

The Plumber Problem

**Who Will Do
The Dirty Jobs
After The Revolution?**



NⒶTE

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**Replace the word 'Plumber' for any skilled manual work that we rely on*



The Supposed Challenge Of Filling Undesirable Jobs Without Capitalism

‘If they can get you asking the wrong questions, they don't have to worry about answers.’

– *Thomas Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow*

We've become so accustomed to using money for everything that it's hard to imagine a world without it. Yet, for most of our history, money didn't exist. Ancient cave etchings show that while our ancestors spent much of their time hunting and gathering for survival, they also dedicated moments to creating art, music, and enjoying each other's friendship — all without the need to earn a wage, pay bills, or rent. So do we really need money getting in the way of all that now?

Yet it is hard for many to imagine a world without it, in which resources prioritise needs instead of profits. Some argue that abandoning money wouldn't be practical. They ask, ‘But who will do the dirty jobs? Who will fix the toilets or unclog the drains? After all, the world will still need plumbers, and they wouldn't do it without being well paid, would they?’

This often serves as a ‘gotcha’ question, highlighting the seeming impossibility of a society without money. Essentially, it asks, ‘Why would anyone spend their days dealing with crap (especially of the literal kind) when there's no financial incentive?’¹ This implies that:

- A. People are primarily motivated by financial rewards in their career choices.
- B. Individuals only opt for undesirable jobs only if the pay is high enough (and plumbing becomes a preferable choice over poverty).
- C. People are choosing plumbing over other skilled professions due to lack of intelligence or unwillingness to work harder for better-paying roles.²

¹ Of course there have been even Anarchists who have suggested using money or labour vouchers, at least transitionally.

² I'm not sure how much plumbers like capitalists implying that they only do their job because they are both greedy, but also fairly dumb.

Under capitalism, this question seemingly has one simple answer ('they'll do it for the money'). However, there are problems with the answers simplicity. Money requires a system, and this system relies on questionable and costly forces to function. Many factors influence how and why individuals handle sewage within a capitalist framework, yet the messy and complicated aspects of this journey are often overlooked.

For those who believe act similarly to donkeys, motivated either by carrots or sticks, this scenario presents a carrot of 'look at this money we'll give you if you do this awful thing,' or the stick of 'look what will happen to you if you don't do this awful thing.' But is this the only practical way for individuals and society to operate? This argument raises multiple problems and contradictions, each of which deserves closer look.

1. Believing that only within Capitalism would people want to be plumbers is not a realistic or accurate argument.

The capitalist argument for people becoming plumbers is this: 'People want more stuff and greater comforts, plumber gets paid more because few people want to deal with the crap, so plumbers can afford more stuff, therefore enough people want to become plumbers for the stuff.' But is this true?

Lets go with the first premise that plumbers are paid better. It makes sense that plumbers would be able to demand more money under capitalism, because a home cannot be completed without the work they do with pipes, toilets, and taps. Such skills are especially sought after in an emergency, when the plumber can remove smelly problems that would make life at home unbearable. Even when the problem isn't quite as pungent, a plumber is often the only one who can fix problems with blocked pipes, broken toilets, and issues relating to showers and taps, all of which when broken can seriously impairs your quality of life.

Just as you are grateful to have a painful tooth pulled when you need it, because you look forward to being out of pain, people value what plumbers do when they desperately need them to fix a burst pipe, and are prepared to pay a premium for it. So it does indeed often pay more than other manual labour such as construction work.

(I'm not arguing that money isn't ever an incentive – our whole system is designed to make it so. I'm not arguing that it may not sometimes incentivise dirty jobs more, or claiming that difficult jobs don't typically pay more. I'm not disagreeing on those points. While we have bills to pay, then more money means less worries, and even after our needs being met extra luxuries are desired by some.)

There is still often the question of the time and effort it takes to become a plumber. It takes three years of training, often initially at a much lower apprentice's wage, to eventually be able to work on your own, and expect a higher pay rate. But does that mean that plumbers make more money than other 'clean' manual professions that take as long to train in?

If we compare electricians with plumbers, as the training is of similar length, then on average in America plumbers are paid better than electricians. However, in every other 'Western' countries this is actually the other way around. In Europe there are roughly the same number of vacancies for electricians and plumbers, but electricians are paid slightly more. So at least in Europe under the capitalist argument there is no financial reason to be a plumber rather than an electrician, and in some (so called) some third world countries plumbers get paid poorly precisely because it is seen as a dirty job.³

So why do people in countries where they can earn similar or more doing other cleaner jobs with a similar length of training still choose plumbing? Why do people in countries in which there is free education, free housing, free medicine, and decent social welfare for the unemployed still choose to be plumbers? The simple answer is that it is possible to have people doing dirty / difficult jobs when money isn't the only incentive to do that. Money is not the only factor in deciding why people do that and other dirty jobs.

People become parents knowing they'll have a duty to wipe their children's backsides, but they don't get paid for that task at all. Sometimes those children grow up to care for their parents and

³ In America on average plumbers are paid better than electricians, in most other countries it is the other way around. It takes about 3 years to fully train to be either.

<https://www.payaca.com/post/who-makes-more-plumbers-or-electricians> . In the UK there are roughly the same number of vacancies for electricians and plumbers

<https://www.hvpmag.co.uk/Plumbers-are-third-most-in-demand-tradespeople-in-the-UK-/16875>. But electricians are paid slightly more –

<https://www.hitchcockandking.co.uk/h-k-news/average-salary-for-tradespeople-in-the-uk/>

wipe their backsides when they are old and infirm, but they don't get paid for that either.

