

## **A Day in the Life of a Suburban Socialist**

My alarm clock blares annoyingly. I lie in bed. It is Saturday morning. I have to go to work, but I don't want to get up. My bed is very comfortable. I put my alarm clock on snooze and try to go back to sleep. I fail. The stupid thing woke me up for good. It starts blaring again. I let out a disgruntled sigh. I'm tired of its piercing noise waking me up when I don't want to be woken up. I fumble for my alarm clock, grab it, and fling it across the room. Hard. It hits my bedroom wall and I hear glass shatter. Stupid technology.

Seeing further resistance as futile, I sit up in bed and lethargically start rubbing my eyes, letting my senses come to me. I yawn and stretch and yawn some more. I hate having to get ready for work. Who likes having to go to work? Nobody, that's who. Work is stupid, and having to get up for it is even stupider. I pull myself out of bed and trudge over to the remains of my alarm clock. It turns out my alarm clock was also my iPhone, and now I've lost my lifeline to the world. Whose idea was that? Stupid technology.

I brush my teeth, shower, and all that crap. Get dressed for the day. Then I make some breakfast: a Pop-Tart®, limited edition red velvet flavor. I devour it and get in my car to leave. It's winter time and I should have started my car earlier to let it warm up. But I didn't. I never seem to have enough time.

I notice my car's gas light is on. Stupid technology. I hate having to get gas. I'm going to be late as it is, and now I have to stop and get gas! Whose idea was it to make cars run on gas anyway? Greedy capitalists', probably. They just wanted some excuse to steal my paycheck every week, the scoundrels. It's all a lie. Cars probably don't even run on gas. It's just there for show.

I pull out of my driveway and head for a gas station I've never been to before. It's a Sheetz. I pull up to a pump and get out of my car. I look around. There are cars at almost every pump. Some people sit in their cars, others stand outside bundled up in scarves, hats, gloves, fancy jackets, and earmuffs. I don't own any of that stuff. I can't afford it.

I turn to my pump and push the "pay cash inside" button. I set everything up and the machine starts pumping. I look around again. There is a constant flow of cars in and out of the station. This place really does the business. The greedy capitalists who own the joint must be pretty pleased.

The pump jolts, signaling my car is full. I put the pump back into its little nook and head inside the little store. The cashier is a gruff looking man with a long beard and a scowl. Oh, boy. I walk up to the counter.

"What can I do for you?" he bluntly asks.

"I... I just wanted to thank you for the gas. Have a nice day," I say and turn to walk back outside, back to the safety of my car.

"What...?" the cashier questions. "Where are you going? You still have to pay!"

"I'm sorry," I say, walking back to the counter. "I must have misheard you. Did you say I had to pay?"

"Well, yeah, gas ain't free," the cashier says. "That'll be..."

"You mean you don't share gas here?" I interrupt, acting innocent.

"What the hell are you talking about, man? Of course we don't share gas here! Gas ain't free, I told you!"

"Seriously?" I ask incredulously.

"Uh, yeah. I don't know where you come from. Sharing gas..." the cashier shakes his head. "Now, that'll be..."

"I thought, you know, since America was the land of equality that, you know, gas was shared here," I interrupt again, innocent and sweet-toned.

"Uhrm, no, that's not how it works. I'm sorry to have to break it to you, but this ain't no communist country. Your gas'll cost \$46.83." I let out a disappointed sigh and dramatically take out my wallet. I hand over some cash, the saddest of all expressions on my face. The cashier takes the cash, eyebrow raised, and counts it out. "You're about 5 dollars short."

"I know how you feel," I say. "I had expectations once too."

"Look, man, please just pay for your gas. Stop playing this stupid game."

"Stupid game?" I ask. "This is supposed to be the greatest of all countries, isn't it? America, the land of opportunity! But apparently a man can't just walk in and get some gas whenever he chooses. He has to pay, for cryin' out loud! What kind of country is great and makes its citizens pay for their gas? How can a country built on liberty and equality justify this sort of behavior? This is an outrage, it is! A crime against humanity! Land of opportunity, my ass!!!"

"Sir, I don't know what you're talking about, just..."

"You bet you don't. You just go with whatever the greedy capitalists tell you. You're like a sheep, a pawn in their game of chess! How's it feel, I ask you, how *does* it feel?!?!"

"That's it. I'm calling the cops," the cashier declares.

