

DEBT RESERVE NOTE

Slave Wages by Design

*“How Labor Became a
Commodity of Control”*

IN CONTROL WE TRUST

**ENGINEERED
POVERTY**

ISSUED
IN
DEBT

By Realworktruth.com

BACKED
BY
YOUR
LABOR

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Slave Wages by Design

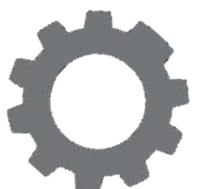
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Preface

This book isn't about numbers. It's about the price hidden behind them.

For years, I've watched good workers chase the promise of "good pay" – only to find out it doesn't buy the same life it used to. The system calls it progress, but the bills, the debt, and the burnout all say otherwise. Somewhere along the line, the meaning of a fair wage got rewritten. Now, survival is sold as success.

What's happening isn't random. Wages are kept low on purpose. The people making the rules know exactly where the limits are – just high enough to keep you showing up, just low enough to keep you quiet. They'll tell you it's market forces, but the market is a cage they built.

This book lays out how that design works:

- 💰 How "competitive pay" became code for "barely enough."
- 💰 How debt fills the gaps wages leave behind.
- 💰 How loyalty, fear, and distraction keep workers from fighting back.

If you've ever looked at your paycheck and thought, This can't be right, you're not crazy – you're just seeing the system for what it is.

Slave Wages by Design isn't a story of defeat. It's a map of the trap – and the start of finding a way out.

– Jeremiah Satterlee

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Chapter 1 – The Illusion of Good Pay



A Feature, Not a Flaw

**You've probably heard this line before:
"You're paid well for what you do."**

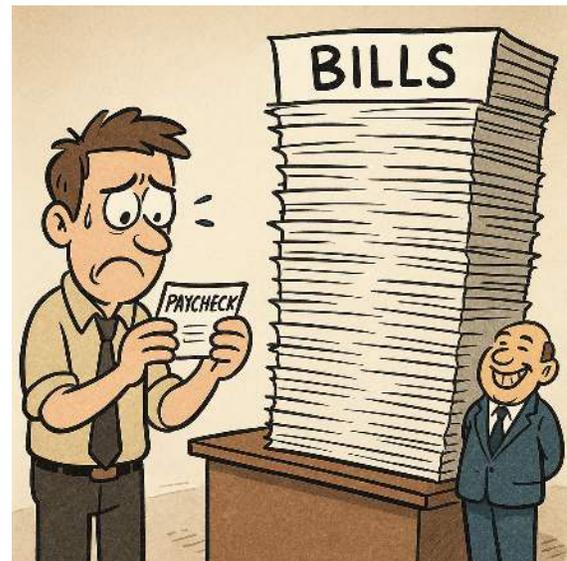
It comes from managers, HR, politicians, even family at the dinner table. And for a second, it almost sounds right. The paycheck shows up, the bills get paid, and maybe there's a little left if nothing unexpected hits. On paper, it looks like it should work.

But when you stack that paycheck against reality, the numbers don't hold up. What counted as a good wage a generation ago could buy a house, a car, and still leave room to save. That same kind of job today barely covers rent, groceries, and gas.

The definition of *"good pay"* has been watered down so much that surviving feels like success. Pew Research noted that *"for most U.S. workers, real wages have barely budged for decades"* (2). Companies know this.

They push the story that wages are fair, even generous, while telling investors "Labor costs are under control." Both can't be true. Barry Appelbaum made this clear: "

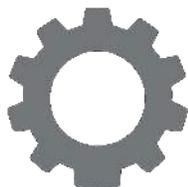
Suppressing wages was never a mistake – it was part of the economic design that favored profits and investors over workers" (3). ***The illusion of good pay isn't an accident. It's built in.***

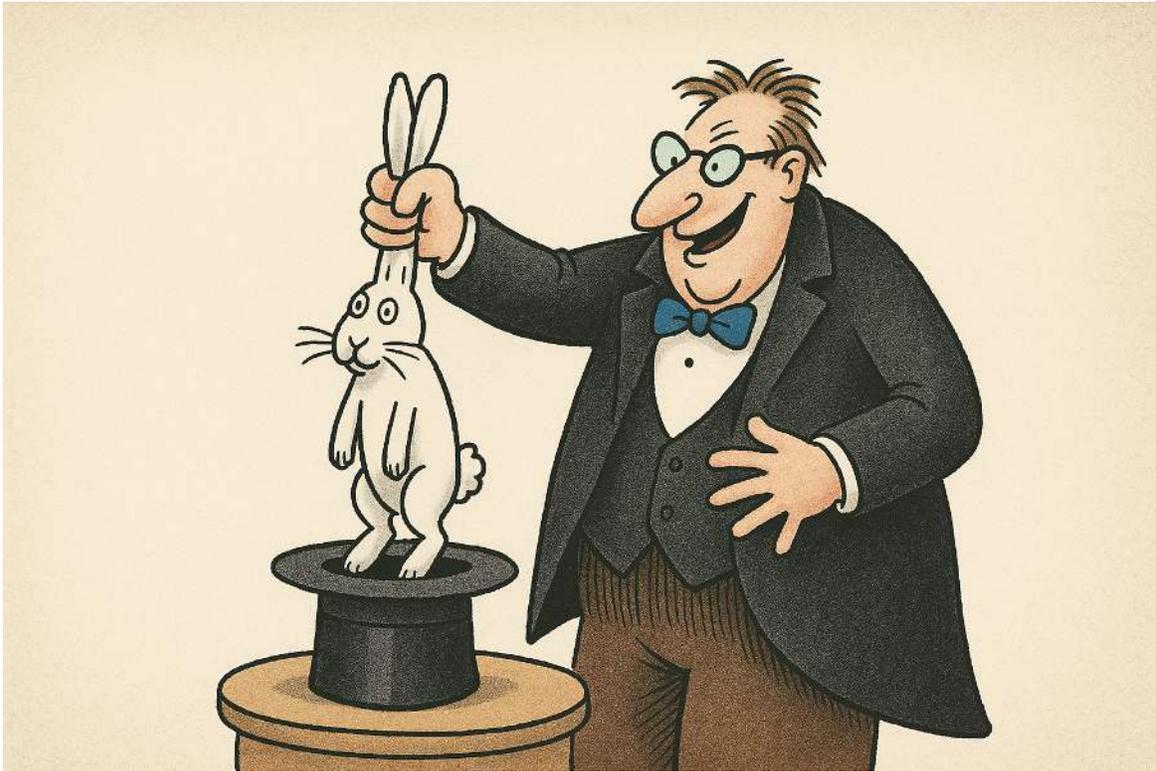




How the Illusion Works

- ⑤ **Comparison Games** → Wages are stacked against the lowest-paying jobs, not the real cost of living. “You’re better off than a fast-food worker” becomes the standard. But as Mishel and Bivens point out, *“productivity has risen while pay has barely moved, leaving typical workers behind”* (1).
 - ⑤ **Location Excuses** → Companies lean on geography to justify less. “For this area, you’re paid above average,” even as rent, fuel, and groceries outpace any raise. Pew’s research shows that wage growth consistently trails the cost of living, meaning *“paychecks feel stagnant even as prices rise”* (2).
 - ⑤ **Perk Distractions** → Health insurance, a small bonus, or even a pizza party gets added into the “total compensation package” while the base wage remains flat. Michael Sandel called this *“the moral limits of markets”* – where companies use shallow perks to distract from the real imbalance (4).
 - ⑤ **Debt as the Backfill** → Credit cards, car loans, and financing keep workers afloat. What wages don’t cover, debt does. Mishel and Bivens explained it clearly: *“Workers are working harder, but the wage increases they need are absorbed by rising costs and financial obligations”* (5).
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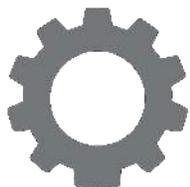




