

*“You won't get caught  
If you don't get scared*

...

*You never saw a thing  
And I was never there*

...

*Let's Steal Everything,  
I want Everything!  
Let's Steal Everything,  
cuz I want Everything!”*

—Jack Terricloth, “Let’s Steal Everything” (2006)



## 2 Essays on stealing (and why it's ok)



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hunger and illness that makes living difficult -- modern living is also just extremely boring. To me, a need can be relaxation, a night out with a friend, a book, etc. People are more than just eating, shitting, sleeping machines and we do “need” more than food and shelter. Rather, I want to simplify my argument and say that company theft is good because paywalls are bad, full stop.

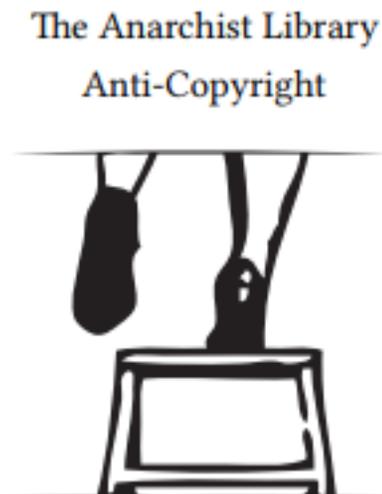
Company theft isn't good “in the instance of \_\_\_\_” but is actually always fine because paywalls are always a punishment/reward tool and refusing to be trained by an economic system or state is empowering.

Unfortunately, we won't often be able to opt out of the law and money game we're trying to cheat. Some of us will get followed around stores because of the way we look. Some days, we'll have to go to work so we can pay rent. We'll have to use some of the rent money to fix a tire or go to the hospital and hope we have enough left over to not get evicted. But we'll take what we can get, share when we can get it, and survive to pull other stunts.

“How to justify workplace theft” published by Crimethinc

“Actually stealing from companies is ok” by Francesca

Both texts can be found on [theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)



a company keeping one of its many investments on a shelf. That's easy.

I really hate throwing numbers around in a piece like this because you can just do that on your own time, but I'll data drop one thing here so we can be done with numbers and get on with it. The qualifying criteria for obtaining a Small Business Administration loan states that a small business is one with fewer than 500 employees and less than \$7 million in annual sales. Also, the vast majority of this very small percentage of business owners you're waving around like a mascot to represent your defense of investments are paying their hundred or so employees next to nothing an hour and working them to the bone, not that that totally makes a difference to my argument, but it's worth mentioning if that's what it takes to cut down a fictional argument tool.

Look, I'm not telling you what to do, if you walk into a store and think the owner has it worse than you, you can go snag your shit from a Walmart. I wouldn't stop you. The small business owner anomaly that fits the downtrodden narrative will go out of business, almost guaranteed within the first year, and it will usually be because they just didn't and couldn't have the tools to compete with bigger companies selling the same thing. It's bullshit to imagine a scenario where stolen eyeliner could be the straw that breaks any business camel's back.

## **NEED VS. WANT**

Unsurprisingly, I'm not going to attempt to split hairs between stealing for "need" and stealing for "want." I'm not trying to claim that theft from businesses is 'right' (yo it totally is) and stealing from a company is a victimless crime (again, I wish it wasn't). I think defining 'need' is a lot hazier than people with slogan-length talking points like to admit, especially given all the multitudes of ways poverty, or even just not being rich, is unbearable. It's not just



# **HOW TO JUSTIFY WORKPLACE THEFT**

Whether aware of it or not, your boss is stealing from you every paycheck. Employers profit off of the "excess" wealth that you, as an employee, produce. There are two ways to get paid in America: make money off the work you do, or make money off the work that other people do. Employees generate wealth, employers collect it.

We live in a capitalist society. We all know that. Most people are okay with it, too. After all, the competition (state communism like the USSR) doesn't have such a good reputation.

But what exactly does capitalism mean? Our good friend the dictionary says capitalism is "an economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state." This definition is a bit deceptive, but let's run with it for now.

