

# Paste

## Why Trump's Carrier Coup Matters to The Forgotten People

*Why feeling superior about the Carrier move is a bad idea.*

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An air-conditioning manufacturer recently extorted President-elect Trump. As a result, eleven hundred jobs will stay in America. The Donald trumpeted it as a victory for his policies. The pundits correctly noted he had essentially paid Carrier to keep the jobs in-country; they were correct to note that this set a dangerous precedent for future corporate shakedowns: big companies can say “Pay up, or we’ll leave!”

But this doesn’t matter. Even in this false victory of fraudulent populism, Trump is giving hope to people who feel abandoned. Below, I’ll explain why feeling superior about the Carrier coup is a bad idea.

### Why It Matters

Carrier had planned to move south below the border. After warning of dire consequences, the Orangeman personally intervened to keep part of the air-conditioning and heating company’s operations here in the States. The furnace plant will stay, but only because Trump assured the business he’d deliver seven million in tax kisses from the state of Indiana. He promised to personally intervene in the case of other companies, too.

Naturally, this was a PR coup. Of course, Trump had *also* promised to cut important regulations and slash corporate taxes, to give Wall Street even more power, which is what the Carrier deal amounts to. Conservatives, unsurprisingly, were horrified to hear the government had interfered. However, the Prophet Sanders put it best in his op-ed for the *Washington Post*:

“Trump has signaled to every corporation in America that they can threaten to offshore jobs in exchange for business-friendly tax benefits and incentives. Even corporations that weren’t thinking of offshoring jobs will most probably be reevaluating their stance ... In essence, United Technologies took Trump hostage and won. And that should send a shock wave of fear through all workers across the country.”

With the exception of Sanders, none of these people understand the optics of this move.

The Message

Remember how people felt when Obama was elected? He had not yet made any political moves, but the symbolic victory was so immense, the implications of a racist country electing an African-American to its highest office were so profound, it was as if the heavens had rolled back. It was taken as proof the hour of redemption had at last arrived.

Consider what Trump's act means to so many people. The man is not inaugurated, and he has already changed the lives of roughly a thousand people; moreover, he is sending a signal. It makes less sense to speak of Trump voters as the Silent Majority. Consider them the Forgotten People.

Different theologians have variant views on what hell is like. But the one that's always struck me as the most appalling is being out of the sight of the better angels; failing to matter at all. The Unabomber, in his supermax cell in Colorado, even while suffering the mind-crushing torture of solitary confinement, knows in a perverse way the United States Government cares about him. They fear and loathe him as the serial killer he is; the man is guarded by armed persons every minute of every day. He is the subject of their watchfulness—they house and feed him and provide medicine.

By contrast, the American worker in Ohio has no such obvious guarantee. Nobody in power notices her; nobody comes to her town; the people she trusted will mouth platitudes about economic opportunity and job retraining and then fly off to Silicon Valley to eat lobster.

The Unabomber knows he is being watched. The unemployed steel worker has no such proof. If this seems like an extreme comparison, I invite you to consider the last year of American politics, and see what indifference can do.

Being treated well requires more than just being noticed, of course. Otherwise, police states would be the most beloved governments in the world. To be precise, being treated well is a matter of whether or not our society tells you that *you matter*. The desire for recognition is why people who have enough bread still fight for roses.

Many unjust economic systems have claimed to be derived from laws of nature. But economics is not the same as nature. Economics is not a science, but a sets of models created by academics to explain complex human behavior. Shills and pundits take these models as gospel, dictating how the world should be. There was a time when heartless folks blamed God for the ills of suffering people.

That was then. We have a new faith now, a faith which allows people to write off any amount of human cruelty as the dictate of the market. When the people up top quote Hayek and argue abstractly for the excellence of our friend the Glorious Market, here is what they are saying: *It is a law of nature that working people do not matter*. Think of how that feels.

When a poor woman can't get medical care, the pundits write, it is the just hand of a beneficent market. When an auto worker is hammered by his plant closing, they wax poetic about the market. The plutocrats label their bad policy the will of the world, as if Jack Welch was a job-cutting hatchet-man because of words writ in the stars. It's an argument as old as the Divine Right of Kings.

Of course Bernie is right about Carrier's clever con, but the Prophet Sanders and Trump share a desire to keep the jobs here, which is something none of the globalizing cadre have done. Oh, Democrats in the halls of power, can you not see what is before you? The Orangeman is not even in office, and already he has given people hope. Blind, foolish, deluded hope, but to quote from an earlier feature, thirsty people will drink dirty water when nothing else is available.

The people being cheered by the Orangeman's gambit are people who *should* be voting Democrat. But it is not so. In this one small bit of three-card monte, Trump has given them hope beyond what the party of Pelosi can offer.

## Automation

What alternative explanation does the current centrist class offer to Trumpnomics? What words of comfort are there from Davos?