The Illusion in Plain Sight

Companies don't just underpay – they run a whole playbook to make it look fair:

- 💰 Comparison games keep you looking down at the lowest-paid worker, not up at the standard of living you've lost.
- 💰 Location excuses turn geography into a weapon, telling you "for this area you're doing well" while your rent and grocery bill say otherwise.
- 💰 Perks and distractions swap real money for crumbs – a bonus check, a pizza party, an insurance plan they act like you should be grateful for.
- 💰 Debt fills the gap – credit cards, car loans, payday advances. What they don't pay, the bank will cover, and you'll carry the weight.





This is the design: wages low enough to keep you dependent, just high enough to keep you quiet, with debt and distraction plugging the holes. *It's not bad luck. It's not a mistake. It's the system doing exactly what it was built to do.*

My First Paycheck

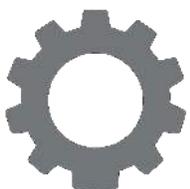
Back in the 90s, my first job paid me \$8 an hour. As a teenager, I was ecstatic. I thought, this is great – I can buy everything I want.

But the illusion faded fast. The first time my car broke down, the repairs wiped out my savings. That's when the fear set in. Suddenly it wasn't about spending money – it was about making it to the next paycheck.

That feeling never really goes away. The system is built on it: the rush of thinking you're finally ahead, followed by the crash of realizing you're not even close.

The Pattern in Play

- ⚙️ Call low wages “competitive.”
 - ⚙️ Compare workers to the bottom, never the top.
 - ⚙️ Cover gaps with perks instead of pay.
 - ⚙️ Let debt do the rest.
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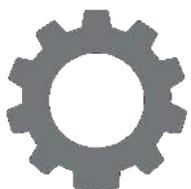
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"The illusion of good pay keeps workers quiet. On paper, you look stable. In reality, you can't even buy the very life that wage was supposed to afford."

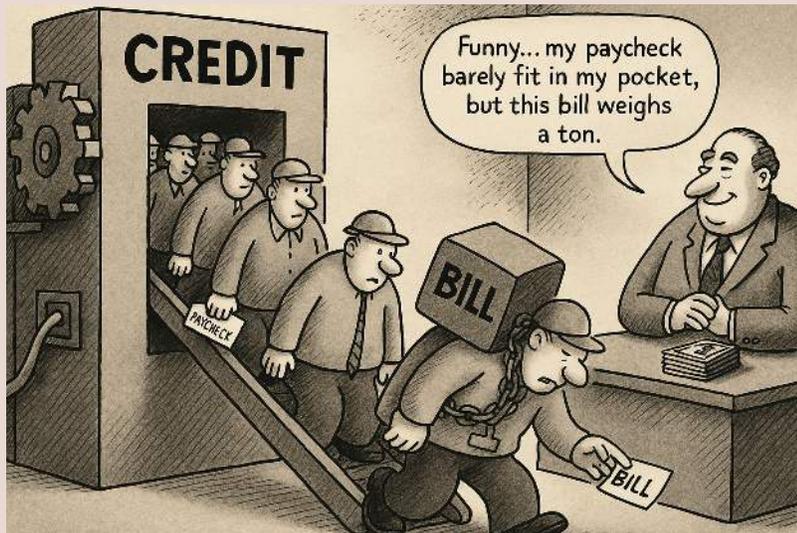
– Realworktruth.com

Notes for Chapter 1 – The Illusion of Good Pay

1. Mishel, L., & Bivens, J. (2021). *Why America's Workers Need Faster Wage Growth—And What We Can Do About It*. Economic Policy Institute. – Shows that productivity rose while typical worker pay flatlined.
2. Desilver, D. (2022). *For Most U.S. Workers, Real Wages Have Barely Budged for Decades*. Pew Research Center. – Documents how cost of living outpaces wage growth.
3. Appelbaum, B. (2019). *The Economists' Hour: False Prophets, Free Markets, and the Fracture of Society*. Little, Brown. – Explains how suppressed wages are a deliberate policy choice.
4. Sandel, M. (2012). *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. – Critiques how markets justify perks while avoiding fair wages.
5. Bivens, J., & Mishel, L. (2015). *Understanding the Historic Divergence Between Productivity and a Typical Worker's Pay*. Economic Policy Institute. – Shows the wage–productivity gap is intentional and profitable.



Chapter 2 – By Design, Not By Mistake

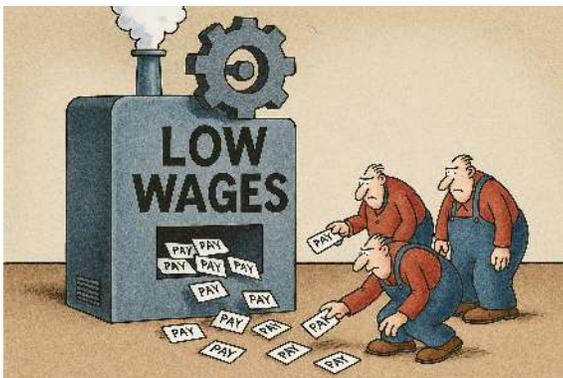


By Design, Not By Mistake

Low wages aren't an accident. They aren't the result of a few bad managers or an oversight in the system. They're deliberate. Suppressed pay is part of the playbook – it keeps costs down, profits up, and workers in line.

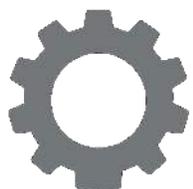
*Companies frame it differently. They'll talk about **"budget limitations," "market value," or "what the role is worth."***

But behind those phrases is a hard truth: wages are engineered to sit just high enough to stop people from walking out, but never high enough to give them freedom. As Barry Appelbaum argued, **"The suppression of wages was one of the most enduring achievements of late 20th-century economics"** (1). It's not broken. It's functioning exactly as designed.



How Wage Suppression Gets Built

- Ⓢ **Productivity vs. Pay** → Since the late 1970s, worker productivity has soared, but wages have stayed flat. The gap isn't a glitch – it's profit. As Mishel and Bivens put it, *"From 1979 to 2019, productivity grew 72%, but typical worker pay rose only 17%"* (2).
- Ⓢ **Shareholder First** → Executive bonuses, stock buybacks, and dividends come first. Workers get what's left. Joseph Stiglitz explained, *"The rules were rewritten to benefit capital at the expense of labor"* (3).
- Ⓢ **Cheap Turnover Math** → It's cheaper to burn people out and replace them than to raise wages. Pfeffer described it bluntly: *"Companies don't fix people – they replace them"* (4).
- Ⓢ **Divide and Distract** → Pay secrecy, tiered job titles, and merit raise systems pit workers against each other. Instead of asking why pay is low, people argue over who "deserves" more.