Some may argue that if these people could pay for others to do this job they would. However, when those with babies or infirm parents can afford paying someone else to clean them (a nanny or carer), those jobs are often low paid. So we already have people doing the dirtiest jobs for no or low pay already in our society.

My mother cleaned people's messy backsides, as a care worker, for most of her life, for relatively little pay. I'm sure she would have rather skipped that part of the job, but she wouldn't have wanted to have seen the elderly people in her care suffer, so she did it with as much grace as such a task allows, because it had to be done so that those people maintained some dignity.

Is it possible that people do such work because they don't like to see others uncomfortable or suffering? Because they (at times) find it emotionally rewarding, or feel that it is their duty? (All of which require no money, and would still be done without the existence of money.) Wouldn't those needs still exist and the incentives be the same without capitalism?

2. Capitalism creates and maintains the conditions in which plumbing must be done this way.

When it comes to the amount people get paid for any job it is argued by capitalists that it is not them, but the 'free' market that decides. This implies that the market is an impartial arbiter, simply reflecting demand for services and value of goods. However, for a market to exist there needs to be several parts already in place. Just like a traditional market needs land on which to place the stalls, tables on which to place your wares, tarpaulins to keep out the weather, things to actually sell, and materials and people to make those things; a modern market requires a transport network to move people and goods, and a means of exchange with which to buy and sell what is produced. There is no modern 'free' market system without currency, and there is no currency without government to guarantee it's value (and ensure it isn't counterfeited).

Governments are not impartial in this process. Their interests often represent those who have financed their political

parties and campaigns, the lobbyists and private contracts, and legislation regarding regulation and taxation often reflects the interests of the corporations behind this process. Likewise they influence the minimum wage, the social benefits available, and put limits on the power of unions to make demands on pay and work conditions.⁴

So when people say the market decides, aren't they really saying that we can rely on some choosing plumbing (or care work etc.) as a profession, because it is an alternative to the capitalist-induced threat and fear of starvation? Some may argue, that's just the way the world and work is, but there is a problem with this if you are a proponent of capitalism. The same capitalists who argue that people wouldn't be plumbers if it wasn't for the financial reward of doing it under capitalism, also often argue that if people are poorly paid under capitalism they just need to train for a better paid job. (They say this as if there is no financial barrier to such training and no lack of availability of better paid jobs.)

This raises the question of why doesn't everyone train for the better paid jobs leaving no-one to do the dirty ones? Which often leads to a (grudgingly admitted) defence by capitalists of the idea that some people are just born dumb, and therefore somehow deserve a lower wage. Yet they argue that plumbers demand a higher wage than so called unskilled 'dumb' people, because they are highly trained, but still too 'dumb' to do other work which would be less dirty and pay them better. But, if all it takes is 'dumb' people to do such dirty work wouldn't there be 'dumb' people without capitalism too?

If you try to say a group of people together could share the responsibility of doing the plumbing, then supporters of capitalists will revert back to telling you that they can't because it is a highly skilled job. The capitalists seem to believe in a kind of Schrödinger's Plumber: a plumber who is too dumb to do anything else, but too smart for anyone else to do their job, yet still not smart enough to do a less dirty job.

⁴ Government exists to enforce property rights, property (& corporation) owners have a major influence on the funding of political parties, selecting of candidates, and what legislation (usually to their benefit) gets promoted and passed. & of course most skilled professions are taught and qualified by university which receive most of their funding from the same people, including whole economics and business departments staffed with people defending this system as the only rational one. So does the market decide? and even if it does is it good that it does (for example it decides that a few Wall Street execs make as much in a years as all the rest of the workers in America put together on the profit of products they don't make).

This where capitalism veers into the territory of eugenics, in which the rich are genetically superior and the poor genetically inferior. Where some deserve to hoard wealth and goods and others deserve to starve. It is a politer form of racism which comforts the man in his mansion, who can argue that it may not be fair, but life isn't fair, even though such unfairness is exploited by the system which gives him his wealth. It is a pseudo-scientific conspiracy theory which no reputable scientist takes seriously. But then most scientists aren't very well paid, which is another reason for the capitalist class to dismiss their research, except when they pay for it and it supports the views of the rich.

So, lets say that – despite these contradictions – you are still convinced people are doing plumbing due to some dubious special monetary benefits, this raises the simple question: Could some of those things – experiential things – also exist within a system without money? Couldn't there be some other way of a community / society showing their gratitude and rewarding those who do dirty / difficult work?



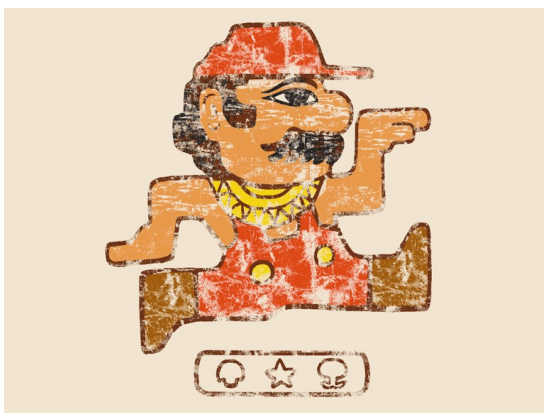
3. The idea that plumbers require money to work contradicts ancient examples to the contrary.

Believe it or not, plumbing existed before money. Not rudimentary wells and baths, but archeologists have found that early pre-money civilisations such as the Indus, Minoans, and Incas had advanced indoor and outdoor plumbing including: pipes, drains, aqueducts, heated water, showers, indoor toilets, and sewage treatment. However, this knowledge was lost when their cities were invaded, or became extinct through natural disaster. Yet their plumbing advances had to be reinvented later, some only very recently (my grandparents had an outside toilet, and used kettles to heat their bath).