The powers that be preach to us of automation. Automation, automation, automation. Here is what the wonk class *really* means when speak of automation: "No jobs will be returning. Stop grumbling, plebs." But there is a curious hole at the heart of this argument: if automation means fewer workers in the factory, why must all our robot friends be housed in manufactories in China? Strange!

And the plot thickens, for if there must be a lower number of workers, why indeed are the factory owners importing skilled laborers from overseas, instead of employing people here, many of whom would kill for a job? Curiouser and curiouser! Could it be that they are not entirely serious when they talk of mechanized labor? Could it be that this is not a well-thought out theory at all, but a cover for the exercise of economic power against a disenfranchised class? Why, yes, it could be!

There are so many ways this system could be better. If automation is the future, then why can't each of us each own a piece of it? Or if that's not your style, why can't we use the profits saved from automation to invest in other innovations, to give other people jobs?

In a just order, a regimen of automation would mean each of us could live in greater luxury. But this is a dim meritocracy, where the elite preach endless austerity to the public. In this economic system, the mass of human beings are thought extraneous to the full functioning of the system. Here, automation accrues advantages to the one percent.

"Automation" is the term Rick Wilson and Ben Sasse use to defend the concentration of wealth and power away from the women and men who gave their lives to build the American economy. These dolts probably think that Wal-Mart gutting small-town shops and hardware stores is a law of nature.

But the modern market is not an eternal mathematical mechanism; it is a deliberate construction devised by human beings to funnel money to a small portion of our society. If Nike really cared about automation, it would have stayed here and, according to the neoliberals, built shoe-making robots, or some damn thing. Instead, Nike pays Vietnamese women and girls a substandard wage. Some automation!

What makes this Carrier political victory even more galling is that Trump, by appointing a Goldman Sachs banker to his Treasury, has shown himself to be a corporate tool; his payout to Carrier shows that he will approach Wall Street with one hand out and one knee down. But even this blatant kowtow to the economic titans of our age will still play in Skokie and the Rust Belt, because it gives the appearance of caring. Because it sends a message—*I have not forgotten you.*

Dani Rodrik put it well:

“The new model of globalization stood priorities on their head, effectively putting democracy to work for the global economy, instead of the other way around. The elimination of barriers to trade and finance became an end in itself, rather than a means toward more fundamental economic and social goals.”

Thomas Fricke, writing for Naked Capitalism, said:

There is hardly any other country in which the side effects of three decades of globalization have been felt so strongly; in which the real income of the middle class has fallen so clearly for a quarter century; and in which the differences between the super rich and the rest of the country have grown as dramatically as they have in precisely the two top capitalist-friendly countries of Reagan and Thatcher: In 2016, through Brexit and Trump, the established political systems of the US and Great Britain are now experiencing the greatest of shocks. A coincidence? Scarcely anywhere else has the dogma of the free market brought about so much implosion of industry as it has for the British and the Americans – nowhere was it more frowned upon by ultra-capitalist supporters to help the losers.

Our neoliberal elite does not realize the New Economy is only new for them. Everyone else is praying for the Old Economy to return. You gabble about means-testing, and yet, ironically, when your ideology was put to the ultimate means-test, an election, you could not pass. And, like most fragile achievers, you cannot accept the fact of failure. Is this not the sweetest poetic justice of the age, that the meritocrats are measured by their own scale and found wanting, and then find reason to complain?

Oh, neoliberals, how long will you bow before these false idols? Neoliberalism has brought us to the brink of neofascism. You exalted the private sector, and now a mad billionaire has taken the reins of the public trust. Is this not the fulfillment of your ideas? To cut away the public, and let capital take command? What an accomplishment for you! How proud you must be! Surely, this is a Third Way to end all Third Ways! Sad!

Neoliberals, the economic doctrine you prize is a delusion. The school of thought you preach was taught to you by the well-fed, who craved above all else the philosophical defense of their own selfishness, their right to gut the middle class and send manufacturing to distant countries.

You prattle and bleat about this unjust, unfair, and unnatural state of affairs as if it was the mandate of heaven. This is nothing new. Throughout history, comfortable people have always been convinced that the system that blessed them was natural and eternal.

Lyndon Johnson said “While you’re saving your face, you’re losing your ass.” You’re saving ideological face right now, defending a rotten position from habit. You have lost your ass; Trump will be sworn in next month.

These people cheering on factory floors are not inherently Trump's voters — they're Democratic stalwarts who you left alone while you went after the Lexus and the Olive Tree. Oh, free market fetishists. You speak to the world of efficiency as if all of us loved corporate standards, but I tell you that *vox populi* is stronger than whatever the Cato Institute and Tom Friedman are peddling. You stick to that old, terrible song, but this great orange fool is singing a new tune — your voice is broken, the notes are strained. Right now, this reality-show lunatic is the only one singing to the crowd.

The age of neoliberalism is coming to an end, and the time has come when your arguments for outsourcing as an iron rule will no longer carry water, or votes, or Indiana. Give it up, give it up!