

# Work less, surf more

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We live in dangerous times. The climate is warming, oceans acidifying, sea levels rising. Air pollution thickens while soil fertility dwindles, all of that while biodiversity braces for a dinosaur-like extinction. It has been noted for decades, but by now everybody can see it clearly: nature is not doing well. Even our precious oceans have started to choke after being treated like industrial sewers for decades. That watery thing under the waves we surfers like to stare at is turning into a graveyard with more plastic than life. Spoiler alert: this persistent polycrisis is not an accident but the result of a specific economic system.

The world is burning and we're too busy counting euros. Governments scroogingly calculate their Gross Domestic Product hoping it'll make them look good at the next World Economic Forum in Davos. Corporations maximise profits to enrich a small caste of elite investors who treat the multiplication of euros like a competitive sport. As for normal people, they are forced to wage a war of all against all for purchasing power just to be able to afford a living. At every economic level, the overruling imperative is to maximise growth: more, more, more, to infinity and beyond. This is a Monopoly game gone mad.

This grow-or-die mantra is the mystique of a bulimic system we ironically call "economic". Because yes, in theory, an economy should *economise* resources. As strange as it may seem today, the *raison d'être* of an economy is to make itself as small as possible. Economic progress should enable us to leave as much of nature safely untouched and as much of our time joyfully unworked. But our present capitalist economy doesn't do that. That's because it frantically seeks fast and furious growth. The more our GDP fattens, the more we come to destroy the social and ecological foundations that support our very existence. Digging for more resources to produce more stuff to create more jobs to raise more taxes is a lethal Ponzi scheme that will leave both the Earth and ourselves in a state of irreversible burn out. This is absurdly counter-productive, like cooking a meal out of your own guts.

That's not all. The faster we spin the economic wheel, the more it monopolises our limited time and attention. A day is only 24 hours, and so to produce forever more of the things that capitalism values, we must necessarily ration hours in other spheres of life. We work longer shifts to increase the digits in our bank accounts but at the cost of not spending time taking care of our kids, friends, neighbours, and ourselves. GDP is up but society is down, economic growth in the midst of a social recession.

And this is a vicious circle: we work harder in order to consume more, partly to forget how miserable we are when we overwork. The harder we work, the more we consume; the harder we consume, the more we need to work. This insane treadmill speeds up when we do it together: the harder we work, the harder our peers have to work to stay competitive on the job market, which then keeps us locked into unsustainable levels of workaholism.. The saying is true: We don't hate Mondays, we hate capitalism and its grow big or go home mentality.

We need to red pill ourselves out of this money-worshipping matrix, but how? How do we activate the emergency brake? That's where I want to make a radical claim you don't often see in these kinds of magazines: What if surfing could be part of the solution? I know what you're thinking. Sun-burnt beach bums covered in corporate logos with flying footprints the size of a small village. But that's not the kind of surfing I want to talk about. Before the advent of wave pools, world tours, and tacky surfwear, surfing was a raging counter-culture. Swell seekers living on the margins of society, barefoot anarchists turning their backs on nine-to-five jobs and the consumerist mentality of their times out of a supreme passion for surfing. Who cares about money when you've got waves? This was a real-existing utopian lifestyle: work as little as possible to maximise time in the water; forget about careers and mortgages to live your life one session at a time.

What if this fuck-you-and-let-me-surf philosophy was the very solution to our social-ecological predicament? The surf ethos is a prime example of voluntary simplicity, the revolutionary idea that less can be more. Work only what is necessary and keep as much time as possible for the activities that you actually value. It might be surfing or it might be something else. Art, science, politics, craft, erotic novels, bird watching or haikus. To do that, we need to tone down the artificial desires coming from advertising, the false needs manufactured via planned obsolescence, and the ridiculously high level of consumption imposed by positional competition. We need to remove all these unnecessary expenses that a constantly growing economy imposes onto ourselves and onto nature. Let us downshift needs in order to live the simpler way, free from financial dependency and the compulsion to work. Prosperity without growth: the art of sufficiency and idleness, an invitation to cultivate that blissful feeling of contentment that got us hooked on surfing in the first place. Nobody worries about the latest iPhone and the price of bitcoin while riding the barrel of a wave. The wave in itself is enough.

Now imagine this as a whole economy. A post-capitalist, post-growth economy that stops worrying over money to prioritise what matters, whether you want to call it wellbeing, health, sustainability, or anything else. A grown-up economy that has matured into a stable steady-state where the efficiency gains from socio-technical progress are turned into more naps, longer holidays, and a luxuriant rewilding of nature. If we don't need more stuff, why the hell are we still so obsessed about growing the size of our economy? Enough with the growth mania: let us dream of a 15-hour workweek and how much surfing we could do if we didn't have to sacrifice countless hours just to "earn a living". There would be no need for each of us to individually toil for survival in a smaller, slower economy where abundance is equitably shared.

This is the biggest lie at the heart of modern capitalism, the fact that economic growth is necessary to improve the living standards of those who struggle, the proverbial "lifting of all boats". But that's a macroeconomic scam. The widespread precarity that persists in high-income regions of the world is the result of a sharing failure, not a production problem. There is no point sabotaging the little nature we have left to realise that economic growth is futile. The truth is: poverty in the global North could have been eradicated decades ago if we had set fairer rules on the distribution of wealth. We won't sacrifice years

of our lives just because governments were co-opted by big business to ensure the availability of a docile, reserve army of labour. And we won't sacrifice the habitability of the planet just for the sake of – a few us – having slightly larger cars and slightly faster phones. No one will on their deathbed regret not having contributed more to GDP.

More than ever, we need to muscle up our capacity for disobedience. We must critically educate our desires for better futures than the fake six-digits happiness that capitalism promises. In times where our very survival is at stake, it has never been more urgent to be radically utopian. There is a whole post-capitalist world we need to build, and to do so, we must mobilise all the anti-productivist and anti-consumerist philosophies we've got. Surfing could be one of them if we scrap the cash prizes and the branding bullshit off what used to be a beautiful, simple recipe for happiness. Think Fight Club but with surfers – Surf Club. That's the kind of bold we need. We have nothing to lose and a world to win. Let's end here. The swell is on.