The Indus Valley civilisation is perhaps the most interesting of these, because it is the oldest (3300 B.C.), and lacked any evidence of hierarchy, priests, slaves, or soldiers. Yet it included around six million inhabitants in an area covering Pakistan and part of India and Afghanistan. The homes in cities like Mohenjo-daro were all of similar size, without palaces or temples, but with many of the same conveniences we enjoy today. Keeping the water flowing and drinkable, and the waste draining and being disposed of in a sanitary fashion, must have taken many people with advanced skills in plumbing. Yet there were no monetary reward for this work, no fear of police or prisons compelling them to do it, and no religious obligation to carry out such duties.⁵

If this could work for a whole cities and civilisations – which didn't use money – five thousand years ago, and lived without our modern technology and tools, why couldn't it work for other cities in our day? Why did people perform dirty plumbing and sewage work before there was money to incentivise them to do so? If they could keep the sewers functioning and the cities clean without paying people – couldn't we?

⁵ https://anarchyinaction.org/index.php?title=Indus_Valley_Civilization



Later the Chinese and Romans had similarly advanced water systems, although primarily for the private homes of wealthy citizens. In Rome plumbers trained through apprenticeships, and they were able to maintain relatively high standards and wages through their trade guild (so avoiding having to compete against each other). Yet they still earned similar to blacksmiths and masons, which were less dirty jobs, but still choose to be plumbers despite this.

During the Spanish Revolution plumbers in the republic were part of the plumbers collectives which helped organise their work. Some of this work was done for pay, some for trade, and some to support the ideals of the revolution. They were ultimately working toward a moneyless society but the fascists (and Leninists) brought an end to that before it could fully happen.

In some modern cooperatives and communes in which there are no wages (or they are equally distributed) they still carry out the plumbing, as this interesting modern example from the book *Anarchy Works* shows:

‘The Christiania ‘free state’ is a quarter in Copenhagen, Denmark, that has been squatted since 1971. Its 850 inhabitants are autonomous within their 85 acres. They have been taking out their own trash for over thirty years. The fact that they receive about one million visitors a year makes their achievement all the more impressive. The streets, buildings, restaurants, public toilets, and public showers are all reasonably clean — especially for hippies! The body of water that runs through Christiania is not the cleanest, but considering that Christiania is tree-covered and

automobile free one suspects most of the pollution comes from the surrounding city that shares the waterway.’

4. The idea that people are only motivated to do plumbing by money contradicts evidence regarding human motivations.

This brings us to the controversial and much disputed topic of human nature. It has long been accepted by evolutionary scientists that there are genetic benefits to cooperation and altruism. Anthropologists can trace through archeological findings to modern society behaviours which favour being considerate of others and acting kindly. Even some philosophers who have questioned the reasons behind such actions and have wondered if they are secretly selfish, still admit that people can and do act in such ways, whether out of seeking recognition or genuine desire to help others.

A large part of our lives (our personal relationships), and for most of the world's history we did things just because we need each other, and our kindness was rewarded with friendship and acceptance. People still do wonderful things without any hope of monetary reward: We love, and spend time with friends, and enjoy many ways to pass the time that don't cost anything. In fact we will do things that do cost money to help others, but which don't give us any personal benefit beyond the good feelings that come with our kindness.

Wouldn't most people – if they grew up with safety and security and were educated with the values of kindness and empathy – be more inclined to do more difficult and dirty tasks if necessary?

If you believe the religious assumptions of Calvinism, that people are born sinful, that nothing they do is ever really good, and that we all deserve to be destroyed (or even tortured forever), you have a theological reason for believing that people are evil. Then you might argue that people should be coerced through fear of damnation (or starvation) to do avoid doing something bad, or compelled (by threat of hell or violence) into do something good.⁶

⁶ They somehow don't seem to notice the contradiction between the idea that man is both inherently evil / selfish, and that the the best way to handle this is to give a few evil men more power over others.

However, even if people are naturally inclined toward selfishness and to act in their own self interest, this doesn't mean that – even without money – society couldn't be structured in a way where it offers the most selfish reasons to do dirty work during part of their week.

Those who bring up the example of plumbing do so because it is something they would never do (unless forced to), and can't believe anyone else would ever do voluntarily.⁷ Maybe they have an extreme aversion to dirty work, maybe there will always be such people who would never entertain the idea of cleaning up certain things, and would go to extremes to avoid even the possibility of doing it. So maybe those people would never be the one doing such jobs.

But is it possible that them not being able to imagine others doing such dirty jobs (without financial incentive and the fear of poverty) may just show more of their personal repulsion of such work, and a lack of imagination and understanding of others motivations for doing it? Aren't they just saying, 'because i wouldn't do this I can't see why anyone else would?'

Still, we live in a world full of competition rather than cooperation, of insecure living situations that make us cling to whatever safety and security we can find, and in a system in which helping others is sometimes seen as a weakness or luxury. So, let's say – for arguments sake – that everyone is selfish, let us presume maybe we are all out to get something, then the question becomes what could be offered to us without capitalism to ensure these things still get done.

5. Saying that everyone is selfish ignores other incentives and ways of dealing with this even if it was true.

The evidence shows that the plumbing and sewage work did get done when there wasn't a monetary incentive, and dirty work still does get done now when it is poorly paid. So, why did dirty work in

⁷ I'm tempted to say that the lack of empathy and toleration of coercion and exploitation shows a lot more about the character of the person asking the question. Whereas, I'm not comfortable with anyone being forced into anything, or with any form of slavery existing, even if it costs me certain luxuries.

a world without money. and why might they still do it in a future in which money was not on offer?

