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WHATME WORRY? I'VE GOT GUARANTEED CASH

By Steve Bakke  June 18, 2019



WHAT.. ME WORRY?

I've got guaranteed cash!

Mad Magazine's Alfred E. Neuman

Several months ago, several democrats, including some presidential hopefuls, expressed support for the “Green New Deal” – in particular the idea of a guaranteed “living” for those unable to work, and for those choosing not to work. Yes, several prominent democrats support salaries, or whatever you call it, for citizens refusing to work, or simply making the choice to engage in alternative activities.

The suggestion that someone can collect a paycheck, even during voluntary unemployment, is very different from providing assistance in a situation of disability or poverty. I'm making an important distinction between necessary and effective public assistance, and the concept of having a salary guaranteed, even when one's idleness reflects a decision to forego the hassles of a job. The imagined legislation would incentivize the decision not to work. Never before have we approached this closely to institutionalizing “freedom from work.”

Another example can be found in a happy proclamation by Speaker Pelosi in 2014: “What we see is that people are leaving their jobs because they are no longer ‘job-locked.’ They are following their aspirations.....” What was that all about? The Congressional Budget Office had just released a report predicting that Obamacare would encourage people to work less. The CBO report concluded that work disincentives in Obamacare would reduce the workforce by approximately two million “equivalent” workers within a few years. Obamacare had made the choice of “not to work” more attractive, and with less incentive to work, employable citizens would be choosing to do something else. Nancy Pelosi couldn't wait to show her delight.

An interesting article by Elizabeth Bruenig appeared early last year in the Washington Post. Its title said it all: “Americans' fixation with work? Maybe give it a rest”. Ms. Bruenig objected to Americans' penchant for work, and by extension, government programs that emphasize work requirements for welfare or other benefits. Rather than assigning any dignity to work, she commented wistfully of the dignity of rest. Bruenig concluded by imagining being independent from the whims of employers and bosses. Her ideal would be to view employment as a mere choice, not a priority.

GOPUSA published an article recently that made an interesting connection to the “freedom from work” concept. It recalled scary messages in Orwell's “Nineteen Eighty-Four” in which we read about a world of contradiction, confusion, uncertainty, “catch-22s” galore, and

extreme manipulation and control of the people. It was all about government overreach. Published in 1949, Orwell's imagined society had a government that even reinvented the meaning of words and made up new words. This was known as "double-speak." "Job-lock" is an Orwellian example of citizen oppression. Does any of that sound familiar? Perhaps Orwell and Pelosi would be in agreement on the issue of optional employment.

What does all of this mean? We're witnessing a power struggle in the battle to reduce economic inequality. The idea of hard work as the best path to success is being challenged by the idea of expanding government transfer payments. Will promoting complacency and dependency cause ambition to be significantly quieted? This yearning for "freedom from work" and "universal basic income" can't be good for our society or economy.

"If money is 'free,' it loses its value" wrote Dennis Clayson, university professor and columnist for The Courier, in Waterloo, Iowa. I'd like to go one step farther and suggest that if money is free, perhaps it's already lost its value.