The Cycle of Control

Low wages aren't just about a company cutting costs – they're part of a system where one business supports another.

- 💰 Employers suppress pay → to keep profits high.
- 💰 Banks step in with loans and credit → so workers can cover what wages don't.
- 💰 Workers fall into debt → paying interest on survival.
- 💰 Profits flow back to corporations and banks → fueling the very system that holds wages down.

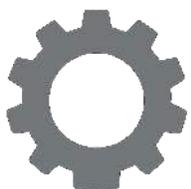
As economist Michael Hudson put it, “Debts that can't be paid, won't be paid – but the system is built to keep collecting anyway” (5). Low wages feed banks just as much as they feed corporations. It's not just about labor costs. It's about locking workers into a cycle where business props up business, profit props up profit, and workers carry the weight.

The Design Laid Bare

When you step back, it's clear:

- ☑ Productivity up, wages flat.
- ☑ Profits sky-high, families struggling.
- ☑ Workers fighting for scraps while executives rewrite the rules.
- ☑ Banks making billions off the debt created by suppressed wages.

This isn't bad management. It's the plan. A system built on suppressed wages delivers more profit than one built on fairness. And the longer people believe it's just “how the market works,” the longer the illusion holds.





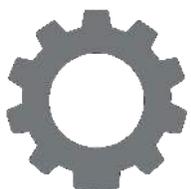
The Pattern in Play

- ⚙️ Keep productivity gains for shareholders.
- ⚙️ Pay just enough to stop exits, never enough for freedom.
- ⚙️ Replace the broken instead of raising the bar.
- ⚙️ Feed debt so banks profit alongside employers.
- ⚙️ Divide workers so they don't see the bigger game.

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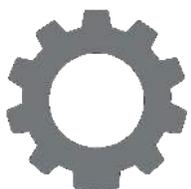
"Low wages aren't an oversight. They're the blueprint. The system works exactly the way it was built – for profit, not for people."

– Realworktruth.com

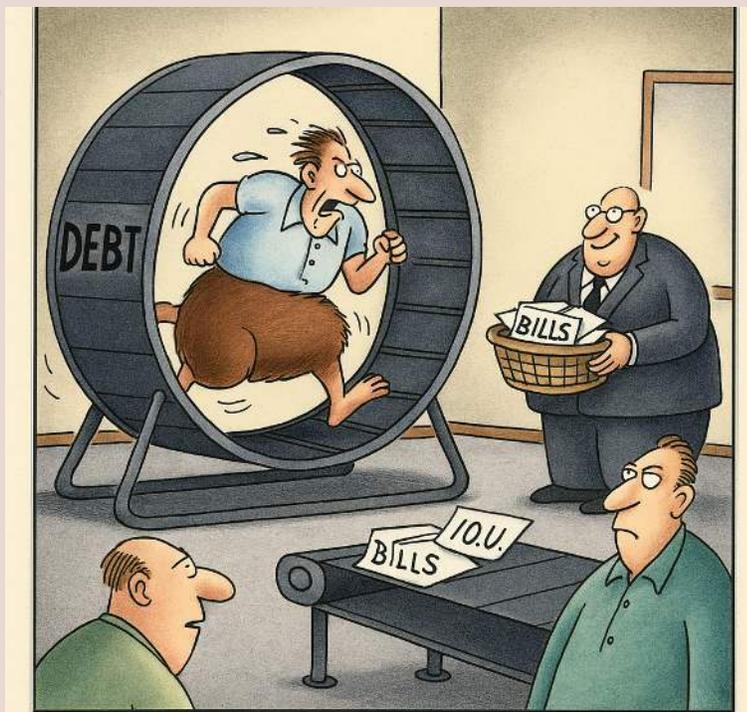


Notes for Chapter 2 – By Design, Not By Mistake

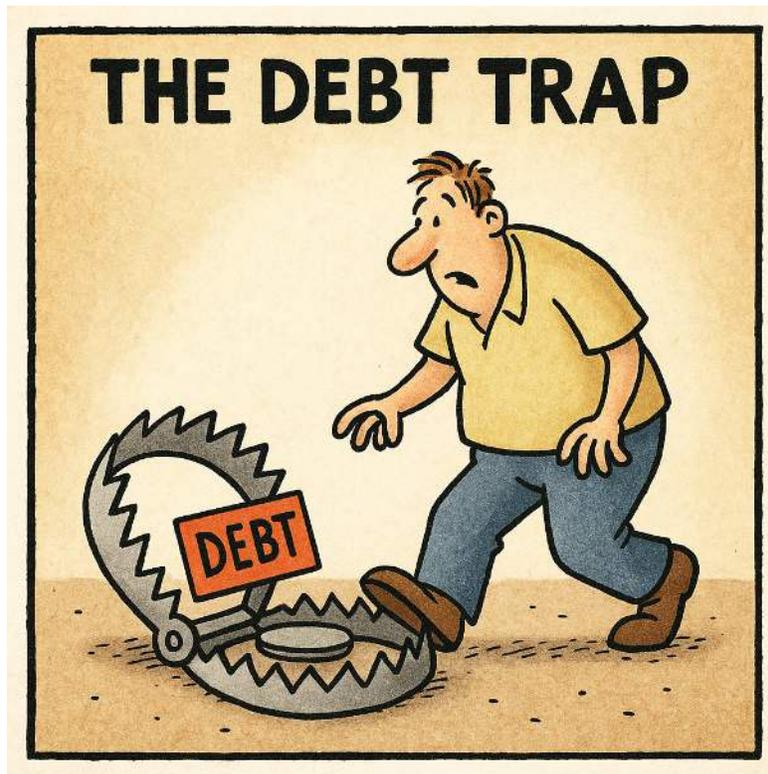
1. Appelbaum, B. (2019). *The Economists' Hour: False Prophets, Free Markets, and the Fracture of Society*. Little, Brown. – Explains how wage suppression was a deliberate outcome of economic policy.
 2. Mishel, L., & Bivens, J. (2021). *Why America's Workers Need Faster Wage Growth—And What We Can Do About It*. Economic Policy Institute. – Documents the productivity–pay gap as a structural design, not an accident.
 3. Stiglitz, J. (2019). *People, Power, and Profits: Progressive Capitalism for an Age of Discontent*. W.W. Norton. – Shows how rules were rewritten to favor capital over labor, cementing low wages as policy.
 4. Pfeffer, J. (2018). *Dying for a Paycheck*. Harper Business. – Describes how companies treat workers as replaceable parts rather than raising wages or fixing conditions.
 5. Hudson, M. (2018). *...and Forgive Them Their Debts: Lending, Foreclosure and Redemption from Bronze Age Finance to the Jubilee Year*. ISLET. – Explains how modern debt systems profit from wages that are too low to cover basic needs.
-



Chapter 3 – The Debt Treadmill



"Guess that's what they meant



When Wages Fail, Debt Collects

When wages fall short, debt steps in. That's not an accident – it's the next stage of the design. Low pay creates the gap, and credit fills it. Banks and lenders make billions while workers pay interest just to keep their heads above water. This isn't freedom. It's a treadmill. You keep running, but you don't move forward. The system is built so you never quite get ahead, never quite catch your breath. And the companies that underpay you are tied to the banks that lend to you – one hand squeezes your wage, the other collects your debt.