"Yeah, you do that," I say. "You call the cops. Know what cops are? Nothing but corporate backers, that's what! They're the reason I have to comply with corporations and people like you. Without them, corporations couldn't rob me of my hard-earned money. That's all cops do, I tell you! They protect the corporations, the price gougers, the robbers! In fact, they're robbers themselves, when you think about. Nothing but a bunch of thieving bullies! They're the ones we should be afraid of!!!" The cashier walks to the store phone, shaking his head again. I throw 5 more dollars on the counter and run out the door in a hurry. I sprint across the parking lot, get in my car, and drive away.

I'm going to be really late to work, but I don't care. I'm late just about every other day. I don't really agree with having set times that you have to show up to work by. That just seems wrong to me. Immoral, even. So I don't really comply with set working hours. I show up when I feel like. That's how it should be, the way I see it.

I park my car and head inside to my office. My office consists of some floor tiles behind a counter at a local Noodles & Company restaurant, as I, like the gruff dude at the Sheetz, am a cashier. Not long after I arrive my boss comes over. She's quite a woman, my boss. She was married to a rich businessman, but they divorced, and she took a good portion of his portfolio with her. Then she decided to try *her* hand at business and franchised this Noodles joint. She's doing quite well for herself now. She's always telling us how she views her failed marriage as an investment, one that's had a very lucrative rate of return.

"Where were you?!?!" she angrily demands of me.

"What do you mean?" I innocently ask.

"Where have you been? You're a half hour late! For the fourth time this week!"

"Well, I mean, it's not like you ever asked me when I actually wanted to work. You just assigned me hours and assumed I would show up for them, without ever asking my opinion or checking with me or anything."

"That's how a job works!" she exclaims, frustrated.

"Well, maybe if you let me pick my own hours, I'd be more inclined to be on time for them."

"That's not how a job works!"

"Well, it should be. I think that would be a lot more fair."

"Business isn't fair! Life's not fair!"

"Yeah, well, the only reason it's not is because of people like you. If there were more people like me in the system, it'd be a whole lot fairer."

"That's it, you're fired!"

"You can't fire me, you capitalist pig, I quit!" I spit in her greedy capitalist face. I take off my Noodles hat, throw it on the ground, and stomp on it.

"Ughhh!!! Get out!" She kicks me out of the restaurant. And this isn't a metaphorical affair. She quite literally kicks me out. Kicks *me*, with her foot! And it hurts, too. She's wearing heels. Lord knows why you'd wear heels to a Noodles. That's just the kind of person she is.

Now that I have some free time, I head over to a Verizon store. I'm operating without a phone, remember? That's like operating on fumes: it doesn't work for too long, as exhilarating as it may seem. I walk into the store and am greeted by bright lights, flashy devices, and an army of Verizon employees wearing red shirts and black pants, all waiting to converge on their next victim. Greedy capitalists and expensive technology. They go together like hamburgers and potato chips.

"Hey, man, welcome to the store!" a young African American salesman exclaims as he approaches me. "How can I help you?"

"I need a new phone. My old one broke this morning."

"What happened to it, man?"

"Just died on me," I say.

"Weird. Aight, it'll be a little bit of a wait, because we're pretty busy, but we'll be with you in no time." I walk around the store. The place is packed. I observe suburbanites of all different shapes and sizes -- short suburbanites, tall suburbanites, small suburbanites, big suburbanites, lean suburbanites, fat suburbanites, good-looking suburbanites, ugly suburbanites, wealthy suburbanites, poor suburbanites, polite suburbanites, rude suburbanites, educated suburbanites, ignorant suburbanites, black suburbanites, white suburbanites, yellow suburbanites, red suburbanites -- all eagerly browsing the seemingly infinite supply of devices and accessories before them, all brought together by their common love of technology. Yes, those greedy capitalists are good at what they do.

I see a leather sofa against one of the store walls. A family is sitting on it, but I plop down on the corner anyway and make room for myself.

"Uhm, excuse me," the father of the family, who is sitting right next to me, says. "But I'd appreciate it if you didn't sit there."

"I'm sorry, sir, but this is the only seat in the house," I calmly respond.

"Yes, but we were here first, so if you could please wait until we're gone, that'd be great. That'd be the civilized thing to do."

"It'd be the civilized thing, would it? Do you realize that I have just as much a right to this sofa as you do? It belongs to everyone here, all the customers. To think you and your family have sole rights to it is blasphemous!"

"Please..."

"You say the civilized thing to do would be to put this sofa into the hands of just one family, eh? Hah! Fat chance! The civilized thing to do would be to give everyone a fair share of this sofa, not hog it all for yourselves! Civilization exists to give everyone liberty and equality, not to bestow a privileged minority with a sofa and slight a luckless majority by leaving them to stand idly by, no sofa to sit upon!"

"Come on, man..."