For those who believe that we are naturally lazy, it is easier to conclude that no one would do anything unless they had a strong reasons and rewards to do so. Although some scientists even argue that laziness is a learnt and largely modern habit, which is rare in some societies even now. Sure, there may be a few people who aren't embarrassed by doing nothing and still taking all the benefits. But, we have a whole class of people who do nothing of value now and take far more than their share of benefits (share holders, landlords etc.)⁸

Yet because a society lacks money doesn't mean that it lacks incentives to encourage people to the dirty work. There will be several kinds of incentives in a post-money world. It will be a world without the worry of affording housing, food, clothing, healthcare, education, and entertainment, which are possible because everyone is working together without the need to satisfy the voracious appetite of the rich.

But there are additional incentives particular to difficult and dirty work, which fall into three categories: emotional (empathy, vocation, ego), reputational (friendship, status), and special perks (unique benefits). According to social scientists these first two have the potential to be more powerful than getting bits of paper and exchanging them for things (and worrying about not getting enough of them). The last of these would work as a substitute for the things money might have bought anyway.

Emotional Incentives

For a short time one of the highest paid worker in the Birmingham City Council was once one of it's lowest paid: a street sweeper. They were known for how much they loved their work, before they were paid very much for it, and because of this love and them going above and beyond what was required of them, the Council decided to reward them by paying them more than most of its other workers. This proved to be politically unpalatable, and the amount the street sweeper was paid was reduced to their old rate.

⁸ The difference is that – although food and essentials will be free – the kind of theft that steals a mans labour and what he produces under threat of starvation will have no place within the post-capitalist world.

Whereas people who produce nothing, but have inherited property, are often the most wealthy, despite offering little to society. But this was a person who swept streets with the fervour and talent similar to Michelangelo painting the Sistine chapel, even when he wasn't paid much for it.⁹

Many people like to be useful, they like to fill their time with doing something, especially something they consider useful or that benefits others. Some take a particular pride in their work, knowing they have a talent or skill, that they have developed into expertise. Others feel they are called by the universe or suited by nature to particular tasks, and a few find they do very well at work others may not wish to do, and cannot understand their love of.

Although it may be hard to believe, there are some people who seem to genuinely like doing dirty or difficult work. Maybe they like proving their strength, maybe they like the recognition, maybe they just like sparing someone else from having to do it. The work has to be done by someone. They may even resent doing the work, but rather than a toilet not get unlocked or a backside go unwiped they'll do it, because they feel that the results of not doing it are worse.

This is my personal attitude. It need to be done? No one else will do it? Then I will do it. Why not? If no one else will someone has to. I'd rather do it than force someone else to. Its the least I can do to help bring about a better world, and I'm betting I could get a lot of people to join me.

Maybe – if we are being cynical – we might conclude that they like the praise and recognition, or perhaps it is just the good feeling of doing a job well, but whatever the reason it is something other than money that motivates them. If this is true for a poorly paid street sweeper dealing with common refuse could it not be true for some future plumbers in a world without money?

Reputational Incentives

People work now. They work to pay bills. Would they be less inclined to work when they are working to help their community? Does working always require the stick or is the carrot

⁹ 'If it falls to your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures.' (Martin Luther King Jr.)

ever good enough? If laziness really proved to be a major problem, does need some consequences what form might that take?

Some things we do because we know we are doing them for others, for people we want to please or impress. or just simple help out of kindness or camaraderie. We are social animals (when costs aren't a barrier to this) and plumbing is a more social job than many. When we help out in a community we show we are a part of that community, and we become someone important in that community.

This is different than when work is just done for money and people, when you work for just employers or customers. We wipe our children's bottoms now because we care for them, living in a community will extend the range of our caring and of who we consider our family and friends. We will see the inter-reliance we have on each other more clearly, and will have our efforts bring a more direct benefit to those we know personally, and they express their appreciation more directly too.

The desire to be part of something and to maintain respect and a good reputation becomes a sort of currency of its own. We will have the respect of friends, family and colleagues, as well as the reciprocal kindness you receive from others we help.

Likewise, ignoring others' needs, especially those who are part of your community, would not only potentially leave you very unfulfilled, but also possibly lonely, as few may want to associate with someone not doing their part.

A world without money would still require organisations and expectations. Every society will come with some potential for social pressure even if it is just in the form of reputation and respect, and the possibility of social praise and acceptance.

Because of plumbing work being more challenging plumbers work may be more venerated and valued, and could come with higher social capital. Perhaps today's plumbers are the superstars of tomorrow's communal world, where their efforts are lauded more greatly than that of celebrities.¹⁰

Maybe sanitation workers won't end up being heroes, but without money the dependency and inter-relationship between us and others will be more apparent without hierarchy and money getting in the way, as will the need to fulfil such roles, and the

¹⁰ 'If we lived in a state where virtue was profitable, common sense would make us saintly.'
(Robert Bolt, *A Man For All Seasons*)

value we place on those who can and will do the jobs some other people can't or wouldn't want to.

Special Benefits

If all else fails in encouraging people to become plumbers then perhaps there is a case for greater non-monetary material benefits as incentives for doing the dirtiest jobs, especially in the early days of moving to a non-monetary system.¹¹

You could give greater benefits to those who make greater sacrifices. This could come in the form of more time off, a better positioned place to live, or the first choice of rare luxuries. Maybe for a week every month they get access to sail around on a yacht, go skydiving, or receive some other gift that the community can supply. If the price of having a plumber is that they are first in line for a waterfront apartment, or for a gourmet meal, or a cool truck to drive as part of their work, then a community may be willing to make such things a priority, to show their appreciation, or to give as an extra incentive.

