

Barriers to Business

1) Capital Starvation

Banks are only willing to lend you money provided you can prove to them that you don't need it. To most of us, therefore, a bank can never be more than a place to store money and a mechanism for sending and receiving it. But by refusing to lend, banks are in fact withholding what is rightfully ours.

The Need For Capital

The human life-form does not have built into it the means of generating its needs of life. It has the ability to work. It can output both mental and physical labour. But it cannot, without the use of mechanisms external to itself, produce food, clothing and shelter. To survive, therefore, the human being must have access to, and the use of, those external mechanisms necessary for converting its labour into its needs of life. These means and mechanisms are the resources provided by the Earth's mantle and biosphere. What this amounts to, in a word, is *land*.

In our capitalist economy land is all owned by a small minority of individuals known as capitalists. Thus it is only *by their leave* that the rest of us may convert our labour into our needs of life. This may be granted in the form of employment. They provide us with our subsistence in return for our labour. They may condescend to grant some of us the use of their resources in return for a part of what those resources yield in response to our labour. The resources they grant us use of are then known as *capital*. What they demand of us in return for granting us use of their capital is then known as *interest*.

The industrial revolution brought specialisation. The capitalist who lends capital to an artisan may not want his interest paid in the form of what that artisan's specialist skills create. Conversely, an artisan who borrows capital may not want the kind of resource owned by the capitalist who is willing to lend to him. Consequently a free market was born through which both capital resources, and the interest they generated, could be exchanged in terms of a universal commodity known as money, which erroneously is *perceived* to possess always a fair and common value.

The upshot is that if for any reason the capitalist chooses not to employ the labourer or lend to the artisan then neither can acquire his need of life. To function and survive in a capitalist economy, the artisan therefore *must obtain capital*.

Getting Capital

When we come into this world we bring nothing with us. Our needs are provided by our parents. In an equitable world, we would inherit the means of converting our own labour into those needs of life. Our parents would, when we grew up, also provide us with, or pass on to us, the means they were given. In our capitalist world, however, only capitalists inherit. Most parents do not have such means to give or pass on to their children. Consequently, when most of us reach adulthood we must either live by selling our labour or borrow capital from a capitalist with which to buy or rent the means of converting our labour into our needs of life. We must each and all beat a path, cap in hand, to the capitalist's door.

A capitalist makes his capital available to an artisan either directly person-to-person or through a bank or other corporate instrument which administrates a common fund in which he holds a share.

The artisan's quest is to convince the capitalist that his capital will be safe if he lends it to the artisan and that he will receive a good rate of interest or profit by so doing. But how does the capitalist become convinced?

First of all, the borrower needs what the capitalist *perceives* as the right background. It has always mystified me how capitalists (and those who act on their behalf) make decisions regarding to whom they will and to whom they will not lend money. I am among those to whom they most definitely will not. In the early 1980s, a friend and I used to make competitive predictions on how long each newly-launched whiz-kid computer dealership or software house would survive. A year? Six months? Our guesses were uncannily accurate. But obviously, the banks thought they were a safe investment and that we were not, despite our meticulously formulated business plans.

The ones who always seem to succeed in obtaining finance are either those with rich well-connected parents and those 'Jack-the-lad' con-men who have the gift of the gab and a nose for a deal. A street market trader thus has far more of what is required to gain the confidence of a capitalist than does a hard working highly skilled artisan. Yet it is the artisan who provides his clients with what they actually want, what they actually need and what is ultimately best for them.

Secondly, the borrower needs both existing assets and a steady income. A lender may thus condescend to lend capital to a borrower provided the borrower has:

- assets to offer as security which have a value considerably greater than the value of capital he wishes to borrow, and
- an income sufficient to enable him to pay back the capital, and the interest on the capital, within the period of time determined by the lender.

On this basis, neither my personal assets (my house) nor my income (state [welfare](#)) are sufficient to enable me to borrow capital.

