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## Take This Jobless Recovery and Shove It

By [Genevieve Roja](#), [AlterNet](#)

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In the larger scheme of President Bush's agenda, it's people like me who don't really matter. And why would I? I'm no CEO of a big monied corporation. I'm neither a fundraiser nor a politico.

It's worse – I'm unemployed.

While the President is horseback-riding around his Crawford, Texas ranch during his month-long hiatus, my fellow unemployeds and I try to land the job of today, rather than the job of our dreams. That's what happens when you're out of work – you take the measly scraps and wait for the steak dinner.

Some of us go back to school in the hopes that the economy will recover by the time someone hands us a diploma. Or we move in with our parents, sell our cars and apply for jobs netting half what we used to make. There is no real feeling of optimism – just desperation. Our anxiety makes others around us crazy. We want jobs not just for the money, but to join the others out there who are contributing something to the world, whether it's shoveling dirt or pushing paper. Take away someone's job and you take away a sliver of that person's self-worth. Sometimes, working, whether we like our jobs or not, validates our sense of presence, of being a valued member of society.

It's too bad television news can't broadcast the life of the jobless like they do soldiers duking it out in lawless Iraq. Joblessness is rarely sexy or scary.

What would the cameras capture if they could? How about roads and highways bogged down by traffic, regardless of the time of day? Try going to Whole Foods at two in the afternoon. Nightmare. Bodies abound, jostling for sale-priced baskets of raspberries and freshly cut samples of nectarines.

Ditto the scene at drycleaners, restaurants, pharmacies, coffee shops and department stores. I can't go to the library anymore to job-hunt online because there are too many people camped out at the computer stations. They're like the ghosts of employed days past who refuse to leave their haunting posts. There's the white-bearded hippie professor type with his stacks of Chicano literature by his side. Or the polo shirt-clad man with his weather-beaten briefcase sitting atop the table of his workstation. He looks quietly displaced pounding away at the keyboard; it's as if the library has

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become his new cubicle.

Since Bush took his cubicle, about 3.4 million Americans have lost their jobs. Last month, 470,000 Americans became discouraged and stopped looking for work. We have a 6.2 unemployment rate and the highest level of unemployment in nine years. And how does Bush respond? He signed a tax cut bill he claimed would create a million more new jobs but in actuality, did not. He recently sent three Cabinet members by bus to Wisconsin and Minnesota who reported "a positive feeling in America about our economy."

Well, what about the sentiment of the other 48 states? As a Californian, I can tell you a lot about the daily struggle of an unemployed. It is a constant period of personal re-evaluation and daily affirmation. It's learning to forgive myself, telling myself it wasn't my fault I was let go, that I'm good enough and smart enough, and by golly, someone *will* hire me someday. It's difficult hanging onto hope when you've been out of work for almost a year. Unemployment means readjusting to job hunting too, maybe lowering your standards in the process. I now click on part-time job postings and submit my name for marketing studies that pay \$20 for my cooperation. I explore volunteer opportunities because that's always good for the soul and there's virtually no rejection – everyone loves an employee who doesn't have to be paid.

But it's still not a job. Nothing can replace that feeling of making a important contribution toward the greater good. Also irreplaceable is the feeling of waking up in the morning not in a state of panic, but in a state of employed serenity.

There is much to be done about this Bush-termed "jobless recovery." It may start with a bus ride survey, but it certainly doesn't end there. Sure, the rest of America wants to have positive feelings about the economy. But first of all they want to believe that the creation of jobs is high on the agenda, not just an empty promise on the eve of a presidential respite. Our leaders need to work hard to find real solutions the way Americans work to find jobs and retain those jobs – with integrity, intensity and with stubborn determination.

*Genevieve Roja is a freelance writer living in San Francisco.*

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