money you could save if you didn't pay rent! Even if squatting is not an option (since it is sort of discouraged by the authorities), it's possible to arrange cheap places to live. Plenty of people I know pay only a little over a hundred dollars a month to share an old house with a bunch of friends. I've known people who have been paid to stay at someone's house and take care of it while they were gone; I've known people who have worked on the house where they lived (painted it, etc.) in exchange for paying little or no rent; the list goes on. The possibilities are endless and ever changing, so I can only give examples here—you have to find concrete opportunities for yourself.

As for things that have to do with the hardcore scene—often if you're active, doing something that is useful to people (because I'm trying to encourage that here by speaking out against work, NOT discourage it!) you can barter it for the records, 'zines., etc. that you're interested in. If you write reviews, you can get all that stuff for free; you could trade a traveling band food or a place to sleep in return for their record; you could trade some rare records for a tattoo or vice versa; trade a copy of your friend's 'zine for another one that interests you; volunteer to help organize and clean up after a show in return for free admission.

Another way to make ends meet when you're unemployed is—brace yourself—stealing from corporations. This can range from the very petty to the other side of the spectrum. You can get a variety of materials you may need from some simple, low risk urban hunting and gathering. Toilet paper is, obviously, everywhere; so are cleaning products, matches, salt and pepper, coathangers, cardboard boxes, light bulbs, batteries (you can get them out of smoke detectors, for example, if you don't think it will endanger anyone), staples and staplers, pens, soap—just keep your eyes open. Copy shops often have tape, folders, markers, paper, and a million other typical "office" needs (it's a well-known fact that Kinko's has financed punk rock in the U.S.A. almost single-handedly). For that matter, stealing from the workplace is a time-honored American tradition, since so many people are so frustrated there; if you make friends with people who do work at these companies, chances are they will be happy to share a little of their companies' resources with you. Example? Since Inside Front #4, three years ago, I haven't paid for a single xerox copy; that includes thousands of copies of each issue from 4 through 7, thousands of pamphlets, and literally tens of thousands of fliers.

Do I feel bad about this? No. Corporations are distinct from traditional businesses in that they exist as separate financial entities from their owners. When you steal from a large corporation, you're stealing from a business entity that exists to perpetuate itself rather than from a private individual. Sure, private individuals profit from these corporations, and some of them are not really all that bad; others, though, like Pepsi or Marlboro, are up to some really bad things, and the less resources they have to pursue those goals the better. Most of the workers at these corporations receive a set salary, and will not suffer too much if you steal from the corporation. These corporations, in fact, usually figure some loss from theft, etc. into their budgets—they know that's the price they must pay for doing business in an environment where their workers feel little loyalty to their employers or fulfillment in their work, and many people in society are hungry, fed up with their jobs, and fed up with being "honest" and waiting fruitlessly for change. If you actually did steal more from a company than they were prepared for, the people who will probably lose money are the stockholders—and the majority of stock is not held by working class men and women who are counting on it to be able to take care of their families. And if so much theft somehow occurred that these huge corporations like Kmart and McDonalds had to close, I would shed no tears about it! These companies and the multinationals that own them would disappear, never again to wreak wholesale destruction upon the earth's environment, never again to sell the same unhealthy, nasty-tasting hamburgers in every town from Los Angeles to Moscow through sheer force of advertising

dollars. Perhaps they would be replaced by individuals who could be held accountable for their behavior by their communities; individuals who would care about their communities and act accordingly, rather than having to obey the impersonal and disinterested orders of a faceless profit machine. Individuals like my friend who owns the Burrito shop, who would give me food when he knew I couldn't afford it—because he knew I would do the same for him.

Anyway... Certainly, I'll admit it does take some time and energy to avoid working; you have to spend a fair bit of each figuring out how to survive without a steady income (at least you can do this on your own time, when and how you want to). Not to mention that you will have to go without some comforts and conveniences you may have been used to; but is that stuff really more important to you than anything else? Of course, more than anything else, it helps to have the support and camaraderie of your friends in an undertaking like staying unemployed, and that's where our hardcore community comes into this.

How Does This Relate to Hardcore?

Being a one-person economy is extremely difficult. Even if you don't work, you will still have no free time if you have to arrange all your food, all your shelter, all of your needs for yourself from scratch. But with others to work with, it becomes a lot easier. Food Not Bombs, the organization that I mentioned earlier, works so easily and smoothly because it is a group effort. Because a number of people help with obtaining the food, cooking, serving, and cleaning, it isn't that much work for any one individual, and the whole thing seems more like a friendly social event than a demanding task. The same goes for all the other ways of obtaining resources to stay unemployed—not only are they easier in groups, but you will feel less alienated from the world if you do them with others.

Imagine if the hardcore scene wasn't just a bunch of kids wearing funny clothes, practicing their dance moves and camera angles at punk shows once every couple weeks. Imagine if everyone in the hardcore community, at least those who could (because of course not everyone can), quit their jobs and used all the potential energy we have as idealistic young people to try to develop a new way of life. We could use the networks we have already set up for touring bands, distribution, etc. to support each other in our attempt to break away from the employment system. Imagine how much creative energy would be unleashed, if we all stopped exhausting ourselves for "the man" and put that energy back into our own lives! Surely, all together we would be able to make something like that work. And then we would no longer be just another subculture with our own characteristic "rebellious music" and "fashionable clothing." We would be a fucking counterculture, a force that would work effectively against the status quo we all claim to reject—for the contents of our daily lives would, by themselves, do more to change the way the world works than our words ever could.

Does this sound difficult? It probably will be! But whether it is impossible or not can only be determined by trying it. And besides, what do we have to lose? Are our diet sodas and home entertainment systems really worth the lives we must sell away to buy them?

The Library of Unconventional Lives