

Capitalism

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Over the last couple of days I have been in Newport in Pembrokeshire, which I would recommend to anyone looking for a place for a break in the UK. This is where some of the discussions on what I should do next have been taking place.

On my last afternoon, the weather was not as reliable as it had been, but discussion continued during a walk, with wet gear donned just in case, and my camera left behind because the likelihood of rain seemed too high to take the risk of carrying it.

Despite that - or maybe because I was carrying my phone as if it were a camera - and was using it as such - I was asked what the propose of the photographs I was taking might be, and in that instant I realised that the theme I had been looking for was pictures that might illustrate ideas I try to explain on this blog.

Within minutes, this picture had been taken:



I stress for the sake of the connoisseurs that this is a screen shot of an iPhone 15 image lightly edited in Google Photos and not Lightroom or something like that - which it is still my task to learn. Those technicalities are not, in any case, why I am sharing this image.

What I was most interested in was that fishing boat. It represents what capitalism can be to me.

It is clearly a working boat. Someone has accumulated the resources to buy it. They take very obvious risks to fish from it.

The outcome of their activities is uncertain. They face the vagaries of weather, tide, climate change, pollution and much else to land a catch. Given the locality that catch might well be lobster.

But the point is that this is what entrepreneurship is all about. It is the taking of risks in the course of making a living, including the risk that the investment in capital employed in that task might not pay off. The result is something rather special if this boat is supplying the local shellfish company.

The point of this picture, and I suspect many others that I might take, is to also highlight a paradox, which is that most of those who like to claim they are entrepreneurs in this country are nothing of the sort.

No one working for a large business with a guaranteed monthly pay cheque, bonus arrangement with few if any downsides, and a pension scheme, is an entrepreneur, or even a wealth-creator. They are a manager, at best. That they might be an egomaniacal manager with a penchant for overstating their value, is much more likely.

Nor are those renting property entrepreneurs. They are rentiers.

And those setting up tax dodges are simply cheats.

But there are entrepreneurs who really do take risks, and put their money and resources on the line without any guarantees, all in the process of making a living, and maybe to create jobs for others as well. There may, after all, be a crew on that fishing boat on occasion. What I also strongly suspect is that its owner also knows that the price they get for their product is uncertain - they accept they operate in a market.

I have no problem with this real form of capitalism.

I do have a big problem with all the phoney entrepreneurs who claim a status they do not have.

And we do need to differentiate the two. Genuine entrepreneurial activity can create value and is worth encouraging.

The types of guaranteed return activity that masquerade as entrepreneurship, but do not even approximate to it, are in reality also much more likely to be part of rentier activity - which is the activity that has much more to do with seeking to screw unearned value out of employees, suppliers, and society at large by creating unaccounted for

externalities, than it is to do with any form of actual value creation.

We have to know about, understand, and call out this difference to really hold people to account in our economy.