Bridging The Credit Gap

But one cannot run a business in an unregulated free market economy without an initial large injection of capital. It is not possible in the normal run of things to start small and build up gradually. This is illustrated by my own business during the mid 1980s when I had contract programmers and technical writers who worked on a client's projects.

My house then had a market value of about £60,000. I still had a mortgage on it. The bank was prepared to lend me a quarter of its value for business purposes provided I gave them what is called a 'second charge' on the property. This meant that if ever I were unable to pay them back what I borrowed from them, they would have the right to sell my house and take the money thus received to pay off my debt to them. The building society who provided my mortgage naturally had the 'first charge'.

The bank thus allowed me an overdraft of up to £15,000 for my business. From work I had done previously I had accumulated savings of another £15,000. I therefore had up to £30,000 of available capital.

The norm and tradition of the industry was that contractors were paid at the end of each week. There was no norm or tradition regarding when my client would pay me. Of course there was as always a clause in our contract which said that they would pay within 30 days of invoice. But anybody who has ever traded in this lawless economy knows about the proverbial cheque in the proverbial post in the proverbial '30' days! In reality, I received payment from 100 to 120 days after invoice, which in this country is the best one can ever expect. Let us be optimistic and say the delay to my receiving payment was 100 days.

Because I paid my contractors at the end of each week, the length of time I had to wait for my money after having paid a contractor was on average 93 days. With £30,000 of capital, and an average rate per contractor of £80 a day, I could never support more than 4 contractors at any given time. Before I could take on a 5th contractor I would have to accumulate another £7,500 of capital out of the profit I was making on the first four.

I had set the average mark-up per contractor to 12½%. This was a mid-range profit margin in the industry at the time. It worked out at £10 per day per contractor. Thus I made £40 per day on my four contractors. This was my income. It was half what my average contractor was receiving. I had to pay my tax and run my business out of this as well as live on it. Were it not for other work which I was doing myself I could not have survived. It was payment for this other work, not the profit from the contractors, which eventually allowed me to save enough to take on another contractor.

Despite this obvious and simple arithmetic, many of the contractors were convinced that all I did was sit back and count the money coming in while they worked. This made me feel awkward because by nature I am an artisan: not a businessman. But sadly, the industry does not allow one whom circumstances force to be home-based to work as a contract programmer. My only happy option was therefore to act as a kind of subcontracting agency for other contractors at the time - an opportunity for which I will nonetheless always remain very grateful to those who made it possible.

In this unregulated and immoral free market, the large and powerful invariably delay paying for what they have received from their small suppliers. This imposes a very low insurmountable limit upon the income of the uncapitalised business. It makes the small business very vulnerable. It places upon its proprietor an unbearable level of stress. It renders too much of his time unproductive. It thus inevitably detracts from the effort he is able to put into the primary service he provides. Both the artisan and his oppressive customer thus become losers as a result of this reprehensible practice.

My contracting business could not expand to a self-sustaining size because my bank would not lend me sufficient capital to finance the credit gap caused by the propensity for large corporations to renege (as they do universally) on pre-agreed payment terms. I therefore discontinued this aspect of my business.

Capitalising a Product

I could not adequately capitalise a proper business for finding and supplying contract programmers and technical writers. The industry would not in general allow me to be a programmer or technical writer working at home. So, since I could not write and document software products for others, I decided to produce my own with a view to selling them directly to end-users.

I designed and produced my first software product with little trouble. I did not need capital for this. I managed to find several businesses to try it and buy it. I did not need capital to do this either. Many of these initial customers went on to use it to great effect and benefit. However, if I were ever going to sell enough of my software to make my living, I would have to market it. For this I definitely needed capital.

I wrote a business plan for marketing my first software product. I took it to my bank manager. He would not lend me the capital, but referred me to several other sources of venture capital. After about 18 months of effort none of these would capitalise me either. They gave several reasons for this. My product was new. It had no precedent in the marketplace. Banks and investors don't take risks on endeavours for which there is no established precedent. It was at that time my only product. It used new technology: it ran on an Apple II microcomputer, and, when it arrived, the PC. I was perceived to have no 'track record' in computer software. The fact that I had at the time been a programmer and technical writer for 15 years did not seem to count.