The word I care about in that definition is “profit.” Profit is the extra money at the top after all your expenses are paid out. You buy ten apples from the farmer for ten cents each and sell them in town for twenty cents each, leaving you with an extra dollar. Hurrah! You make enough of those dollars, and you can pay your rent and afford to eat. Both things you might need.

But you can only carry so many apples, and you can only sell them so fast. You could make more money if you hire other people to sell the apples for you. You pay them an hourly wage, or take a cut off of every apple they sell. Multiply this by enough people, and suddenly you’re quite wealthy. The people you hire only have enough to pay rent and eat, but you get to drive a hummer-limo and smoke Cuban cigars or whatever. Why? Because you stole from your employees. You aren’t working harder than them—in fact, you’re probably working less—and derive your income from the excess wealth generated by their labor.

And that is capitalism. When rich people steal from poor people through the legal process of wage labor. Capitalism is based on “capital.” Capital is wealth that can be used to generate more wealth. If capitalism was about getting rewarded for working, we’d be all about it. But it’s not. It’s about getting rewarded for other people working, it’s about letting money (and people) make your money for you.

If you, as a wage laborer, didn’t create more wealth for your boss than your hourly wage, you wouldn’t have a job. What we’re calling workplace theft is actually a bit of a misnomer. Workplace theft is the norm: your bosses are stealing from you every day. They’re living off your sweat. When you take money out of the register and put it into your pocket, that’s not workplace theft. That’s workplace justice.

## “My Boss Isn’t Like That”

houseless guy busking in the French Quarter who recalled living in New Orleans just after Katrina when he and a few other people from his neighborhood would periodically go out and loot (as many others famously did) what they and their neighbors might need to survive the hellscape that week. He told me his block thought of him as a hero and he probably did save or improve a few lives by taking what needed taking. Which is of course miserable in hindsight, given that now he lives as a homeless criminal, hated by upstanding citizens, policed by the police, etc. The law doesn’t ‘misunderstand’ what looting meant to Katrina survivors, I think it actually understood very well that theft is necessary for survival in that case. We are not experiencing a misunderstanding or a bad translation with law, we are experiencing a conflict with it. There is no state or economic power that needs truth spoken to it. What we want is on the other side of it, not within it.

## WHAT ABOUT SMALL BUSINESSES?

The handful of often repeated arguments against taking things from businesses rely on a few hypothetical exceptions that get waved around like a weird fantasy flag. The most common hypothetical perfect victim is The Downtrodden Business Owner. The shitty-apartment-renting, poverty stricken, unpaid-bills-having business owner makes up such a tiny, barely visible percent of actual real life company owners, it actually pains me to give this strange desperate argument page space. Plus, if your definition of a victim has about \$30,000 just lying around to startup a small business, we have very different definitions of a victim.

Regardless, the attempt to personify a company is so weird to me. A company isn’t human, it’s a series of investments made, often intended to turn around to create a profit margin which expands as you pay employees less and sell things for more money. So I mean, yeah I would prioritize a person having a meal or getting Advil over

pose even the smallest threat to a single lowgrade millionaire. And that's the bad news.

The good news is, I do steal to survive, and because of that, I've given myself a life where I can wage work a little less than the average person and while I wouldn't call myself "free" because of this, I have stolen time in my life that I use for more important things than either a job, or day-off-style leisure, both of which I don't think make my life worth living.

And I'm not scrambling to justify theft beyond that. I'm uninterested in deserving anything that a person with more cash has easier access to than me. If I'm not going to be given a choice in participating in the game of law and order, then I'm not going to feel badly about cheating it. It's not my game, and I'm not going to be given a chance to win so I'm not going to play where I'm able to opt myself out. I don't want to be 'deserving' in the same way I don't want to be 'tolerated' (for example, straight people exercising tolerance of the gay people). I don't want to be 'tolerated' in the same way I don't want to be 'innocent' (I'm not against crime, I'm against law, I don't want to fight for my innocence, or legality, I want to fight against anything that would classify me as either a criminal or a citizen).

I see tolerance as just a quiet, suppressed hatred in the same way that being deserving is just being softly restricted. I don't want to DESERVE food, clothes, books, etc. I want to HAVE those things because I'm alive and because it's available and the dumplings from Whole Foods taste good. I don't want to be trained into gratitude for the opportunity to deserve food, like a pet.

