

“Organized Capital”: The Corporate CEO as Mafia Don

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“I’m gonna make him an offer he can’t refuse,” is one of the most famous lines in cinematic history. It is the set-up for the scene in Godfather where a big shot Hollywood producer wakes up with a bloody horse’s head in his bed.

In less than 10 words it also perfectly sums up how the rich and powerful get their way. Use of the tactic has certainly never been limited to Mafiosi.

In fact, countries possessing military might have made “offers they can’t refuse” all through history to less powerful nations or regions.

But today’s ultimate practitioners are giant corporations that dominate the world economy. The 0.1% wealthiest people on the planet use their control of these corporations to impose their will on the rest of us.

Their “offers we can’t refuse” go something like this:

“Cut pensions, chop government jobs, privatize everything you can, or we will start a run on your currency and sink your entire economy.”

“Sign this ‘free trade agreement’ or we will pull all our investments from your country and move them to places that have agreed to everything we want.”

“Cut our taxes or we will fund a political party that will.”

“Build this pipeline if you want jobs.”

“We don’t care about democracy, satisfying us is more important than satisfying the will of the majority.”

“Weaken unions, or we’ll take our money and run.”

“Ignore global warming, or we’ll make sure you regret it.”

“If we don’t like your response or you protest too much, maybe even at all, we will use the violence at our disposal, including that of the governments we own, to crush you.”

But it’s not just threats. Like Don Corleone, the corporations also have politicians, judges, journalists, academics, lobbyists, personalities and many others on their payroll to lie, obfuscate, corrupt, manipulate and who knows what else in order to get their way. Both the

wise Mafia Don and the effective corporate CEO understand that power comes in many forms. The use of violence needs to be minimized. Better to save it for when there is no other way to impose your will, or it loses its effectiveness. And too much looks bad. (Witness Iraq and Afghanistan.)

But here's the thing with both organized crime and our economic system in general. There's always some competitor — be it a long established rival or neighbourhood punk/upstart capitalist — willing to employ whatever means necessary to steal your territory. If you get soft, you risk losing everything. If your profit margins are less than your competitors, their power will grow while yours stagnates.

As the movie (and its sequels) vividly shows, there can be no Mr. Nice Guy Mafia Don. The logic of organized crime makes it impossible. To be successful — to survive — lying, cheating, bribing and ultimately violence is necessary.

The same is true of our wider economic system. While violence is usually confined to governments that the corporations control, in both worlds hands get dirty doing whatever it takes to succeed because the system demands it.

This is why environmentalists who look for capitalist solutions to global warming are either extremely naïve or in the pay of corporations.

This is why union leaders who fail to see the fundamental contradiction between workers' and capitalists' interests often sell out to the bosses. This is why in the long run there can be no capitalism with a human face.

If the 0.1% who own and control most of our economy want to keep their power, they will act as capitalists have always acted. They will grab as much profit for themselves as they can and pass the environmental costs on to the rest of us while doing so. They will try to reduce wages to increase their profits. They will manipulate democracy to get their way. They will attempt to overthrow democracy if it threatens their existence. They have no choice. Greed, self-interest and a relentless drive to increase profits are the foundations upon which the capitalist economic system is built.

Only when the vast majority of us, the 90% who work for a living, come together to use our collective power to create a new democratic economic system will anything change.

Only greater power can overcome the might of the Mafia Don or the corporate CEO: The power of the people who actually do all the work that makes up our economy.

Gary Engler is an elected union officer and co-author of the just released [New Commune-ist Manifesto — Workers of the World It Really is Time to Unite](#), an updating of the original designed to provoke discussion about the future of unions and the Left.

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