Nevertheless, three organisations did consider it further. One of them was a globally known household name. They liked the product and were willing to capitalise the marketing of it. But only under terms and conditions which to me not only seemed unfair, but also totally incongruous. The proposition put by each followed pretty well the same scenario as follows.

There would be a business venture. Its objective would be to market the software product I had developed and field-tested. The venture needed to be capitalised. Each party to the venture would contribute to the venture. Each party would receive a share of the profits it produced. All perfectly reasonable. Incongruity came in the balance between what each party should contribute.

My proposal was that I would contribute the product: they would contribute the capital for marketing it. We would split the profits it generated according to a proportion to be decided. My business plan specified an amount of capital which would be needed to capitalise the marketing process. They said they would contribute half this amount and that I should contribute the other half. For this they wanted half the profits. I reiterated that the whole idea was for them to contribute all the marketing capital. To this they asked me with surprise what I would then be contributing to the venture that I should receive half the profits. I said that I was contributing the product into which I had put over 15,000 hours of my time over several years at my own expense. To this they replied, "but what capital are you contributing?". It appeared that the product did not count as a contribution to the venture. I explained my notion of the proposition through the following table.

My Contribution	Their Contribution	In Return For
All instances of the product to be sold	Capital required to market the product	A share of the profit
Technical expertise	Financial, marketing and administrative expertise	Remuneration for time spent

They still could not see that I would be contributing anything to the venture for which I should receive a share of the profit it generated. I began to despair. As a last attempt to communicate I devised a different proposition. I put it to them as real. To me though it was hypothetical. I said that I had changed my mind and I would contribute half the capital. My new proposition altered my original table to the following one.

My Contribution	Their Contribution	In Return For
Half the capital required to market the product	Half the capital required to market the product	A half share of the profit
Technical expertise	Financial, marketing and administrative expertise	Remuneration for time spent

I then announced to them that the venture would now need considerably more capital. "What for?" they said. "To buy a product to sell." I said, "The venture now owns no product. It cannot sell what it does not own. It must now buy the product from its owner, namely me. I will use the half of the capital I am to contribute in order to buy the exclusive rights to the product for the venture. The venture will from then on be free to sell as many instances of the product as it likes."

They replied that the years of work I had put into the product at my own cost was "water under the bridge" and that I could not expect to get anything back for that. As far as the product was concerned it was part of my 'technical expertise' for which I would be remunerated for the time I spent installing, supporting and maintaining the product on behalf of the venture. I would still have acquired the same expertise even if I had developed the product for an employer. Its existence is

therefore independent of, and in addition to, the software I produced while acquiring it. I gave up trying to reason or communicate with capitalists.

By this time those original first users of my product had produced lots of feed-back in response to which I gradually implemented improvements. Eventually I got to the point of specifying a complete rewrite of the product to run on the latest operating systems and graphical user interfaces. However, since I knew I would be unable to market it, I decided against developing the new re-designed version of the product.

It seems that those who decide who shall and who shall not be capitalised are people who are completely unequipped in both technical knowledge and the ability to assess market acceptability. How this is so often and frustratingly proven each time a demised British invention reappears as the munitions of a devastating commercial salvo from the other side of the Atlantic. The majority of small businesses are doomed to failure not because there is no market for their products, or because their products are no good, but purely through lack of capital.

Running on Batteries

The recession started to bite around March 1990. Demand for my first product rapidly wound down and then disappeared. This was expected. The odd items of support and upgrade work could not even begin to provide a living. I was running on batteries. My income ceased. My savings fell below £3,000. So reluctantly in April 1991 I signed on as unemployed. From then on the only way was down. Economically I was like a fire which was too small to remain self-sustaining. Money got tighter and tighter.

A couple of years later the recession eased. I always have a vast reserve of workable ideas. Quality opportunities began to present themselves again. But locked into the poverty of State welfare I had absolutely no means of realising them.

