

Across the Globe Workers have Started to Question the Validity of Capitalism to Provide Meaning in Society

News:

Recently, The Guardian newspaper reported that workers are quietly quitting their jobs across the globe in the post Covid-19 world. [The Guardian] The main reason attributed to this phenomenon is that coronavirus has pushed people to seek meaning in their lives. The quiet quitting follows the great resignation or great reshuffle, which is a trend observed in workers resigning voluntarily en masse at the beginning of 2021. [CNBC] The reason for the great resignation lies in several factors such as increased cost of living, job dissatisfaction, better work from home opportunities and so forth. Both the quiet quitting and the great resignation raises uncomfortable questions about workers giving up on capitalism.

Comment:

Western experts are deeply divided over the role of capitalism in fueling the worker crisis. Professor Robert Reich, the former U.S. Labor Secretary is adamant that the brutal nature of capitalism is spurring the great resignation. According to Reich "We don't work for the economy, the economy is supposed to work for us." [CNBC] Maria Kordowicz, an associate professor at Nottingham University UK opines that workers are fed up with capitalism and are leaving to seek meaning elsewhere. Kordowicz believes that workers are looking to redefine their relationship with capitalism by asking questions like "What should work mean for me? How can I do a role that's more aligned to my values?"

There are several factors behind the waning appeal of capitalism amongst workers. In the West, workers are fed with a daily diet of capitalism that leads to freedom, individuality, democracy and material riches. But at the workplace, many workers discover that such values are simply not attainable. Freedom is replaced with slavery as workers have to work long hours to barely survive. Individuality is trounced upon as workers quickly learn that they have to work in teams to succeed. Democracy gives way to corporate dictatorship, as workers find they have very little say over pay, working conditions, job roles, promotions and a host of issues that affect them. Last but not least, only a tiny majority make it to the top of the wealth pyramid, whilst the vast majority give their lives to capitalism only to retire in poverty. Worse still is that many workers view the companies they work for undermining democracy and not sharing the profits with wider society. For instance, energy companies make huge profits whilst people suffer from the cost of living crisis and they also fund politicians to remain quiet.

The primary cause behind workers' dissatisfaction with capitalism is the materialist ideology that drives it. Within Western societies, the dominance of materialism has stripped humanity of its spirituality, community spirit and family values. From an early age, workers in the West are conditioned to find meaning in material forms only; however, the Covid era has provided space for workers to critically re-evaluate their relationship with capitalism and seek meaning in non-material values and belief systems.

In the Muslim World, the discontent of workers is even more accentuated because many workers struggle to reconcile unbridled capitalist values within the work environment with their Islamic values. This leads to a perpetual struggle for identity at the work place—many workers choose to limit their engagement at work fearing a loss of Islamic identity. Indeed, career progression comes at the price of assuming a capitalist personality over an Islamic one.

In Islam, work is a material action and its purpose—unlike in the West—is to fulfill rights and obligations that encompasses different values. So workers in Islam earn money to feed, clothe and educate their families, look after the unfortunate ones in their community, build masjids and engage in charitable actions, support the mujahideen and so forth. Islam does not belittle non-material values but provides the right atmosphere and motivation to meet all obligations across all forms of value. Thus, under the Islamic state both non-Muslims and Muslims have meaning in life and are encouraged to pursue all forms of values thereby bringing the correct work life balance to society. Allah (swt) said وَمَنْ أَغْرَضَ عَنْ دُعَايَ فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَى ﴿١﴾ **"But whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him is a life narrowed down, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgment."**

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