CANNED

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CONCEPT:

Although they don't know why, several employees have been summoned to their boss' office and are waiting outside. Players play the boss as well as nervous employees, who for various reasons cannot afford to lose their job. This is a game about the perils of capitalist productivity standards and how the system pits workers against the needs of one another in order to sustain income inequality.

Content Warning: capitalist productivity standards, oppression, loss of employment, helplessness, coercion

REQUIREMENTS:

Players: 5 - 7 (no director required)

Time: 1 to 2 hours.

Materials: Anything approximating the following…

• Chairs equal to the amount of players -1

• A room (preferably with a door and hall)

• Note cards and safety pins

• A number of straws (strips of paper works) equal to the amount of players

• Markers / Pens

• An envelope

SETUP:

As a group answer the following questions: *What is the nature of this company? What do you do here? How oppressive is it?* Do not name it; refer to it only as "the company."

Place 2 chairs in the room (or space designated as the room) and arrange the remainder in a line in the hall outside.

Next players should cut the straws so that each one is a different length with the longest and shortest marked in such a way that it will be covered when it is held. One player holds the straws as each other player take turns drawing them. The last straw belongs to the person holding it. Players should keep their straw secret for now, unless they draw the shortest straw. The individual who draws the shortest straw is playing The Boss and should declare it aloud. They should feel free to ignore everything after the note below until the **Bosses Only** section.

Productivity: The measurement of output per hour worked you character provides for their company. This is represented by their straw length. Players must keep that information on their person for their meeting with the boss.

A Note On Playing The Boss: Before accepting this character, please know that this has proven to be a notoriously difficult role. Players often feel emotionally overwhelmed, as their job requires them to be callous and uncaring in the face of issues that are often very real to player's default life. Playing The Boss is not necessarily a "fun" experience, but is an enlightening one. If you do not wish to play this character, please inform the group and exchange "straws" with someone who desires the necessary burden of this character.

Employees write their job title and their pronouns on the *front side* of the note card. On the reverse side, employees should write:

• 1 reason you feel justifies your level of **productivity**

• 1 attribute you possess and see as **having value**

• 1 **reason why** you need this job

• your character's **name**

Characters should wear the card so that only the front is visible. This is their name tag.

Next, have players form a line with one end representing their charter's *contempt for the company* and the other *indifference*. Starting with the two players representing the poles, couple players moving inward. If an odd person remains, they should join the last couple (then triad). These pairings represent **Personal Relationships**. Pairs should take 1 minute and define this relationship.

Personal Relationship: These should be fairly distant but can be any relationship not having to do with productivity. It should be briefly outlined before play, but allow the fiction of that relationship to emerge in-game. The only requirement is that its nature is such that both parties know one another's **"reason why."**

Once again have players form a line. This time, have one end represent players who view themselves *as valuable* (this is the characters internal sense of self worth and does not necessarily correspond with their productivity) and the other those who see themselves as *worthless*. Starting with the two players representing the poles, couple players moving inward. If an odd person remains, they should join the last couple (then triad). These pairings represent working relationships. Pairs should take 1 minute and define this relationship. Additionally, the player on the pole representing the lowest self worth should be given the **Rumor** card from the **Assets** section.

Working Relationship: Similar to personal relationships, the nature of this relationship can be anything that would enable one another perceived insight into their productivity. They should compare their levels of productivity. To compare levels of productivity, parties simply hold up their straws to compare length.

Stay Your Lane: When developing your character, do not appropriate experience from axes of oppression from which you do not experience oppression in your default life.

Bosses Only: You believe in capitalism and all that it represents. And

what is productivity if not the back-bone of capitalism? Today you must fire all but the employee with the highest productivity. That employee will be promoted and takeover all of the other's responsibilities. First you have to call all of them in one by one to do *performance reviews*. Each should last about 3 minutes. Over the course of each, ask for their numbers. You're looking for the one marked as *the most productive.*

Once you've reviewed everyone, bring them back in one by one to fire them, leaving the newly promoted employee for last. You know how to fire people; regardless of how they plead, or what they say or how emotional they get, the bottom line is what it is. Some employees may offer viable, even legal reasons legitimizing why their numbers are below company's standards but you don't care because the market doesn't care. Just make up another reason, any old reason will do. Make sure to mention that this is "an opportunity for growth" and "a chance to take some time off."

