Before I get started on this Musing, I need to do an addendum to the previous one. It was pointed out to me that capitalism is actually good for society, because the more someone makes, the more they're taxed. And by extension, the more money goes towards building roads, hospitals, schools, etc.

That's a fair point. On paper, that is how it works. Putting aside the fact that taxes also fund cops and soldiers (whose job is sometimes to literally *kill people*), let's focus on the good things taxes are used for. Let's also briefly examine the idea that the more you make, the more you pay in taxes.

Last time I explained how in order to stay competitive in a capitalist system, business owners really have no choice but to pay their employees as little as possible. Doesn't that extend to how much they pay the government? I mean, money going out is still money going out, isn't it? Does it really matter who the money is being sent to? Business owners have to minimize *all* expenses, not just ones on their employees.

I also explained that the larger a company gets, the more power it has through its money. If it can strangle smaller companies with more inventive ideas, can't it also strangle attempts by the government to get it to pay taxes? I mean, our former President is considered a 'successful' businessman, and he openly bragged about how he avoided paying taxes. Granted he brags about a lot of stuff- like all the time- but a lot of people in his tax bracket have been known to come up with some truly Machiavellian ways of dodging taxes.

Just had to clarify that. Anyway, on to the new Musing.

In the same way I've been pondering why there's so much suffering in the world, I've also been looking for ways to end that suffering. And no, I don't mean euthanasia (though I do have strong feelings about that one). I mean changing the circumstances that cause that suffering.

In my opinion, capitalism causes suffering. It requires it, because it requires poverty for the masses in order to have riches for the few. So what system would be better? Socialism? Communism? Zoroastrianism?

That last one is a joke. It's a religion, not an economic system. Let's examine socialism for a bit, though. Even the word itself is loaded. It means different things to different people. When I say socialism, some people think, 'He said the s-word! He must be a damn Commie!' Ok, so that might be a slightly dated opinion, but then so are a lot of our lawmakers.

Let's start with the Oxford definition and work from there: a political and economic theory of social organization which advocates that the means of production, distribution, and exchange should be owned or regulated by the community as a whole.

Yes, very Marxist indeed.

So if I'm getting this right, they mean a system where any production facility- any factory for example- is owned by the community. The closest thing to that I've heard of is a worker co-op. It's pretty widespread, but the most sustained example I've read about is in Italy. Basically back in 1985, they made a law that said whenever an Italian business was about to go belly-up, the owner was required to offer the business for sale to the workers. If they could come up with the money, the owner had to sell it to them. If not, I suppose they could sell it elsewhere.

The law also gave the workers a better chance of getting the money. It offered them what's basically an advance on their unemployment money, if they used it to buy the business.

Ok, that sounds complicated. Let's think about it for a moment. In a standard factory, the owner of the building has final say in all decisions, just like they do in the company itself. They get paid more (sometimes a ridiculously great amount more) than the standard peons putting in all the work. In a worker co-op, *everyone* has a say in all decisions. From what I've read about Italy's worker co-op system, the highest paid person never gets more than 8 times what the lowest paid person does.

My info is about a year out of date, so it could have changed a little by now, but I doubt it. This system was put in place in 1985. That's over thirty-five years ago! Thirty-five years of worker co-ops existing side by side with 'standard' businesses. Sounds pretty stable to me.

Now let's think about the possible reduction of suffering. If suffering is primarily caused by poverty, and poverty is caused by people not getting paid enough to live on, then this sounds like pretty good change, doesn't it? If there's only an 8-1 ratio, well, how does that compare to our current system?

Turns out it's really really hard to get an accurate picture of the pay differences between CEOs and entry-level employees in our current system. Go figure, right? It's almost like the statistics are being impeded by very wealthy, very powerful people who have a vested interest in keeping the information opaque. But that sounds paranoid, and couldn't possibly be true. We can trust our CEOs, right? They'd never do anything to hurt us.

Oh, right. It's literally their job to squeeze us for all the money they can. Which... hurts us.

Suffice to say it's a lot more than an 8-1 ratio. Based on my reading, if every 'standard' company switched to a co-op model, the average worker's pay would go up by a factor of five or six. And my reading is preliminary. As I said last time, I'm no economist, and I have no financial training. I suspect the pay would go up even more than that.

That's at least five to six times what we all get paid right now! What would you do with that money? I know what I'd do. I'd get a frickin' boat. Don't worry, not a yacht or ostentatious phallic symbol to park in the harbor and swing at the neighbors. I'm thinking something with oars. Oh, and I'd also get better healthcare for myself, get a place to live that doesn't feel like a shoebox, and probably get a frickin' family. Because I can't afford one right now. Because I don't live in a socialist system or work at a worker co-op.

*grr*

Right, I skipped some of the other rewards to such a system. If you're like me, you have... some complaints about your work environment. Things you'd like to change if you could. Things you probably reported to your supervisor, or their supervisor, and then watched as nothing happened. Why did nothing happen?

The obvious answer is apathy. No one but you cares enough to fix the problem. Mix in some value economics, and that becomes more obvious. Sure you care, but you don't matter as much as the people running the company. Therefore it only gets fixed if either they start to care, or a *whole lot* of people like you start to care. And historically, the bosses only start to care if the press notices it. (See also Amazon workers being required to use bags and bottles instead of bathrooms)

Another answer is financial. It costs money to fix things. To replace a window, to repair plumbing in a bathroom... to fire offenders, replace them, and then send everyone to sexual harassment seminars (see also sex offenses being tied to power dynamics).

Now answer me this. If there's a problem at work, who is more likely to want to solve it: an individual or small group who aren't being affected by the problem... or everyone with an equal say?

If people of a certain race or religion or sexual orientation are being denied employment at your company, is it because one or two people are bigoted (those being the ones in charge)? Or is it because over half the people working there are? Which seems more likely to be true?

In fact, that last example should be attractive to both sides of the bigotry. If I was a bigot (and to be fair I can't be sure that I'm not), I'd want the majority on my side, too. I'd want to discriminate against people openly, not have to hide it.

Ok, maybe that bigotry example was a little off topic, but you get my meaning: if we want to solve problems at work that affect a lot of people- which in my opinion makes them the most important problems to solve- worker co-ops are more likely to help us solve them than 'standard' businesses are. Or to put it differently, *socialism helps people while capitalism crushes them*.

I don't know if it's the best system. Again, not an economist. All I know is that it's hard to find a worse one than the one we've got. At least for the entry-level peons like me.