"So, no, I will not relinquish my seat! Not for you, your wife, or your family! Not for anyone! I stand for liberty and equality! And I should be one saying, 'Come on, man!' What kind of parent are you, teaching your kids to hog a sofa all to themselves and not share with the rest of us fellow human beings! Haven't you ever heard that sharing is caring? Your kids are going to grow up and be greedy capitalists. What kind of parent raises their kids that way?" At this the father stands up, his face red, practically shaking with rage. But just then a saleswoman comes over and ushers the family away, off to go finalize their purchase. I sprawl out on the sofa. Eventually, I drift off to sleep.

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I awake to a deep, soothing voice talking to me. It's that African American salesman. "Hey man, we're ready for you," he says. I sit up and look around. I must have slept for about two hours. It's around midday, and the store is still packed. "Follow me," the salesman says. He leads me over to a counter and goes around to the other side. He opens a drawer and takes out a pristine white box.

"This is what you need," he says. "An iPhone 7x."

"Why do I need that?" I ask.

"You said you needed a new phone, right?"

"Yes, I did say that. And I do."

"Well, if you need a new phone, and if you want to stay on top of the tech game, this is the big ticket."

"Why would I want to stay on top of the tech game?" I ask.

"That's the cool thing to do, my man!" the salesman enthusiastically replies.

"Cool for you, maybe, but not for me. Technology is pretty awful, when you think about it. Technology takes jobs away from hard-working people and leaves them out on the streets to starve. If the government would just ban using technology in the workplace, literally, so many jobs would be created! But nope, the greedy capitalists want technology because it's cheaper than humans, and they're the ones who run the government, so of course they're not going to ban technology. That would cut into their profits!"

"Ugh..." the salesman starts, dumbfounded.

"So now we have hard-working people like me, out of job and nowhere to turn, all because the greedy capitalists don't care about ending unemployment! It just *burns* me up. All right, now what were you saying? Something about a fancy phone?"

"Uh... Well, yeah," the salesman says, snapping out of his stupor. "It's the latest and greatest. Chrome steel exterior, soft-touch volume buttons, Super Gorilla Glass screen, diamond Apple logo, iOS 9.78, 4D touchscreen--it's got everything you ever wanted!"

"How much does it cost?" I ask.

"The phone costs \$1,000, but the 6G POWR data plan will cost fifty bucks a month. Not too bad considering it's the absolute pinnacle of the tech game right now."

"So what you're trying to say is the that phone isn't free?" I ask.

"Well... Yeah, of course it isn't free."

"Well, why not? Whose idea was that?"

"Uh... Verizon's, I guess."

"That's exactly right. The greedy capitalists. Don't they have any decency? Don't they know that everyone is entitled to things like iPhones, that things like iPhones are meant to be distributed equally? I mean, come on! What's the point of a democracy if it's not going to distribute the fruits of people's labor equally!"

"Uh... Well, I don't know what you're talking about, but the fact remains that the phone costs money, my man. I'm sorry, that's just the way it is. But trust me, it'll be worth it."

"So you really won't just give me an iPhone? You won't be a decent human being and freely give of what you have access to? You know sharing is caring, right?"

"Uh, yeah, but this is a store. So do you want the iPhone or not? I'm sorry, but you have to pay for it."

"Oh, the inhumanity! How did we ever come to this, a society where a man can't just walk into a store and come out with an iPhone, the entertainment he is entitled to free of charge!"

"Come on, man, it's aight. No need to get all sad. Just a thousand dollars for the phone and a couple a bucks a month. Whaddaya say?"

"Hold on. I need a moment to think about my budget," I say.

"Aight, no problem, man. Take all the time you need." The salesman walks away to deal with another client. I reflect on the state of my expenses for a moment. I wouldn't be able to afford my meals without food stamps. I have rent due in a week, and I can barely afford that as it is. I've had a one helluva toothache for the past month, but I can't afford to go to the dentist. I've been having violent episodes of heart palpitations for the past year, but I can never afford to go to the emergency room, so I've grown used to writhing around on my floor. I don't have car insurance. I don't have an emergency fund. I don't have any real assets whatsoever. And, as of this morning, I don't have a source of income or benefits of any kind. The salesman walks back over. I tell him I'll buy the phone.

"Sweet, man, you'll be at the top of the tech game right quick! All you gotta do now is buy a screen protector!" the salesman exclaims.

"A screen protector? What the hell do I need a screen protector for if the screen's made of Super Gorilla Glass?"

"Well, to protect it, of course. It's a dangerous world out there!"

"But... It's made of Gorilla Glass!"

"And you'll need a LifeProof case."

"LifeProof Case? The thing's made out of chrome steel. What do I need a case for?"