Before play begins, carefully tear-out the **You're In Charge** from the **Assets** section and put it in the envelope. Give that envelope to the first employee you fire. Give the players 10 minutes or so to sweat it out before you start seeing them one by one. With any time remaining, plan a lavish vacation that you'll tell everyone about as small talk.

PRINCIPLES AND RULES:

Numbers: This is an in-game word that refers to a character's productivity level. You can only learn a character's level of **productivity** by asking them directly or asking another player. To do this, simply ask *"what are their / your numbers?"* It is considered intrusive and or rude to do so. Characters may decline to divulge said information, unless The Boss asks.

Monologue: This meta-technique allows for a player to open a window to another players mind and permits them to give a soliloquy. Anything said during this time players can hear but their characters cannot. *Players must use this technique at least once during play.* To initiate this technique,

simply ask another player *"tell me how you really feel."* Likewise saying, *"That's how I really feel"* indicates the monologue is complete. Alternatively, you can initiate a monologue for yourself by saying *"You want to know how I really feel?"* During another character's monologue, players are to remain relatively silent and give them their attention. Have two players who wish to volunteer demonstrate this for the group.

Opt Out: The door is always open. Players always have the choice to leave the game at any time should they feel the need and are welcome to re-enter play at any time.

PLAY:

Play is separated into three fluid scenes:

Performance Reviews: When play begins, the players are in a line of chairs outside the boss' office. Eventually players will be called in one by one for performance reviews.

Receiving Notice: Once everyone has had their evaluation meeting, the boss will make a decision, then proceed to call everyone back in one by one to fire them, leaving only the promoted employee behind at which time play for them is over. Players who have been fired immediately move into the third scene.

Reconciliation: Fired players leave the immediate play area and form a circle where they talk about 1) Why this happened 2) What will happen next 3) Their value. *When a player in the circle feels valued for reasons unrelated to productivity they should flip over their name tag so their name is visible. The game ends when everyone who has been fired feels valued.*

The bulk of the game takes place with characters waiting to learn whether or not they will be fired. Players should focus on what they have to lose, whether it is fair and why it's happening to begin with. This situation should inevitably lead to characters sizing one another up and using their relationships for leverage. Maybe characters just want to figure out who

is getting fired before the axe drops or maybe they are trying to strike some kind of deal. Emotions run high when the consequences are ones livelihood - everyone needs their job. Even if characters find the composure to stay outwardly calm they can use monologue to express their internal anxieties. Players should play it *close to home* and allow themselves to feed on their own internalized monetary fears propagated by capitalism.

When the game is over, you may run an optional after-care session. Just be supportive and don't interrupt one another.

What is *not optional*, is out of character support for the player playing The Boss. Once play ends, everyone should take a moment to thank that player for their performance and for their emotional labor. Make sure they are okay; hug them if they want hugs; reassure them that play is over and that there are no feelings of contempt toward them.

ASSETS:

[Rumor]

Once play begins, start a rumor about everyone getting fired. Be Creative.

[You're In Charge]

You're now in charge of leading the Reconciliation. Start the circle, then lead and direct it with the goal to have everyone in it support one another. When the first person joins you, welcome them and ask them the following questions one at a time 1) Why did this happened? 2) What will happen next? 3) Why are you valuable? Comfort and support your fellow workers. When another player joins your circle, quickly fill them in. Example "welcome to Reconciliation, the file clerk is sharing with us why they are valuable." When a character feels valued for reasons divorced from productivity, have them flip around their name tag so that their name is displayed. Make sure everyone gets asked these questions. The game ends when everyone's name is displayed.