How the Debt Trap Works

- 💰 **Wages Create the Gap** → Low pay ensures workers can't cover the basics. The system counts on it.
- 💰 **Credit Cards as Lifelines** → Easy credit is offered not as luxury but survival. Interest rates guarantee workers pay back far more than they borrow.
- 💰 **Loans for "Normal Life"** → Cars, housing, even appliances come with financing. What used to be affordable with cash wages now demands years of monthly payments.
- 💰 **Student Debt Pipeline** → Education, once the promise of upward mobility, becomes a lifetime bill that locks people into jobs they can't leave. As Stiglitz noted, *"Student debt has turned into a shackle, binding workers to the system that underpays them"* (2).
- 💰 **Payday and Predatory Lending** → For the most desperate, high-interest loans take what little stability remains and turn it into a financial death spiral.

The Debt Treadmill in Plain Sight

- ✔ Low wages push you down.
- ✔ Credit props you up, but at a cost.
- ✔ Banks profit off the shortfall created by employers.
- ✔ Interest payments eat the raise you never got.

This isn't separate from work. It's the extension of work into your bank account, your mailbox, and your future. The paycheck ends, but the treadmill runs on.





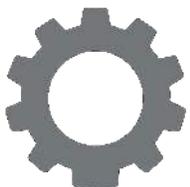
The Pattern in Play

- ⚙️ Keep wages low enough to create the gap.
- ⚙️ Offer credit to cover survival.
- ⚙️ Collect interest as the hidden wage tax.
- ⚙️ Turn mobility (cars, education, housing) into decades of payments.
- ⚙️ Keep workers running, but never moving forward.

End Quote

“Debt is not freedom. It’s the leash that makes low wages work. You’re not falling behind because you’re lazy – you’re running on a treadmill that was built to keep you in place.”

– Realworktruth.com



Notes for Chapter 3 – The Debt Treadmill

1. Hudson, M. (2018). *...and Forgive Them Their Debts: Lending, Foreclosure and Redemption from Bronze Age Finance to the Jubilee Year*. ISLET. – Shows how debt systems profit even when repayment is impossible.
 2. Stiglitz, J. (2019). *People, Power, and Profits: Progressive Capitalism for an Age of Discontent*. W.W. Norton. – Explains how student debt and financial structures trap workers in cycles of dependency.
 3. Graeber, D. (2011). *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*. Melville House. – Explores how debt has historically been used as a tool of social control.
 4. Rivlin, G. (2010). *Broke, USA: From Pawnshops to Poverty, Inc. – How the Working Poor Became Big Business*. Harper Business. – Documents the rise of payday lending and predatory credit as profit models.
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Chapter 4 – The Psychological Spin



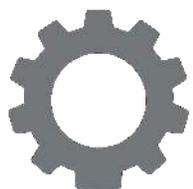
“Funny... I thought school was supposed to help us earn more, not less.”



Heading: Teaching Workers to Accept Less

*The system doesn't just hold wages down – it convinces you to accept them. That's the psychological spin. Companies, politicians, even the culture at large use language and tactics to keep workers quiet, grateful, and in line. It's not enough to underpay people. They have to sell it as a gift. And when you push back, the story flips – suddenly you're **"ungrateful," "lazy," or "not a team player."***

As Michael Sandel pointed out, "Markets don't only allocate goods, they also shape attitudes" (1). Low wages aren't just about economics. They're about conditioning.





How the Spin Works

- 💰 **The Gratitude Trap** → Workers are told they should be thankful for having a job at all. The message: survival is a privilege, not a right.
- 💰 **The “Above Average” Trick** → You’re told your pay is good “for this area” or “for this role,” even if you can’t cover the basics. But as Pew Research found, *“for most U.S. workers, real wages have barely budged for decades”* (2).
- 💰 **The Team Player Guilt** → Asking for more is framed as selfish. Corporate culture studies show this is no accident. Kunda wrote, *“Corporate cultures create rituals of commitment that mask control as loyalty”* (3).
- 💰 **The Hustle Hero** → Those who work extra hours, skip breaks, and sacrifice personal lives are praised as “dedicated.” Pfeffer noted, *“Long hours and overwork are not signs of health – they’re signs of a broken system”* (4).

The Spin in Plain Sight

- ☑️ “You should be glad you have benefits.”
- ☑️ “It’s competitive for this region.”
- ☑️ “We’re all in this together.”
- ☑️ “At least you have job security.”
- ☑️ “If you don’t like it, someone else will take your spot.”

Every line is a way of saying: accept less, demand nothing, and smile while you do it.



The Expanded Spin (4 More Hard Truths)

- 💰 **The Scarcity Script** → Workers are told “there’s no budget” or “the market sets the rate.” But executive bonuses prove the money exists – it’s just not for you.
- 💰 **The Fear of Replacement** → Constant reminders that someone younger, cheaper, or hungrier is waiting in line keep you obedient.
- 💰 **The Loyalty Mirage** → Workers are told loyalty is rewarded. In reality, long-term employees often make less than new hires brought in at “market rates.”
- 💰 **The Self-Blame Loop** → Struggling workers are told to “budget better” or “work harder,” shifting the blame from corporate policy to personal failure.

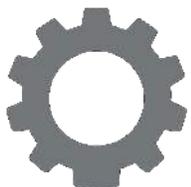
Note on New Hires

One of the most frustrating tricks is when new hires are brought in at higher pay than long-term workers. Companies excuse it as “market adjustments,” but they rarely adjust existing employees to match.

That choice saves money, but it also drives a wedge inside the workforce. Instead of questioning why management underpays veterans, resentment often falls on the new hire. It’s a spin that divides workers while protecting profit. As Pfeffer pointed out, “Organizations will spend more to recruit than to retain, because turnover is cheaper than fairness” (4).

The Pattern in Play

- ⚙️ Convince workers survival is a privilege.
- ⚙️ Redefine “good pay” as relative, not real.
- ⚙️ Turn sacrifice into virtue.
- ⚙️ Use fear to block demands.
- ⚙️ Blame workers for the system’s failures.





End Quote:

“The spin is the silence. Wages stay low not just because the math works, but because the message keeps workers from fighting back.”