Savings Limit

Among the rules for receiving State welfare is one that [limits how much liquid capital you are allowed to possess without having to use it to live on](#). At the time it was £3,000. Even if I had been given capital by a benefactor which was in excess of this I would still have had to use it to live on. With capital above £3,000 I would have had my state welfare reduced by an amount which increased with the capital. With more than £8,000 of capital I would have received no state welfare and would have had to live entirely on my capital.

A Fresh Start

There can be nothing to spare out of the £3,000 I managed to hold onto to capitalise a re-start of my former business as a self-employed artisan. The entire amount would not be enough. Ten times that amount would not be enough. Even if somebody gave me a further £5,000 it would be sitting in a very leaky bucket. It would merely provide my minimal domestic needs until it ran out. The rules do not allow me to spend it at a rate any greater than State welfare. If I were to spend it any faster, I would be seen as disposing of my capital extravagantly, safe in the knowledge that I could go back onto State welfare sooner just as easily as later. Being thereby forced to live within the financial constraints of State welfare, I am rendered unable to travel the length and breadth of the country and make heavy use of the telephone in order to find business.

Without fuel, my car will not move. It is therefore pointless my saying to my car, "If you take me to Birmingham I promise to reimburse your tank with the necessary fuel within 30 days." There is no

such thing as payment in arrears in physics or engineering. Cause must precede effect. The means must be there before the job can be done.

Capital is the fuel of business. Enough must be available to sustain the business until it can sustain itself with revenue. It must then remain available to smooth out inevitable ups and downs in revenue and outgoings. Furthermore, unlike a physical mechanism, a business needs additional capital to survive the reprehensible man-made practice of payment in arrears. In a capitalist free-market, might always has its way. By delaying payment for 3 months ... 6 months ... 12 months ... 18 months ... forever, I am forced by my customers to contribute without reward to the capitalisation of their much larger and hence less needy businesses. The better survivability of big businesses is probably less to do with economy of scale and much more to do with their ability to free-load on the backs of the individuals and smaller businesses who have to trade with them.

A Basic Human Right

We were all born on this planet as nothing but helpless babies. All 7,000 million of us. None of us brought anything with us. None of us helped 'capitalise' the planet. It was all there when we arrived. Why then is this planet's immense inventory of productive resources deemed to be owned by a privileged few? By rights, since we all brought nothing, what is there should be divided out equally among us so that we each may apply our share to transforming our labour into our needs of life. In the context of our modern capitalist economy we should each be *given by right* one 7-billionth of the global capital with which to finance our individual economic endeavours.

Why then are we required to *rent* our capital from capitalists? What is special about these people that we should have to pay them usury for what the planet itself provides for turning human labour into human needs? By any unfettered system of morality, it is ours anyway. They are working a con. They are defrauding us of what we rightfully own by virtue of having been born as human beings on this planet. Nevertheless, the system of law which prevails at this time gives them the power of possession, however wrongly. For the present, we must therefore endeavour to live with it as best we can.

Conclusion

Being long-term unemployed, neither banks nor others will consider lending me capital to restart my business. Before I became unemployed I was self-employed. This makes me ineligible for all government start-up schemes for helping the unemployed to set up in business. Besides, such schemes assume that the applicant has received a substantial redundancy payment from his former employer which the scheme then matches to form the starting capital for the applicant's new business.

My savings have now fallen below £2,000. What little remains is vital for buffering my domestic outgoings and for family emergencies. I have no capital available for restarting my business. Coming off State welfare back into self-employment is therefore not an option. In any case, even if I had the capital, I simply could not survive the long and uncertain period of attrition between starting work and receiving my first payment with which to replenish my needs of life. This is not the 4 weeks which State welfare now allows for: it is month after month after month after month. And it will take phone call after phone call after phone call after phone call; letter after letter after letter after letter, most probably culminating at least in the taking out a county court summons.

2) The Image Barrier

The ancients worshipped the graven image to whom they prayed daily for their food and protection. Peasants lived in fear of the noble coat of arms. Today, their descendants worship the corporate logo. It is their new god in whom they trust implicitly and exclusively to supply their needs of life.