"And volume button protectors."

"What..."

"And some over-ear headphones. I prefer Beats."

"But..."

"And a safe to store all this in at night."

"But..." I wind up with my arms full of accessories. And they aren't *free* accessories, either. Apparently sharing isn't big in the telecommunications business.

"One more thing," the salesman says. "You'll need an insurance plan for all this so you're not screwed if anything breaks or dies on you, like your old phone did."

"I don't even have car insurance!" I exclaim.

"Trust me, this is important." I trust him, buy the insurance plan, and go to exit the store. "Have a nice day! Please come again!" the salesman calls after me. I leave with a device that looked sleek and sexy at one point in time but is now covered in layers of plastic. Yes, those greedy capitalists are good at what they do. Stupid technology.

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It is only 2 o'clock in the afternoon. I never realized how much time you have when you don't have a job. It really is quite liberating. But I figure I'll probably need some money soon, especially with that new iPhone weighing on my budget, so I head over to Noodles to beg for my job back. No luck. My old boss tells me she never wants to see me in her restaurant again. So I stand outside her restaurant. And boycott it.

I make picket signs, give speeches, take out an ad in the local paper, write letters to the editor, hire a non-profit consumer activist agency to help film a commercial. In the span of 3 hours, I have all of suburbia abuzz. Steve Kroft even flies in to interview me for an episode of *60 Minutes*. My old boss couldn't be more enraged.

"So tell me, what was it that seriously turned you against Noodles?" Steve asks me.

"Well, there were a lot of things, really. But, honestly, the main thing was the lack of power the employees had. I just thought that between the owner and the employees, there was a huge power gap. When I worked there, the owner made all the rules, told us when we were going to work, how we were going to work, what we could wear to work, how much we would be paid for our work. We really just had no say in how the business operated, and I think that's what really got me."

"So what did you do?"

"I quit."

"You quit?"

"I quit. And now I am boycotting the establishment to expose the dictatorial policies of its owner and operator. I can't sit idly by and watch my fellow laborers be mercilessly exploited by greedy, money-loving capitalists."

"So you think that your former boss, the woman who provided the capital to bring Noodles to market, shouldered the risk inherent in doing so, and put in the time and effort to make it a success, shouldn't have any more "say" in her company than her employees?"

"Well, of course she shouldn't! She should be on an equal level with her employees. Allowing her to continue in her elitist, capitalistic, exploitative ways runs roughshod over the ideals of liberty and equality our country was founded on."

"You know, Noodles is a very well-run company with a very high profit margin. Surely they must know something about doing business right?"

"Oh, no, see, there's where you're wrong, Steve. High profits are a sign of corruption, a sign of shortchanging your employees and gouging your customers. So, obviously, because of its high profits, Noodles isn't a well-run company at all. It's a corrupt company!"

"I see. Well, thank you for your time and your insightful views."

"Anytime, Steve, anytime." I don't want my consumer activism to stop here, though, so I start an *Occupy Suburbia* movement. I attract hundreds of followers and set up camp right in the heart of suburbia. People who share my views start flying in from all over the country to join the effort. I stand atop a makeshift stage to give my first speech as leader of the movement.

"Welcome, fellow occupiers! Welcome, fellow hard-working Americans. We all are concerned for the sad state of affairs that have befallen this great country. Greedy capitalists, corrupt corporations, technology promoters--all must be made to pay for their harmful ways! But together we will usher in a return to the ideals of liberty and equality that this great nation was founded on! Together we will bring a higher standard of living to the common man! We are the 99%!!!" Thousands of people cheer me on. I don't even know how they can hear or see me, as I'm not speaking into a microphone, and this stage is pretty short, but they cheer me nonetheless. How exhilarating!

I decide to form a new political party, the movement is going so well. It will be called the *Occupy America Party*. Our platform: a sharp increase in social programs at the expense of the wealthy, government-distributed luxury goods like iPhones at the expense of the wealthy, free gas at the expense of the wealthy, sweeping workplace reforms at the expense of the wealthy, bans on technological progress at the expense of the wealthy, price controls at the expense of the wealthy, a high minimum wage at the expense of the wealthy, and liberty and equality, at the expense of the wealthy. They're only the 1%. They can deal with it. Our party slogan: "Sharing is Caring".

Well, this has been great day. A true milestone in my life. I lost a dead end job only to discover a career with limitless possibilities. And while I wish this day would never end, it is now 10 o'clock at night, and I need some sleep if I wish to have another successful day of consumer and political activism tomorrow. So goodnight, dear reader, and always remember that no one, not even you, likes to get up and go to work in the morning. Not. Even. Gandhi.

**The End**