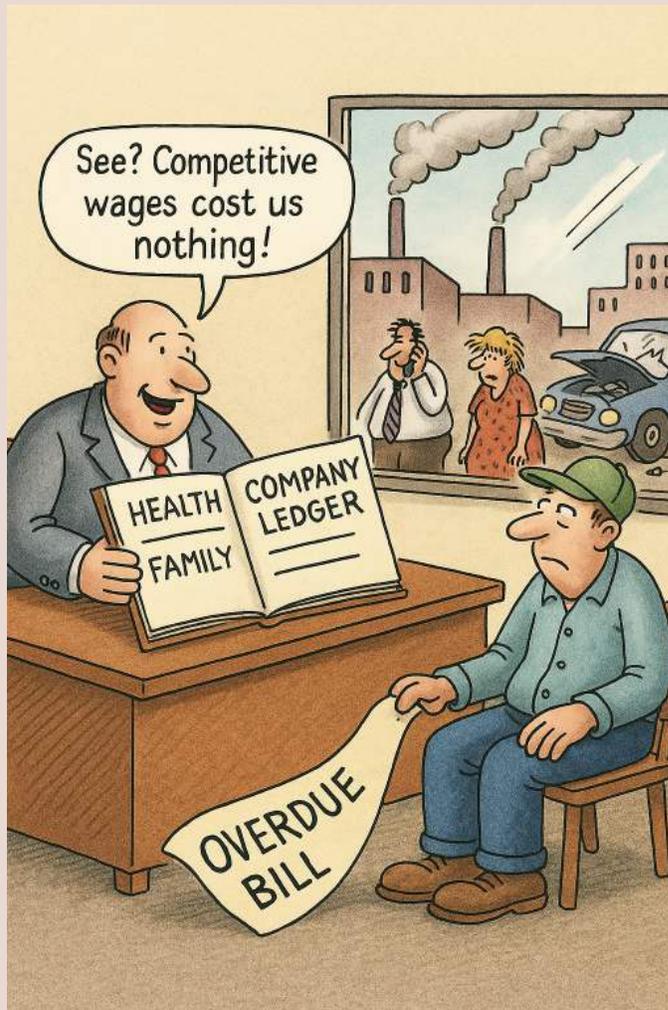
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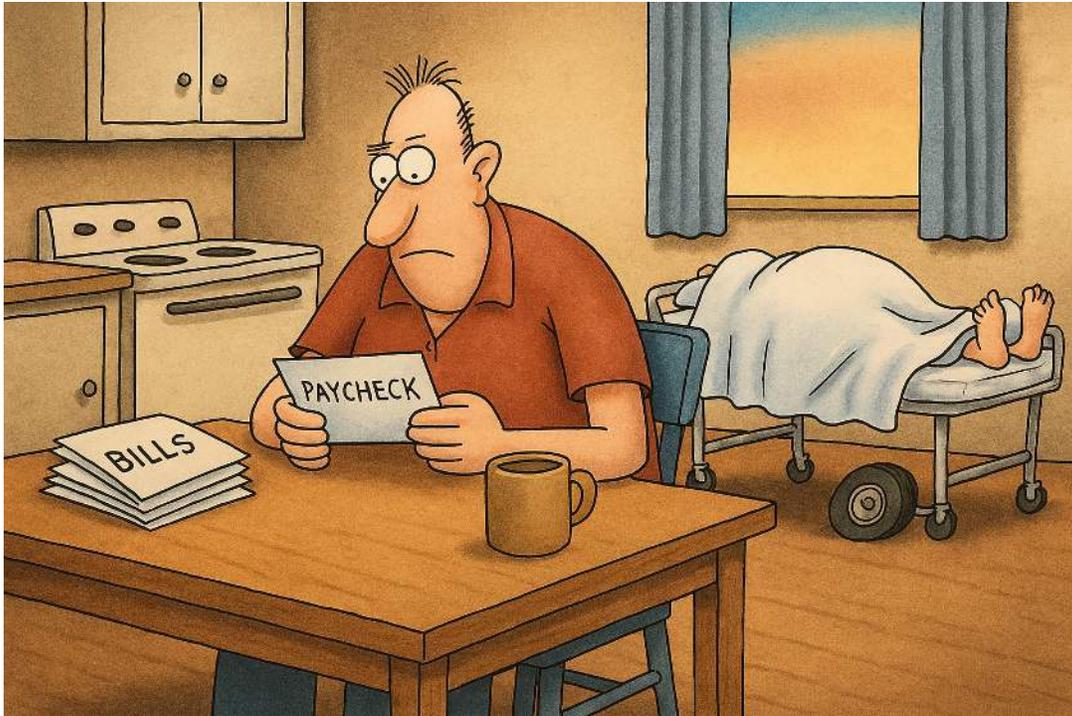
Notes for Chapter 4 – The Psychological Spin

1. Sandel, M. (2012). *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. – Shows how market thinking shapes culture and convinces people to accept unfair systems.
2. Desilver, D. (2022). *For Most U.S. Workers, Real Wages Have Barely Budged for Decades*. Pew Research Center. – Documents workers' frustration with stagnant wages even as companies call pay “competitive.”
3. Kunda, G. (2006). *Engineering Culture: Control and Commitment in a High-Tech Corporation*. Temple University Press. – Explains how corporate culture and language manipulate workers into compliance.
4. Pfeffer, J. (2018). *Dying for a Paycheck*. Harper Business. – Highlights how companies use loyalty and fear to keep workers tied to low pay.



Chapter 5 – The Real Cost





When the Math Doesn't Work

Companies brag about “competitive wages,” but the real cost doesn't show up on their ledgers. It lands on the workers. The bills that don't get paid, the health that breaks down, the families stretched until they snap – that's the price of cheap labor.

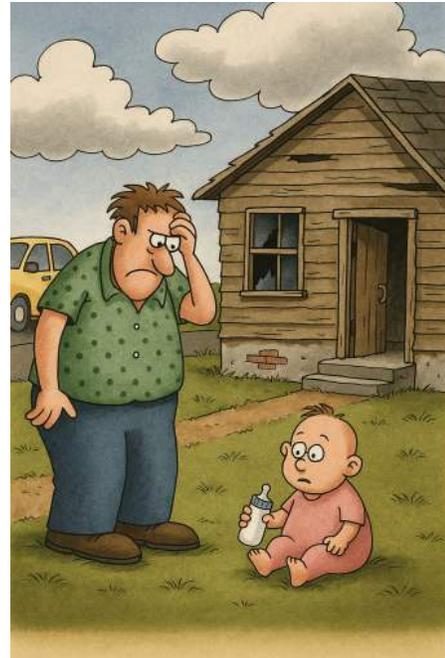
It's not about laziness. It's about math. The numbers don't work. A paycheck that barely covers rent and food leaves nothing for savings, emergencies, or the future. One flat tire, one hospital visit, or one missed shift is all it takes to send a household spiraling.

As Jeffrey Pfeffer wrote, **“Work is literally killing people, and the system is built to ignore it”** (1). And the system does ignore it – because the cost is shifted off the books and onto the backs of workers.



What the Cost Looks Like

- 💰 **Families on Edge** → Most households are one crisis away from collapse. Elizabeth Warren called it “*the two-income trap*” – families need two earners just to stay afloat, but one small disruption can push them over the edge (3).
- 💰 **No Room to Breathe** → Vacations, savings, or even a sick day become luxuries. People drag themselves to work sick because missing a shift means missing rent.
- 💰 **Health on the Line** → Stress, exhaustion, and cheap food take their toll. Marmot showed in *The Health Gap* that “*lower income consistently predicts poorer health outcomes and shorter life expectancy*” (2).
- 💰 **The Generational Squeeze** → Parents can’t save for their kids’ futures. College becomes another debt trap. Children inherit the same cycle, already behind before they even start.



- 💰 **The Silent Collapse** → Marriages break, communities weaken, and workers burn out – but none of that shows up on the company profit sheet. Case and Deaton tie stagnant wages and despair directly to “*rising deaths from drugs, alcohol, and suicide among working-class Americans*” (5).





The Real Cost in Plain Sight

This is what it looks like on the ground:

- ✔ A parent tells their kid they can't go on a school trip because there isn't enough money.
- ✔ Someone skips filling a prescription so they can pay the light bill.
- ✔ Families sit at the kitchen table juggling which bill gets paid and which gets pushed another month.
- ✔ Workers push through pain and illness because they can't afford to stop.