Under the Mutualist / Collectivist / Parecon forms of Anarchism labour vouchers will be issued by syndicates for work, and more or special labour vouchers may be issued to incentivise people to do more dirty / dangerous jobs, such as plumbing. These could be exchanged for certain luxuries.

Within a Market Anarchist system there would be money but it would be created through labour and not capital, and there might also be means to limit its accumulation. The idea is that money is still used to track what is needed, as well as being a means of fulfilling individual wants, and as an incentive for doing essential but difficult work.

These kind of perks are not dissimilar from the kind that someone might buy under capitalism if it still existed. But it is far preferable to the large human costs of current capitalist system. So why wouldn't such special benefits be incentive enough for some people to do the dirty work?

These kind of perks are not dissimilar from the kind that someone might buy with money if it still existed. But if that was the

¹¹ The dangers of having a specific reward / bonus / benefit for a specific task is that it potentially creates a new class. This could be mitigated somewhat if the reward is experiential and can't be traded, or is limited just to them and had time limits. But still could lead to all plumbers retiring in seaside facing apartments, which may not be a bad thing.

only way, then it is far preferable to the large human costs of current capitalist system. So wouldn't such special benefits be incentive enough for some people to do the dirty work?

6. Different factors and incentives would exist under a non-capitalist society.



In a post-capitalist world money would be only one of the elements that would change. A world which was exactly the same, but suddenly without any currency, would have to go through a difficult adjustment period, especially if this happened suddenly, without any other systems being put into place. This is not what anyone wants.¹²

So there is a lot that would have to change culturally. Luckily we have good examples that this is possible, but getting to there from here would come with growing pains. Likewise, it will take time to unlearn the insecurities, fears, and selfishness capitalism has encouraged in us, but humanity has existed without them for most of its history.

Of course in times of upheaval it takes a while to get things back to a reasonable level, and if the change is rapid it may take time to adapt to the new norm. It will involve education, and is

¹² Admittedly a few people may want this: Anarcho-primitivists and extreme right-wing Libertarians perhaps.

sure to take some adjustments, but it isn't an untried or new experiment.

Schools in an anarchist world would train people in practical skills as well as intellectual knowledge. At some stage children will get to be exposed to different types of work – creative and manual, and may discover a talent or be drawn to a certain kind of occupation. As they reach adulthood they will have opportunities to take part in apprenticeships or do academic work etc. They will be aware of what type of work is needed for the survival of the community, some of which can be done by everyone part time, but others will need more in depth training. There may be many reasons they may select plumbing (given the possible incentives already mentioned), and the community will decide together how many plumbers are needed. Maybe there'll be so many applicants that they ask some to work in another area for a while, perhaps there'll be fewer than expected an extra incentives might be offered.

Monetary incentives are a relatively modern invention that have only existed for the working class for perhaps 2-300 years (before that time a poor worker rarely ever saw money personally).

We are brought up now to value money, to be engaged in competition for it, and fear of not having enough of it. Imagine if we didn't have these insecurities, and were brought up to value cooperation just as much. But that is not the world we now live in.

Capitalism works in a way that benefits a certain small and exclusive group: the the owners (or takers) at the cost of a the majority: the workers (or makers). It incentivises some essential tasks like plumbing, albeit far more poorly than non-essential ones such as stock brokers. Capitalism also incentives destructive tasks, it creates problems and then tries to monetise them, to get people to pay with their taxes and services for the crap (such as pollution) which the businesses created.

So much of our money goes towards going up the corporation's waste in one way or another, something they rarely pay to have cleaned up, leaving us to pay for that at our expense (and often at the expense of our health). In economics this is called externalities, and it hides the true cost of capitalism upon us and the world.

This raises the question of, 'Could it be capitalism be what is keeping plumbing as dirty as it is now?' What would plumbing

look like if money wasn't an issue? Under capitalism there is little incentive to build more reliable sewage systems if it costs more in the short term and those costs can't be profited from (and may eat into the profits of the manufacturers, builders etc.). Likewise, there is little incentive to replace some plumbing work with automation until it is cheaper and more profitable than getting a human to do it.¹³

Where profit is not the motive, and resources are not restricted to maintain artificial scarcity to drive up prices, then human need and safety can be prioritised. Because it doesn't need to satisfy any shareholders, only those who use the goods and services, which are distributed according to need instead of return on investment.

There'll be more reasons to divide the dirty work, to have two or four workers dividing the time dealing with the crap, where there is one dealing with all now. Someone who may hate the idea of 6 hours down the sewers every day might be okay with a couple hours a week helping out, knowing that lots of other people are doing it, and that it is essential for the running of their community.¹⁴

There will also be far less crap produced. Corporations will not be overproducing it, and over time the ways it is dealt with will be standardised according to what is healthy and safe, instead of using cheap materials in the hope of making more money. Ask any plumber now and they'll tell you about the corners cut, the shoddy materials used, and the bad planning and fitting that they encounter and have to deal with, that makes their jobs harder and more messy. The financial incentive to keep it so dysfunctional won't exist any longer without the accompanying profit motive.

In Conclusion

The question of how will we will do X without capitalism is looking at the problem upside down, as if it could only be solved by people at the top solving it. Which begs the question of, in whose interest

13 At which point plumbers would become unemployed and could no longer be used as an argument in favour of capitalism.

14 Under a non-capitalist, decentralised, worker managed, decommodified, non-hierarchical society the responsibility of people for their shit is more direct. The process isn't as separated from the producer and those who have to deal with it. Whereas now we are alienated from the whole creation and processing process, whether it is of food, furniture, or faeces.