In Whom We Trust

People only trust those they know. They will only employ or buy from those they trust or from those recommended by those they trust. In the [anthropological communities](#) of the pre-industrial world, the individual was an integrated part of his community in every facet of life. The reputation of each was emblazoned upon the minds of all. Each knew and could trust the other. Credibility was universal and life-long. Industrial Capitalism destroys community. It isolates each from his neighbour. It forces each to specialise in one narrow skill. It severs the work-place from the home. One works with colleagues not family and friends. Navvies work with navvies. Nerds work with nerds. But each lives in the same geometric suburbia with neighbours who culturally are strangers. As a result, common man *knows not* his own peers. Consequently he does not trust them.

The tireless [spin-machines](#) of free-market mass-media advertising continually bombard the common mind with endless indoctrination on the trustworthiness of vast corporates and their products. These self-made idols of capitalism thus establish themselves as the exclusive members of a new kind of anthropological community. It is a global village of trusted peers of which common man is made to feel a part. He therefore comes to trust implicitly every corporate citizen of his global village. But it is only a one-way trust. This is because mass-media advertising is a one-way channel. Common man cannot afford it. His voice is never heard. He remains unknown, not only to his corporate idols, but also to his own peers. The common individual is therefore naturally trusted by nobody.

The ancient artisan served his immediate community. Each individual therein knew him personally as one of a small number of trusted suppliers. That once-parochial market has long since been laid open to the world. However, though the market has expanded in size beyond imagination, the number of trusted suppliers within it has not. Within the mind of each individual, the number of trusted suppliers stays very much the same. This number is constrained by what is thought to be a [physiological limitation](#) within the human mind.

Of course the small set of suppliers trusted by each individual on Earth could be different. This would allow a vast number of suppliers to coexist in the world as a whole. However, the recent rapid advance in communications has caused all our once-separate parochial markets to coalesce into a single integrated global market. This has placed all the world's suppliers of each commodity into a contiguous economic domain. In this situation, market forces compel all competing suppliers eventually to coalesce into a small number of large multinational corporations, or die. The corporate population of the global economic village thus gravitates inevitably towards the numerical limit which can be accommodated within the mind of a single generic individual.

The global village thus only has room for a certain *small* number of 'citizens'. As the size of the market increases, so too then must the size of each trusted supplier.

In Whom We Don't

Through the relentless indoctrination of highly orchestrated mass-media advertising, the corporates have successfully discredited common man as a worthy and trusted artisan. The upshot is that as far as the free market is concerned the common individual is ipso facto a 'cowboy' of his trade. He is thus left no option for economic survival but to kneel before the corporate throne and entreat he who sits thereon to condescend to grant him the undeserved privilege of paid employment.

Naturally, any such employment will be granted strictly under the terms and conditions dictated by the corporate. And since they are all operating within the same contiguous economic domain, their terms and conditions of employment tend to gravitate towards the same one-sided format. The individual's option is therefore merely to accept them and eat, or reject them and starve. But not everybody is able to meet these generic terms and conditions of employment. Many are prevented from doing so by circumstances they can neither control nor influence. They have no choice but to seek a living as best they can directly from the free market as self-employed artisans or traders. I am one of these.

As a lone artisan I find myself trading in the same global domain as the corporates. However, I cannot become a citizen of their global village. I do not have the capital necessary to buy world-class corporate advertising. Therefore I cannot make my voice heard above the mêlée of the global market. Consequently I am unable to create a commercial image of myself before which my market will bow down and worship.

I cannot afford the prestigious concrete and smoked glass office tower. I cannot afford the model girl receptionists with leather settees and rubber plants in the lobby. I only have a small room at home. I cannot afford an executive car to project an image of success when I visit clients. The Enterprise Initiative consultant in 1988 told me that my old car did not present an appropriate image for the kind of work I did and therefore undoubtedly had a very adverse effect on my business. But without capital I cannot change this.