Whether you're a hard worker or a cheat (a good-poor or a bad-poor), you're still the designated loser in the eyes of the game of law, work, economy, whatever. But that's in THOSE eyes. In my eyes, you're doing what you have to do to get by. I once talked to a

This isn't the Gilded Age of the late nineteenth century, you could argue. Your boss might not be buying diamond-studded collars for his dog, might not be throwing \$20,000 dinners for all her friends, it could be said that most employers aren't in it for the top hats and monocles. They're in it because they care about culture or books or food or whatever it is they promote through their store. Good for them.

There's no use arguing that store owners need to be thrown up against a wall and shot. That honor is reserved for the rich bastards who really do run world politics for their own ends regardless of the ecological or social atrocities they leave in their collective wake—the billionaires, the heads of major industries, the corrupt politicians. Hell, small business owners probably don't even need to be seen as villains. They're just petty thieves—and they might even be petty thieves who don't know they're stealing.

If a business isn't doing so well, it's run by petty thieves who are failing. They would like to steal your money by paying you less than you earn them, but they can't, not yet. I don't know about you, but a burglar who can't figure out how to open the window of my house still isn't my friend.

## **“I Don't Have To Work Here”**

Sure, you don't have to work any given job. But you've got to work somewhere.

Bosses like to sleep at night, just like everyone else. Bosses like to think that people need jobs, that they provide jobs. “If you don't like the pay, don't work here.”

It's a shame that the modern labor movement is a shambles, that the most of the existing labor unions are hopelessly bureaucratic and lily-livered, because a hundred years ago they showed the world the falsity of that claim with remarkable articulateness. The short of

it is: you gotta work or you don't eat. There are ways around it that individuals will find, but by and large, you don't have a choice. You need a job. If it's not one crummy job, it's another. And most anywhere you go, there will be bosses. There's an entire class of professional thieves just waiting to siphon away the products of your labor, ready to buy your time (let's be honest, your life) for as little as they can get away with.

## Defending Yourself From Workplace Theft

If you're ready to defend yourselves from these thieves, these bosses, then there are a few ways you can go about it.

**Not Working:** The purest and, at first glance, simplest solution. Stop selling your time. In the US at least, there is plenty of edible food thrown out each night by grocery stores. Or you can grow food in empty lots. There are abandoned buildings to live in. You and your



friends can teach each other the skills necessary to live, to thrive. Some stuff, though, like dentistry, is going to be hard. And squatting is usually frowned upon by property owners (they would much prefer that you paid them for the honor of residing on their property, once again trying to make a buck off of you without lifting a finger). But at least no boss will get to steal from you.

**Collective Bargaining:** You and your co-workers can organize with unions. You can stand up for yourselves, you can show your employer that the system only works because of your input. The reason you might have an eight- hour work day (though it seems

You're reading this because you work too much and still eat and live like shit. Or maybe because you've given in to the feeling we all have — that having a job feels bad and you don't really want to work that much...and you also eat and live like shit. You've been told all your life that criminals like you are bad people. I hope to convince you not to believe that and to stop playing a game you were designed to lose, or at least to cheat it a little. I think you're worth it.

## WHY DO PEOPLE STEAL FROM BUSINESSES?

I steal because I'm hungry or need something I can't afford comfortably or at all. I steal because some days I'm just bored and frustrated from either working on the clock or trying to prepare to clock back in (days off/ vacation) and it feels good. And I steal because I don't have any real choices in most things I do in day to day life (work to pay for rent, feverishly try to decompress in my time off so I can be ready to go back to work, repeat) and stealing dumplings from Whole Foods might be the only thing I do today that was truly my own freely made decision.