Plumbing already happens in our dysfunctional society where it is arguably less valued and made more difficult by the system it happens in. That system creates the situation of having to pay a bit more to incentivise people to do such an unpleasant job, rather than either spreading the work amongst more people, or addressing the problem of why it has to be done in such a difficult and dirty way. The problem of plumbing exists (or as at least much worse) because of capitalism, and the incentives to change it to be better are much lower because of capitalism.

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The Plumbing Revolution

The grey-haired lecturer stood at the front of the hall, paused for a moment, knowing he was nearing the culmination of his lesson, and looked to see if he had the students attention before continuing:

Although, looking back now it seems that it was inevitable, no-one at the time imagined that it would be the plumbers who'd start the revolution. Many people thought the plumbers had it good when it came to pay and the comforts that can come with the extra money. That had been true for a while, but it was a situation that couldn't last forever, as other manual jobs became less profitable due to automation, there was within a few years a glut of people training and working in the profession. This drove down both wages and quality, and some older plumbers who remembered when things were better, along with some of their younger apprentices facing a less prosperous future, saw that the situation wasn't financially stable decided something had to be done.

Around this trying time a lecturer in sanitation sciences shared a series of PeerTube videos on the history of plumbing in ancient times, including detailing the Roman plumbers guilds and how they maintained high pay and high standards. Plumbers had already increasingly worked as part of plumbing co-operatives to deal with rising costs, so local guilds became the logical next step.

Unlike, unions which couldn't offer pensions, healthcare, or enforce certain standards, a guild was just a collection of individuals voluntarily co-operating and leveraging their collective efforts and resources. The guilds offered training, their own qualifications and standards, their own pension and injury insurance plans, which granted you special rates at guild-aligned plumbing supply co-ops. They also insisted on higher pay, especially from corporate contracts.

Some city council departments began insisting they would only employ guild-certified plumbers, likewise many construction-related workers began insisting that they would only work with plumber's guild members in solidarity with them. (There were still unions, which acted as the respectable public face of such manual workers, but the guilds were not bound by their legal constraints.)

In right-wing news outlets critics quickly arose, condemning the tactics of the plumber's guilds, saying it was an affront to the idea of a free market, that it was tantamount to having cartels and price fixing. This has always been part of government contracts with private contractors, but which corporations had never opposed (unless they were outside of the cartels) until then, and so the politicians they made donations to hadn't previously done much to stop it.

There was no way that the capitalists would let that last. Capitalism had relied on people doing dirty jobs being able to charge just enough of a premium to incentivise them doing the job, but not so much as to irk the rich. Now the corporate owners were put out, and they weren't going to let the idea of workers taking back their power go unchallenged and spread to others.

New laws were drawn up, with stiff financial penalties to stop this 'guild conspiracy'. The laws were fought against on the basis of free association, free assembly, and free speech, but ultimately still passed with the help of even seemingly sympathetic politicians who didn't want to fall afoul of the media or their benefactors.

Plumbers in unions polled their members and went on mass strikes, which left many sewers backed up, burst pipes undealt with, and the taps to government departments mysteriously stopped working.¹⁵ Plumbers still carried out works at hospitals and other essential places, but steadfastly refused to work for business and government.

The government ruled the strikes illegal, but then unofficial guild actions began taking place, with the majority calling in sick, even if it was primarily the government and their corporate masters they were sick of. Although other manual workers striking in solidarity was strictly illegal, many of those in the building trade refused to work where they couldn't guarantee their health and safety due to lack of plumbing support. Many offices found themselves empty of workers too when they couldn't fix a problem with the water, such as guaranteed access to flushing toilets and running taps. There were accusations of sabotage, but nothing ever conclusively proved.

¹⁵ I don't know if the crap ever hit the fan, but it definitely threatened to flood the streets around parliament.

A lot of other plumbing work still went on officially during this time, but it was primarily of plumbers helping out friends and neighbours, and the guild alerting its members to where the elderly and poor needed help, and other workers needed their services, sometimes in return for untraceable cash or goods or services in kind.

The government reached the point where it was considering pairing policeman and soldiers with plumbers, and creating a mandated and enforced plumbing allocation system, which would focus on government buildings first, followed by corporate offices, then high paying clients, and finally others as resources allowed (which would probably mean hardly ever). The threat of this intimidated some, but the majority of plumbers remained steadfast.

An old Italian plumber, known by his friends and colleagues as Papa Maria, who had immigrated many decades earlier, could see that this was not only a threat to plumbers, but ultimately to anyone who hoped that their hard work should guarantee them a roof over their head, sufficient food and clothing, and time off to relax and recuperate from their dirty work. He didn't consider himself much of an orator, but voiced what many were feeling. His passionate call to all workers throughout the country to lay down their tools, even reached some who had not realised how much the ills of the system they lived under hurt poor workers, who then joined the movement too.

His voice was joined by a multitude of others. Of course many had always understood well the problems of their situation, but felt powerless and were unsure and about how to do anything to change it. The plumbers, however, had shown them the way. The systems of co-operation which had kept the plumbers going and helping their neighbours extended to other jobs and services. When people realised they didn't really need money to meet one need they quickly saw that other needs could be met without it too.

(I'm skipping several steps in between here and what happened next, but they are covered well elsewhere in my lessons on the periods of mutual aid, prefiguration, dual power, and insurgency. Suffice it to say that all of this ultimately came to a potential violent stand off.)

When tens of thousand soldiers and police are met by several million people on the street, with tens of million supporting

them, then it didn't take the soldiers long to foresee the potential human cost and futility of threatening to attack their relatives and neighbours, and that they would be better off joining with them. The politicians fled, only to find that similar movements were happening all over the world. But the people didn't care about the politicians and corporations any longer, they had the skills and means to keep the world working – including and especially the plumbing – without them, they always did.

