

Joe Barbieri

Hunsinger

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Modern Day Feudalism: A Short Essay on Corporate Feudalism

When presented with the term “feudalism” most people will think of knights, kings, and castles. The age of feudalism was dominated by fiefdoms and kingdoms. Kings often had less power than the lords that served beneath them, and the poorest of the population were faced with low life expectancy and years of backbreaking work for little to no gain. Countries were amalgamations of these fiefdoms and kingdoms, and there were no federal government systems. Justice was often handled locally per fiefdom. It was an age of fear for many—even the social elites had to be wary of their kingdoms being stolen. Of course, this is all in the past. The age of feudalism is long gone. Now there are countries and presidents. They lead with state funded militaries and negotiate around the world with other countries, most of which have had their populations vote them in. While there may not be knights and castles anymore, the age of feudalism hasn’t ended. It may look and sound different now than it did thousands of years ago, but the trend is still very much alive. Instead of a political and military system, feudalism has become a corporate system. Run by corporations for corporations.

In classical feudalism, a lord might gift a vassal with a fief. This often came with some ceremony, but that vassal was expected to pay back something to the suzerain that gifted the fief to them. This could be paid in service, loyalty, money, or military support. Take this example and apply it to a powerful corporation. Disney is interested in the work of a smaller arts and productions studio. They gift this studio with extended funding and support but in return, the

artists there can't sell personal artwork without Disney getting a small royalty. In this example, the common workers in the small company (now a "vassal" to Disney) are the serfs. Their own lives and payments probably won't go up in any way, but the bosses at their studio who signed with Disney now become richer and benefit more off the serf labor.

Amazon does this all the time. Amazon will purchase companies over the weekend and merge them into their corporate conglomerate. Amazon is one of the wealthiest and wide-reaching lords of the modern feudal age. They give companies deals they can't turn down and make more vassals every day. These vassals must return the monetary gift with a lifetime allegiance to Amazon. The workers behind the scenes are often not thought about at all and continue working in stressful and often dangerous situations.

Corporations can also influence political action in the modern era. Lobbying in America has given corporations with extreme wealth the power to change political actions. Politicians can be bribed with a fief of money in return for favors when the politician gets elected. Fiefs were originally gifts of land from one nobleman to another. In a modern super interconnected world, classic feudal deals with land are difficult to do. Replace the land with large sums of money though, and the age of feudalism is only getting started in the modern era. The intentions and actions are still the same but the players and the props are different. A wealthy nobleman in 11th century France might've given land to friend as a fief but today that nobleman is a corporate leader and the fief is a smaller competitor's studio, or the rights to a film. The noblemen are politicians and businessmen and the fiefs are million-dollar checks or blockbuster entertainment deals. The idea has become a common part of global economic life. So much so that the people, the petty workers, the serfs don't even notice it.

While the faces have changed and the deals have expanded past land, the ideas of feudalism are alive and well in the global economic stages. Like before, it's the rich noblemen that are primarily benefiting from it. They control their little fiefs and micro-kingdoms away from the view of the public while the common people suffer. The only actors who have stayed the same over all these years are the serfs—the working poor. They're still stuck in an endless loop of abuse from their higher ups and most have acquiesced that this is simply how life is. Political feudalism failed the people before. Will corporate feudalism do the same? It appears that only time can tell.