These stories aren't outliers. They're the norm. And that's the most damning part of all.

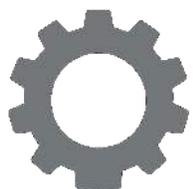


Note on Healthcare Costs

Companies parade health insurance as proof they *"take care"* of workers. But even with coverage, the system guts paychecks with deductibles, co-pays, and prescription costs. Himmelstein's study found that "over 60% of U.S. bankruptcies had a medical cause, and most filers were middle-class, well-educated, and insured" (4). You're not protected – you're just trapped in another kind of bill.

The Pattern in Play

- ⚙ One crisis away from collapse.
- ⚙ Health traded for survival.
- ⚙ Generations inherit the shortfall.
- ⚙ The system saves money; the people pay the price.
- ⚙ Medical costs become another wage cut.





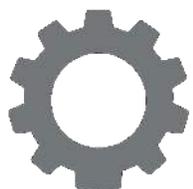
End Quote

“The cost of low wages isn’t in company books. It shows up in broken health, broken homes, and broken futures. The system runs on savings it never earned – yours.”

– Realworktruth.com

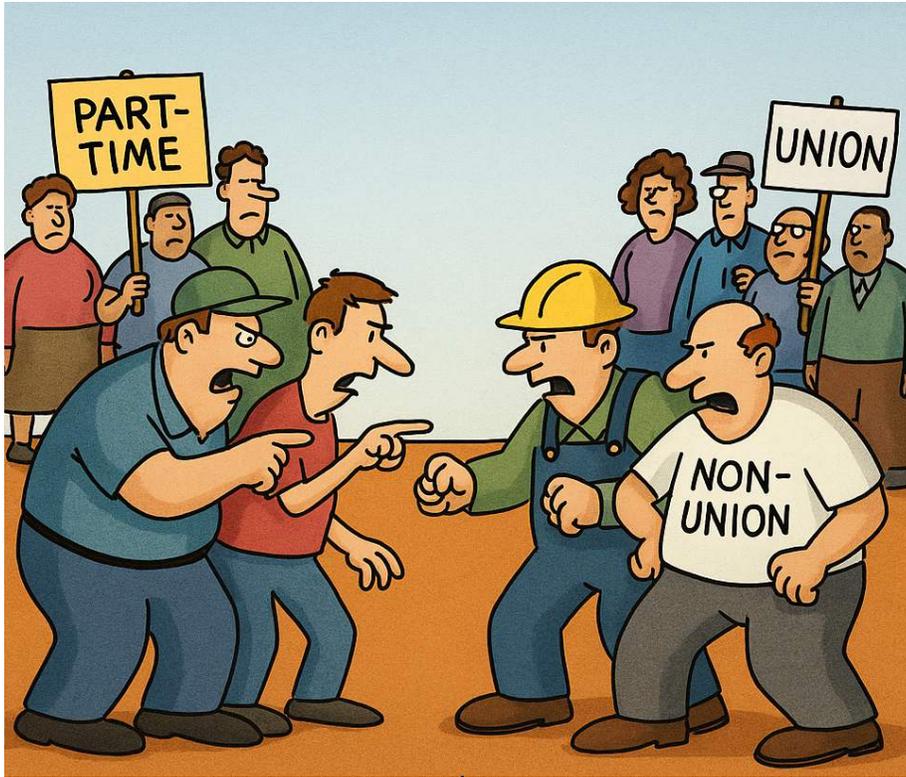
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2. Marmot, M. (2015). *The Health Gap: The Challenge of an Unequal World*. Bloomsbury Press. – Shows how inequality and low income directly harm health outcomes.
3. Warren, E., & Tyagi, A. (2003). *The Two-Income Trap*. Basic Books. – Explains how families are one emergency away from financial collapse despite “good jobs.”
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5. Case, A., & Deaton, A. (2020). *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism*. Princeton University Press. – Links stagnant wages and economic stress to rising deaths from suicide, drugs, and alcohol.



Chapter 6 – The Divide and Conquer Game



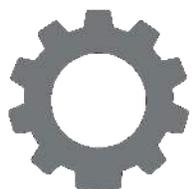


Divide and Conquer: How Workers Are Kept Fighting for Scraps

If workers ever stood shoulder to shoulder, low wages wouldn't last a week. Companies know it. That's why they spend so much time and energy keeping people divided.

Instead of everyone looking up and asking why the system is broken, the fight gets pushed sideways – veteran against new hire, full-time against part-time, union against non-union. A fractured workforce is easy to control.

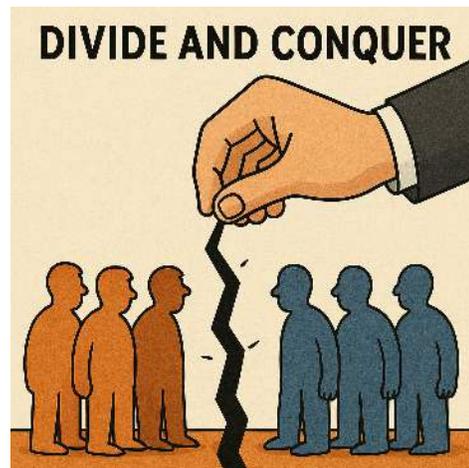
This isn't a new trick. It's one of the oldest. Divide the people who do the work, and you can keep paying them less while they fight each other for scraps.



How Division Works

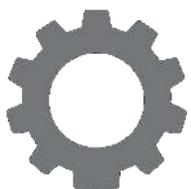
- 💰 **Pay Secrecy** → Workers are told not to talk about wages. That silence isn't about professionalism – it's about control. If nobody knows what the other makes, nobody knows they're getting screwed.
- 💰 **Tiered Titles** → Companies slap different names on the same kind of work. Suddenly it looks like one job is "above" another, even if the pay difference is pennies.
- 💰 **Merit Raises** → Raises are handed out like favors. Instead of fairness across the board, it becomes a contest. One worker's "reward" is another worker's reminder to stay in line.
- 💰 **Union Fear** → Management pushes the idea that organizing is selfish or dangerous. They'll spend more on anti-union campaigns than it would cost to just raise wages.

- **New Hire Divide** → Back in Chapter 4 we saw how companies spin this – calling it "market adjustments." But it's more than spin. It's a wedge. New hires come in making more than the people who carried the load for years, and the frustration doesn't go upward where it belongs. It turns sideways, worker against worker. That's exactly how management wants it.



*"Keep them divided,
and you can keep
them down."*

– Realworktruth.com





My Story: Integration into the American Pay Scale

When I moved my wife and children back to the U.S. in 2016, after living and working overseas for 10 years, the first thing that happened wasn't a welcome home. It wasn't recognition for the skills I brought back or the years I'd already put in.

It was a pay cut.

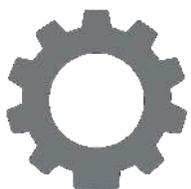
They called it "integration into the American pay scale." That was their polite way of saying: we're going to slash your wages because we can.

Overseas, my time and experience were worth something different. Back here, I was shoved into a chart, boxed into their scale, and told to accept less. It didn't matter what I had done or how many years I'd carried heavy work on my back. The only thing that mattered was fitting me into their system of control.