The aged teacher came out from behind the lectern, still holding the microphone so everyone could hear him, and stood in front of his students. Although they had heard this story before they were attentive, and interested to hear his personal thoughts next:

Now kids, thats the story as I remember it. That's why we have this one day a year, Plumber's Day, when we remember their sacrifice. They not only risked their comforts, but their lives, in standing up to those who'd taken for granted their work, and that of other workers on who the world relied on to keep civilisation going. It's hard to believe now that there was a time when people were compelled by poverty to work, and that some workers died just to obtain an eight hour day and five day work week, and now we consider working that long too much.

But we won the revolution, and we keep winning it by holding true to the ideals those brave plumbers and other workers fought and some died for. (I was just a simple university lecturer in sanitation studies at the time, but I like to think I played my part back then, and that all of you today still do too.) Now we live in the world they envisaged, without rulers, money, and landlords. Without having to pay for food, housing, education, or healthcare.

Yet we are a world that still needs plumbers. As you know we lost Papa Mario a few days ago. Sorry, I should have phrased that better; Not lost as in died, but as in he has retired, and has settled down near the seaside. We are sad to see him move away, but he kept on doing the work he loved for as long as he could, because he enjoyed it so much and took pride in his work. Luckily for us, he didn't keep those skills to himself, he trained up many apprentices, quite a few who live and work in nearby communities. They will help us out whenever they can, but now it is time for us to train some more plumbers to work here in our town.

Most of you are finishing your schooling this year, some are going to university to train in highly specialised areas, or to do important medical and scientific research. Others already feel a calling to developing and offering your talents in creative or practical pursuits. But I wondered if any of you have considered continuing Papa Mario's legacy in plumbing, here in this community?

Before you answer I want to remind you that sanitary work isn't as dirty as it once was, at least not for as large a proportion of the work, with all the new technology and automation involved, and because people don't create as much chemical or other waste, as part of our recycling and composting processes. But I won't pretend that it still can't sometimes be a dirty job at times. With all that in mind, do I have anyone here interested?

He looked out across the lecture hall with a smile on his face, when he saw the number of students who seemed to have been inspired by the example of the plumbers of the past.

That's a good number of hands, but have any of you been thinking of this as your main vocation for a while? A couple of you. That's great. There are opportunities for lots of you to help with it, but I want to speak specifically to those two who seemed keenest. I don't know if all of you could see whose hands shot up quickest, but I suppose it should come as no surprise that it was young Mario and his brother Luigi. Chips off the old block as they say. Could you both explain why you are so enthusiastic?

I don't know if everyone at the back heard that. I'll try to summarise as best I can. Mario got to see firsthand the value Papa's work brought to the community, how valued he was, not just for his role in the revolution, but for helping the people in his neighbourhood. He had wanted to try his hand at learning and doing lots of different things, but after years of doing that realises that it really is what he always wanted to do, and has some new ideas of better ways to do it. He looks forward to helping you all out with his plumbing skills, and will be happy for any help you can offer him on any especially tricky jobs, or just for the companionship.

His brother Luigi's motivations are maybe a little more unusual than we often see these days. He wants to feel and be important, essential to the community, and to enjoy the chats and cups of tea that seem to come before and after the plumbing work.

I don't know if there is such a thing as altruistic vanity, but he also thinks he looks cool wearing overalls, with a wrench in his hand, and envisages driving the Super Mario Bros¹⁶ plumbing van, which he considers a classic of it's kind.

Class, there is a lot to learn from all of this. When most people – except the rich – only worked for money, the idea of doing work for the love or even the need of it, (without the fear of starvation or the promise of luxuries) would have seemed ridiculous to many. Even though those same things were done without money or compulsion in ancient civilisations, as we covered in a previous lesson. But why do people do such jobs today, without the promise of money in return? Mario, could you could share with us your personal answer to that question?

For those who didn't hear, he said that, if no-one did the plumbing then eventually the pipes would back up and burst, the whole village would smell badly, and there would be a much bigger mess to deal with. Do any of you want to risk that? No I didn't think so. That's why Mario said, (if I can quote him correctly), 'I'll have wished someone did something before then. I'll wish I'd done it. I work best with my hands, I'm not so completely selfish so that I can't see that it is in my interests (as well as everyone else's), and I know it is an important job that is respected, and I'll have the satisfaction of doing it well. So, why wouldn't I do? A little smelliness occasionally? I have that living with my brother Luigi already.'

The teacher rolled his eyes recounting Mario's last remark, but Luigi took his joke in good humour, knowing it was good natured, and retorted with his own remark about Mario's bad habits. With that the lesson ended. The plumbing continued to be done. The community continued to work together to see everyone's needs were met, and the idea that plumbers (who had been so important to the revolution) were once not as highly respected as they were today, became a part of history, which people were reminded of on every Plumbers Day, and were forever grateful for.

¹⁶ Because intellectual property no longer exists Nintendo can't sue them for calling it that.

Work Under Capitalism & Anarchism

To an Anarchist all work under capitalism comes at an unacceptably high moral and human cost, because it involves coercion and exploitation, and is too great an imposition on people's freedom.

For all the words I spent trying to show that plumbing didn't need capitalism, an Anarchist doesn't need to prove that it can do everything first before opposing capitalism. Capitalism didn't have that burden before it started, and if it couldn't have provided plumbers capitalists would have still carried on regardless.

Capitalism didn't begin with philosophers sitting around debating and proposing it as the best solution. It began as feudalism was being undermined by merchants, and government began to become independent from monarchy, then people amassed sufficient capital to become wealthy from ownership, with the state protecting their physical and monetary property.

Capitalists didn't say, 'we have worked out a great system, that will cover everything including plumbing.' Instead they said, 'We want to own things and make money from that. Everything else will just have to fall in line, or if capitalism can't make money from it people will just have to go without it.'