Most people who would advocate theft might begin by reassuring you that stealing from businesses doesn't hurt anybody. They would tell you that employees working for a wage don't tend to see those wages influenced by product theft, and that most stores actually factor product loss into their budget so the store revenue itself is also barely affected at all by your theft. While those things are true, I'm not exactly that person. I WISH I could hurt or even inconvenience a company owner by taking some of his investments from him. If I could get back at even one of the bosses I've ever worked for through workplace theft, I would love to do that. Sadly though, at this point, things are so unfathomably overproduced, wealth is so unimaginably hoarded, and power is so terrifyingly concentrated, I could spend the rest of my life looting as much as my arms could carry and I would never be able to make my crimes

*Actually, Stealing From Companies Is Okay*



*Making the case for workplace theft, shoplifting, looting, and other forms of taking stuff from businesses*

<b>TEAL</b> <small>DON'T STEAL FROM YOUR BOSS</small>	<b>STEAL</b> <small>IF YOU DON'T STEAL FROM YOUR BOSS</small>	<b>STEAL</b> <small>IF YOU DON'T STEAL FROM YOUR BOSS</small>
<b>SOME</b>	<b>SOME</b>	<b>SOME</b>
<b>THING</b> <small>STEALING FROM YOUR FAMILY</small>	<b>THING</b> <small>YOU'RE STEALING FROM YOUR FAMILY</small>	<b>THING</b> <small>YOU'RE STEALING FROM YOUR FAMILY</small>
<b>FROM</b> <small>JOB IS STEALING YOUR LIFE</small>	<b>FROM</b> <small>YOUR JOB IS STEALING YOUR LIFE</small>	<b>FROM</b> <small>YOUR JOB IS STEALING YOUR LIFE</small>
<b>WORK</b>	<b>WORK</b>	<b>WORK</b>
<b>TAKE A LITTLE BACK</b>	<b>TAKE A LITTLE BACK</b>	<b>TAKE A LITTLE BACK</b>
<b>DAY</b> <small>work.crimethinc.com</small>	<b>DAY</b> <small>stealfromwork.crimethinc.com</small>	<b>DAY</b> <small>stealfromwork.crimethinc.com</small>
<b>4/15</b>	<b>4/15</b>	<b>4/15</b>

most Americans don't anymore) is because union members refused to work endless hours and were shot or hanged for it. If you want a chance to argue for your fair share of the wealth that you have created, you're won't be able to do it alone. You'll need your friends. You'll need solidarity from folks you've never met before. Try the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) for a union that isn't just trying to create a comfortable niche for itself within capitalism.

**Worker Cooperatives:** We don't need bosses. You can set up your own businesses and organize without artificial hierarchy. There are worker cooperatives all over the world, and most would be excited to help you understand how to set up your own.

**Theft:** If you don't have the nerve (or have too many responsibilities, or are really quite fond of your teeth) to drop out of capitalist society entirely, you're no good at organizing or your co-workers are apathetic, and you don't have the capital or commitment to start your own cooperative, then, well, just take back what's yours. Its simple. Steal from your bosses, because your bosses are sure as hell stealing from you.

## Abolishing Capitalism

None of these options are long-term solutions. We live in a civilization based on the separation of society into haves and have-nots. This cannot be allowed to continue.

The entirety of potential political and social structures don't balance on the axis of capitalism (and democracy, somehow always lumped with capitalism) and state communism. Capitalists would love for you to believe that, of course, because state communism is so clearly a terrible idea; they would love for people to think capitalism is the only alternative to Stalinist atrocity.

Capitalism is an atrocity, however, as a quick survey will let us know. Capitalism (the idea of not working for your money, but

instead siphoning the wealth produced by others) has led us to the very brink of planetary ecocide with its mindless search for profit (a feature included even in the dictionary definition!).

Many people have theorized ways of eradicating the rampant criminality of capitalism. Socialism isn't actually a dirty word, and can mean a whole host of things, many of which are as far from Stalinism as a system could possibly be.

But the simplest one is this: we, as small communities (often overlapping ones), can make decisions for ourselves by the means we best see fit. We can feed and care for ourselves and each other. We can work in ways that make us happy, we can work for projects that actually concern us. If we don't let the ruling class rule us, we won't be ruled. If you ask me, I'd call this system anarchism. Other people might call it different things like autonomism or horizontalism or just decentralization, direct democracy, or common sense.

But in order to do this, we have to take back the means of production. The rich have the things they have because they are dirty stinking thieves, whether they know it or not.

just a friendly word from some anarchists

