

Living the Socialist Dream

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Living the Socialist Dream

Despite working in the United States, a social economy ravaged by forty years of neoliberal capitalism and its associated dehumanization, I have been very fortunate to have been able within this climate to, as I like to describe it, live the socialist dream. For the past twenty-six years I have worked for a single employer, Arlington Public Schools, at a job I love in the service of my community. While my needs are relatively small, I earn more pay than I need to live, and I have a defined benefit retirement plan, which means I have been freed from being forced into becoming a casino gambler in the stock market in order to provide for myself in my last years of life.

In fact, money has in many contexts almost lost all meaning. Twice a month bits moving across wires increase the value of a number in my account at the credit union, and all of my monthly bills for my mortgage, condo fee, utilities, etc. are deducted automatically from this account. Months go by without me even having to think about them. When I need or want something, like food, clothing, school supplies, etc., I either go online or to a local brick and mortar store, wave my magic plastic card, and take what I need. Again, since I earn more in income than I have in expenses, there is no need to pay close attention to any of these transactions, confident that they will just add up. This means that my mind is freed to focus on the things I deeply care about, which makes my life in general a rich and rewarding experience.

I am a workaholic, mainly because my work, my hobby, and my passion are all the same, building an educational program that provides students with engaging, meaningful learning that both prepares them with future knowledge and skills and

hopefully shares some of the joy I feel in the process of learning, while at the same time working for progressive social change.

This past June seven of the students at the school where I work earned Associate's degrees in computer science from our local community college at the same time they were getting their high school diplomas. It has been one of my life's great joys to have had the opportunity to design an integrated learning pathway through the sequence of required courses that got them to their degrees. In this effort, I was given a relatively free hand from the management at both the high school where I work and the local community college at which I function as an adjunct instructor in order for my students to earn college credits in my classes.

I deeply wanted, even needed, the creative space I have been provided at work. I am not in it for the money. I already mentioned that I earn more money than I need to live comfortably already. No additional monetary reward would motivate me to work harder or do me. What I want is life with a purpose, the chance to engage in creative, rewarding tasks that are consistent with my ideals and beliefs, and which are fun and joyful to boot.

I believe I have been managed overall at my work in a way that is both enlightened and effective. I practice radical transparency, so everything I do with my students takes place using open source software on publicly available venues for anyone interested to see. This transparency has helped me earn the trust I need to be given the freedom to innovate and create, including the confidence needed to take reasonable risks in the pursuit of sound goals.

My ability to operate this way does depend in part on a contradiction. In my sixty-one years I have come to have some insight into how bureaucracies work. I respect the social need for institutions that provide stability in our social relations, but at the same time I understand that to adapt, innovate, and change we often need to work around their inherent constraints. Rear Admiral Dr. Grace Murray Hopper is one of my biggest heroes precisely because she understood this so clearly and stated it so memorably. "That brings me to the most important piece of advice that I can give to all of you: if you've got a good idea, and it's a contribution, I want you to go ahead and DO IT. It is much easier to apologize than it is to get permission" (Hopper, G., 2021, March 18).

I have been willing to go ahead and do it throughout my career, and my managers have been wise enough most of the time to just look the other way while I did. I believe that the school system as an institution, the community we serve, and me personally have all benefited as a result.

References

Grace Hopper. (2021, March 18). *Wikiquote*, . Retrieved Sept. 9, 2021 from

https://en.wikiquote.org/w/index.php?title=Grace_Hopper&oldid=2940642.