

Clifford Odets was inspired by the events of a real taxi strike that took place in 19XX, a year before he wrote *Waiting For Lefty*, which was later produced by The Group Theatre. Though the strike was violent and ended unsuccessfully, it served to show that the system of the unions was failing to support workers and their families. Action had to be taken by those brave enough to stand up and demand better pay and more respect from their employers. When the first production of *Lefty* went up, audiences were drawn to the radical energy and message. Countless unions either staged their own productions or read speeches from the play as they went on strike for their own rights. Unions weren't supported by many employers until the passing of the National Labor Relations Act in 1935, just months after *Lefty* was first performed. Before this, a strike was a dangerous risk that often ended in the participants being fired and replaced. In this context, it is easy to understand why the idea of striking causes so much fear for the characters in the play. These characters are all struggling with a range of systems—governmental, medical, economic, union. They each face a hard choice of when to decide that it's their system, not them, that is failing. From the New Deal, to unionization, to communism, those in *Lefty* struggle to find a system that functions for all of its members.

While *Lefty* shows a rejection of systems in the 1930s, *Severance* examines the way that corporate systems shape our world today. The play focuses on individuals who are either at the top of the corporate food chain or struggling to make their living at the bottom. All characters seem to grapple with the ability to fight back against the system of corporations. In FDR's second inauguration speech, he states, "We cannot be content...if some fraction of our people — whether it be one-third or one-fifth or one-tenth — is ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed, and insecure." While this is a beautiful idea, the feasibility is questionable. The corporate system has grown so strong that not even a CEO is truly safe within our job market. However, a CEO has many more opportunities when let go versus a warehouse worker. What does it take for a person at the top to connect their life to someone at the bottom?

Both *Waiting for Lefty* and *Severance* beautifully illustrate how individuals living under their respective social and economic systems work to keep their place, or, when all else fails, try to change it. In both of these stories, we should not see these people as victims. Instead, it is more beneficial to view them as individuals who can acknowledge the flaws in systems such as a union, a corporation, or even their own society, and work to re-shape them for the benefit of themselves and others around them.