And it wasn't a small drop either. It set me back a decade. Ten years of grinding just to get back to where I was before I worked overseas. Ten years stolen under the excuse of "this is just how the market works."

That's division in real life. They used geography, titles, and pay scales as weapons to cut me down and keep me in line. And I wasn't alone. Thousands of workers get the same treatment every day.

The truth is, the system doesn't care about loyalty, sacrifice, or skill. It only cares about cost. When they say "market adjustments," what they mean is simple: your value isn't based on your work — it's based on how cheaply they can replace you.





Divide and Conquer in Plain Sight

This is what it sounds like day to day:

- ☑ "Don't ask about pay. That's personal."
- ☑ "That title is above yours, even if the work is the same."
- ☑ "If you get more, someone else gets less."
- ☑ "Unions just want your money."

Every line is designed to stop workers from turning their eyes upward and asking the real question: why are we all underpaid in the first place?

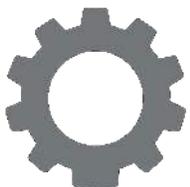


Note on Pay Secrecy

Companies like to frame pay secrecy as "professional." But the truth is, you have the legal right to talk about wages. The gag order is fake. It protects management, not workers. Silence only works for them.

The Pattern in Play

- ⚙ Hide wages to keep workers guessing.
- ⚙ Use titles as walls between equals.
- ⚙ Turn raises into competition instead of fairness.
- ⚙ Scare workers away from solidarity.
- ⚙ Push resentment sideways, not upward.





End Quote

"When workers fight each other, management wins. Division is the cheapest form of control."

– Realworktruth.com

Notes for Chapter 6 – The Divide and Conquer Game

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2. National Labor Relations Act (1935). – Protects workers' rights to discuss wages and organize collectively, directly countering company-imposed pay secrecy.
3. Bronfenbrenner, K. (2009). *No Holds Barred: The Intensification of Employer Opposition to Organizing*. Economic Policy Institute. – Documents aggressive anti-union campaigns and the fear tactics used to divide workers.
4. Freeman, R., & Medoff, J. (1984). *What Do Unions Do?* Basic Books. – Explains how unions reduce wage inequality and why employers fight them with division.
5. Pfeffer, J. (2018). *Dying for a Paycheck*. Harper Business. – Shows how corporate strategies, including "divide and conquer," keep costs down at the expense of workers' health and stability.
6. Mishel, L., & Bivens, J. (2021). *Identifying the Policy Levers Generating Wage Suppression and Wage Inequality*. Economic Policy Institute. – Highlights how wage suppression is systemic, not accidental.



Chapter 7 – The Corporate Religion





The Corporate Religion of Sacrifice

Every system needs belief to survive. For companies, it's not enough that you show up – you've got to buy in. That's why they wrap low pay and long hours in the language of loyalty, sacrifice, and "family."

It's religion without God, built around worshipping the company. The message is simple: your value is measured by how much you give up for them.

"In the church of the company, the altar is your time – and the sacrifice is your life."

– Realworktruth.com





The Articles of Faith

- 💰 **Loyalty as Salvation** → You're told loyalty pays off in the end. But reality proves different – loyalty is punished with flat wages while the new hire walks in making more.
- 💰 **Sacrifice as Virtue** → Miss a meal, miss your kid's game, work through sickness – it's all framed as "dedication." In truth, it's just free labor.
- 💰 **The Family Illusion** → "We're all family here." That's the line. But unlike real family, this one will cut you lose the second you're not useful anymore.
- 💰 **Gratitude as Worship** → A small raise, a pizza party, a bonus check – you're expected to bow your head and say thank you.
- 💰 **Doubt as Sin** → If you question any of this, suddenly you're "negative," "ungrateful," or "not a team player."

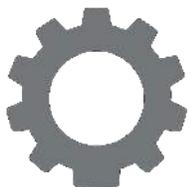
Corporate Religion in Plain Sight

You hear it every day:

But let's be clear – jumping jobs won't fix the problem. The system is rigged against you, and a 7% bump won't necessarily dig you out of the hole. At best, it buys you a little breathing room. At worst, it just resets the same cycle somewhere else with a different logo on your paycheck. **Loyalty isn't rewarded – it's exploited.**

- ☑️ "We're a family."
- ☑️ "Be grateful you have a job."
- ☑️ "Your hard work will pay off someday."
- ☑️ "Don't be negative."

Every one of these lines is a sermon. The slogans are verses. Doubt is punished, faith is demanded, and the rewards? They never really arrive.





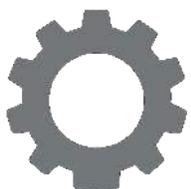
Note on Loyalty

This isThe promise of loyalty is one of the cruelest myths. Workers who stay the longest are often paid the least, while those who jump jobs see the real wage gains. A 2023 ZipRecruiter study found that job-switchers earned on average 7% more than loyal employees in the same role (2). a text placeholder - click this text to edit.

Where the Money Really Goes

We all know where most of the money goes – to investors, to the CEO bonus, to the CFO bonus. That’s where your raise disappeared.

And sometimes, it’s worse than that. A friend of mine worked at the same company I did. He told me how the CEO once used company money to buy the cheerleading squad at a major football game, and had the squad dance and sit on his lap.



So the next time you don't get a raise, remember it didn't vanish. It didn't **"go to overhead" or "tight budgets."** It probably went to the CEO's lap.

The Pattern in Play

- ⚙️ Loyalty is demanded, not returned.
- ⚙️ Sacrifice is praised, not paid.
- ⚙️ "Family" is a slogan, not the truth.
- ⚙️ Gratitude is expected, not earned.
- ⚙️ Doubt is punished to keep you quiet.

End Quote

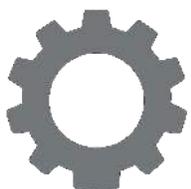
Corporate religion turns work into worship. You don't just give your time – you give your faith. And the only ones blessed are the ones cashing the checks."

– Realworktruth.com

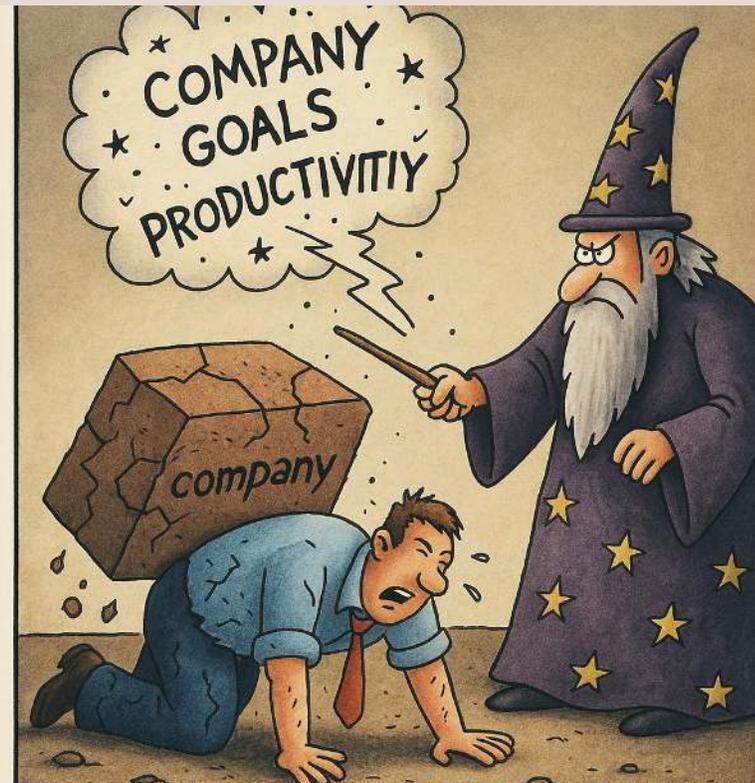


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3. Kunda, G. (2006). *Engineering Culture: Control and Commitment in a High-Tech Corporation*. Temple University Press. – Explains how corporations use rituals and slogans to demand commitment like faith.