Yet some capitalists argue we have to prove how everything would work before ever being the chance to try it. They are expecting more of anarchism, than was ever expected of capitalists.

It is Capitalismists and hierarchists (supporters of capitalism and states) who need to prove that some have a right to rule politically or economically over others first. Devoid of that it doesn't matter if their system produces better plumbers.

Anarchy is a political philosophy, and capitalism is an economic philosophy. However, they both relate to power and who should have it. Anarchists say that power shouldn't be taken from the individual. Capitalismists say those with capital have deserve their power because they have earned it or inherited it legitimately. In this way it is quite similar to feudalism, with lords deserving their power because they are the sons of lords, or because they have been appointed lords by the king, and because the king is (self) appointed by god who can argue with that?

Anarchists believe that the cost of the hierarchy of state and capital power is too high, in terms of freedom and the violence that comes with enforcing such a system. Ultimately all of these debates come back to the question of justifying hierarchy. Is it ever morally right and absolutely necessary? If ruling over others is wrong then we have a reason to try to find other ways of organising society and maximising their freedom. It would be better to use a bucket for a toilet, than to sacrifice others freedom for the sake of our comforts.

But the capitalist focuses on the idea the capitalism works. But does it? And who for? Or does it get done in spite of capitalism rather than because of it? I believe that the human cost of this system makes life more difficult and less free for everyone, including the plumbers.

If capitalism is considered to be working then it is a very dysfunctional way of working. Lots of work gets done under dictatorships too, if you define that as working, but who wants to do any job under a dictatorship?

Capitalism works best for a few: those with the capital, which are a small group who profit from work they do not do, things they do not make, greater land and buildings than they could ever use personally, and a system that enforces this to keep people poor working for them.

But isn't it an efficient system? Don't we have more stuff?

Millions of plastic things we don't need are made every day, that are choking the planet, getting into our guts and blood stream, forcing species to go extinct, and perhaps even humanity at this rate. That's capitalist efficiency.

Capitalist efficiency does seem to mean more choices if you can afford them, but choice for the sake of competition can lead to lower quality (at least for those of us who can't afford to pay for higher quality), it can lead to a great amount of waste (especially in essentials like food, but also in the fuels used to produce, deliver and dispose of the waste), to the incentive to create markets through harming others (such as sugar being added to food to make it more addictive to create more sales, with all the health consequences associated with this), and to the poorest being paid less (and being actually slaves in mines even now) so companies can be more competitive.

Not being motivated by money, scarcity or coercion (so others can make money from you) will end a substantial part of the

waste produced. Ridding the earth of capitalism will remove so much wasted work and useless things.

Capitalism came about because a few decided that they had to have the money, land, and control. Then people worked around this to keep needs met, then capitalists monetised those needs where possible, taking charge of their materials, or production, or distribution, or repackaging the means of their consumption. All of this comes at a high cost to the world and it's workers.

Under capitalism the real cost of things is masked, this is called externalities. It means that for example a gallon of gas may cost \$3.50, which may seem quite cheap, but the oil companies are subsidised to the tune of \$7 trillion per year (internationally), which of course ultimately comes from the taxes of working people. This doesn't count the cost of health problems, the cost of infrastructure to support vehicles and industries that use petrol etc. This is just one example, farming subsidies is another, as is the inflation of currency value etc. Not all of these artificial costs have gone down either – housing, healthcare and education have all gone up substantially since the 1970s, while wages have gone down, and now few young workers can afford a home or retirement.

Without capitalism, replaced by co-operation, the bad things done because of money will go away, and the good things done within capitalism mostly happened in spite of capitalism and will carry on without it. Then a better world will be made for the many, not just a few.



Quick Answers

Why would anyone do the plumbing without Capitalism?

- Parents wipe their children's backsides now – do they get paid for it?
- Sometimes those children grow up to wipe their parents' backsides when they get older – do they get paid for it?
- People who wipe the backsides of children, the mentally infirm and elderly as a job are often paid minimum wage – why don't they do another minimum wage job?
- Isn't it possible that they find that work more emotionally rewarding? Or more rewarding in terms of appreciation?
- If – as you claim – people only do dirty jobs for more money what is their incentive for doing that without any money / for low pay? Isn't there as much of an incentive without capitalism?

No-one would ever do the plumbing without Capitalism!

- In ancient times before money existed people still did plumbing, in fact they had very advanced plumbing systems it would take us thousands of years to rediscover and relearn.
- If they did that with no money why couldn't / wouldn't they do it in a world without money?
- In countries where you can do other jobs with a similar amount of training or avoid work completely people still choose to do it.
- People do wonderful and terrible things when they believe it is in their interests to do so: They put themselves in danger to save others on the one hand, on the other they fight in wars and kill others when they believe it is right to do so, they travel the world looking for an obscure near-extinct plant, or spend a lifetime celibate and alone as a hermit.
- Wouldn't / couldn't people be brought up to believe plumbing is a noble vocation? Is that harder to believe than these examples?

People only do dirty jobs for money!

- Why couldn't other non-monetary incentives work too?
- It seems from history and even modern examples that this does work – what evidence do you have that this is wrong and it doesn't and cannot work?
- Do you truly believe people would stay around doing nothing (that wasn't in their immediate interest for themselves) until they were paid to do it?



are you an
anarchist?

The answer may
surprise you!

"By anarchist spirit I mean that deeply
human sentiment, which aims at the good of
all, freedom and justice for all, solidarity and
love among the people; which is not an
exclusive characteristic only of self-declared
anarchists, but inspires all people who have
a generous heart and an open mind."

- Errico Malatesta



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