Chapter 8 – Breaking the Spell





The Corporate illusion: Are you under the spell

The illusion only works as long as people believe it. Wages stay low not just because of policy, but because workers are convinced this is “normal.” That belief is the lock on the cage.

But once you see the tricks – the comparison games, the perks, the debt trap, the divide-and-conquer tactics, the fake family talk – you can’t unsee them. The spell is broken.

The Limits of Resistance

People say, “If workers stand together, things will change.” Maybe a little. You might see a small bump in wages or a new benefit tossed your way. **But let’s be honest – companies have been playing this game for over a century.**



Slave Wages by Design

They've got endless moves:

- ✔ Bring in cheaper labor.
- ✔ Move to another state or country where people will work for less.
- ✔ Lobby politicians to rewrite the rules.
- ✔ Bribe their way past safety and wage laws.

History proves it. Every time workers push forward, companies find a way to claw it back. That's not defeatism – it's reality. You can fight inside their system, but the house always wins.

The Real Break

If the world stood against this at the same time, maybe it would make a difference. But waiting on that? That's just another trap.

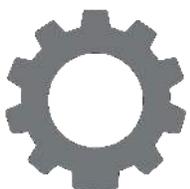
The real way out is walking away. Stop letting them own every piece of your life. Build something that doesn't depend on their paycheck or their promises. Live without their leash.

That's where freedom starts – not begging for scraps at the table, but building your own table.

Note on Truth

The truth by itself won't raise wages – but it kills the silence companies depend on. History proves it: the 8-hour day, overtime pay, and safety rules weren't gifts from above; they came from workers saying enough and forcing the issue (1).

But here's the catch – even when laws are won, companies exploit them. They find loopholes, lobby for weaker enforcement, or straight-up bribe their way out. Safety gets watered down. Overtime gets stolen. What workers fight for, corporations twist to their advantage (2).





That's why the bigger answer isn't just more laws or more bargaining. It's breaking free of the system that makes exploitation the default.

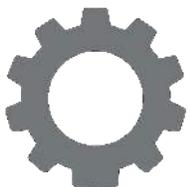
The Pattern in Play

- ⚙ The illusion only works if you believe it.
- ⚙ Fighting inside the cage won't tear down the cage.
- ⚙ Companies will always rewrite the rules.
- ⚙ The real escape is walking away.
- ⚙ Build your own system, live your own life.

End Quote

“The system was built by design, but you don't have to live inside it. Breaking the spell isn't just seeing the lie – it's refusing to live by it.”

– Realworktruth.com





Notes for Chapter 8 – Breaking the Spell

1. U.S. Department of Labor. (2023). *History of the Fair Labor Standards Act*. – Documents how the 40-hour workweek, overtime pay, and minimum wage were established through strikes and worker pressure.
2. Barstow, D., & Bergman, L. (2003). *Death on the Job: The Toll of Corporate Evasion*. New York Times Investigative Report. – Shows how corporations lobby, exploit loopholes, and undermine safety regulations.
3. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2022). *Union Members Summary*. – Confirms that while unions raise wages, companies counter by outsourcing, relocating, or lobbying against protections.



Epilogue – My Break in the Spell



Epilogue – My Break in the Spell

When I moved my wife and kids back to the U.S. in 2016 after years of working overseas, I thought I'd step into stability. Instead, the first thing that hit me was a wage cut. Overnight, I was dropped into the American pay scale – the so-called “normal.”

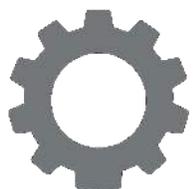
It wasn't just a small drop. It set me back a decade. Ten years of grinding just to claw my way back to where I had been before I left. That's what “integration” really meant. It wasn't fairness. It was punishment for not fitting into their cage.

But here's the truth: before that, I had lived free. When I was a contractor overseas, based in the Philippines, I had a kind of freedom most workers in the U.S. will never know. I was making \$20,000 a month. I took my wife and children on vacations several times a year. I paid off a \$250,000 home in just four years. My job gave me the freedom to come and go as I pleased, to live without fear of the next paycheck, to finally breathe.

So why give that up? Two reasons. First, I needed to bring my wife to the U.S. to get her citizenship. Second, I planned to keep working overseas – but corporate lawyers stripped that away from me. I still don't know the full story. All I was told was this: once I was back in the “good old USA,” I couldn't work overseas for the company anymore. That was it. No explanation, no options. Just another rule designed to trap me.

Could I have fought it? Maybe. But at the time, I was setting up my family, dealing with the mess of moving back, and trying to find solid ground. So I took the shaft, like a good American worker, and paid the price.

And that's when it hit me: the illusion isn't just about low pay. It's about control. Keep you in debt. Keep you grateful for scraps. Keep you believing this is the best you'll ever get.



Slave Wages by Design



But I've seen another way. Overseas, I learned that life doesn't have to be chained to their system. You can work, earn, and live outside of their game. You can walk away. You can build your own.

That's what this book is about. Not just exposing the tricks but breaking the spell. Not waiting for the system to fix itself, because it never will. ***Not begging for crumbs but walking away from the table and building your own.***

This is my fight now. This is why I started Real Work Truth. To tell the stories no one else will. To expose the illusions. To give people the courage to say, "I see it. I won't play along anymore."

I lost ten years to their system. I won't lose ten more. And if you're reading this, you don't have to either



Real Work Truth!

The system is built to keep you quiet. But the more we see it, name it, and share it, the weaker the illusion becomes. That's why I started Real Work Truth – to expose what companies don't want workers to say out loud. If this book hit home, don't stop here.

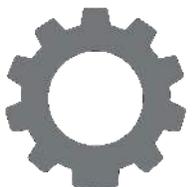
If you're tired of the corporate act and want the truth. Visit-

RealWorkTruth.com

Get honest stories and hard-earned lessons from the trades –

[join the Real Work Truth newsletter.](#)

**Because the only way to break the spell is together –
one truth at a time.**





About The Author

Jeremiah Satterlee is a veteran, tradesman, and writer who spent decades working in the real world of maintenance, drilling, and industrial systems.

He's seen how companies build loyalty programs while burning through people, how **"safety culture"** gets used as cover, and how workers keep showing up anyway – not out of obedience, but pride. Through Real Work Truth, Jeremiah writes for those who keep the lights on and the machines running – the workers who x problems no one else understands.

His goal is simple: bring honesty back to conversations about work, burnout, and respect. He believes in straight talk over slogans, proof over promises, and systems that protect time instead of stealing it.

You can find more writing, tools, and free resources at:

[Realworktruth.com/resources](https://www.Realworktruth.com/resources)