So I am not trusted. I am by default seen as a 'cowboy' of my trade. I must survive by picking up the crumbs. Providing emergency capacity during peak loads when regular staff cannot cope. Picking up odd jobs which are too small, too uninteresting and too unprofitable for the corporates to be bothered with. But such is not living. It is barely surviving. The lone artisan is the first to suffer at the onset of recession and the last to recover when recession eventually recedes. And if, as I have, one falls off the tight rope into the rut of State [welfare](#), one becomes permanently locked out.

3) The Personality Barrier

In a natural [anthropological community](#) an artisan fails or prospers on the reputation of his work. In a capitalist free-market, success depends solely on his political skills of deception and persuasion. Technical skills are irrelevant. He simply hires them. He must be an artisan of business.

Over the past 30 years or so, I have acquired a vast amount of knowledge. I have also become accomplished in a wide range of skills. These cover economics and business as well as computers and communications. My lack of business aptitudes gave my business certain [deficiencies](#). However, these were not critical to the point of failure. I am knowledgeable about the mechanisms of business, and skilled in the practise of running one. Yet I have never been successful.

Aptitude For Business

Knowing about business is not enough. Being skilled in its procedures and processes is not enough. Having years of experience is not enough. In a competitive capitalist free-market another ingredient is necessary for success. It is one you cannot buy or learn. It is something you must *be*.

You must be a certain kind of person. You must be a political animal, skilled in the art of deceit and a master of the credible lie. This kind of ability can never be born out of acquired knowledge or practice. It must flow from an in-bred anti-morality which is omni-present at the very kernel of your character. As evinced by the small number of people who grow rich in a capitalist world, it is something not possessed by many.

As an artisan of business you must possess an innate ability to:

- induce in others an exclusive and unshakeable confidence in your good self
- make people feel very awkward about rejecting what you are proposing
- interrupt people disarmingly and shout them down in the nicest possible way
- throw tantrums of a kind which court sympathy in order to get your way
- make people feel uncomfortable and threatened about not having paid you

These are facets of personality. They are the adult manifestations of the qualities of a spoilt child. They are the antithesis of maturity. They are what you are: not what you have achieved. Practice can make perfect only that which is already part of you. One who is not this way by nature can never become this way. And such a one can never succeed as a free trader in a capitalist free-market. Such is the nature of business.

My Own Shortcoming

I do not naturally have this kind of personality. I have tried to acquire it. I have tried to develop it. I have attended many sales training courses in the past. Some of these were very expensive. I have also read many books on the subject. But despite all my best efforts none of the business acumen ever rubbed off on me. I could not connect with it. I know the theory, but the practice is beyond my grasp. It was, and remains, contrary to my innate personality and the whole ethos of my upbringing. I have had to reconcile myself to the notion that I am by nature an intellectual who finds business distasteful.

In business, the first thing a prospective client sees of me is my face. This appears to give the impression that I am much younger and less experienced than I hold myself out to be. I am therefore perceived as one who exaggerates or at least as one who is economical with the truth, and who is

consequently unreliable and untrustworthy. Yet I have no aptitude for deception. I cannot even steer their false perceptions into seeing the truth. This is, and has always been, for me a formidable barrier to break through in order to do nothing other than merely apply my skills to the task of 'earning' my living.

Conclusion

There is a diversity of innate human abilities (or talents). Each human being probably possesses all of these to some degree, but some more than others. The various degrees to which he is blessed with these natural abilities together form what is known as his [aptitude profile](#). Each person's aptitude profile is probably unique, although they are perceived as fitting into a small number of discrete classes. By working together in an equitable way the people of Planet Earth could, by combining their talents and efforts, provide each with an abundance of all his needs of life. But this does not happen.

The *rules* of the capitalist free-market reward out of all proportion those relative few whose aptitude profiles equip them for business. This effectively gives them *ownership* of the free market. The majority of humanity is thus denied the opportunity to ply its vast plethora of skills other than *by the leave* of these few. They hold the purse strings. They mete out the rewards. Consequently, by what is natural to them, they reward themselves in far greater abundance than they reward those who work for them. They decide who shall and who shall not work. They decide who shall and who shall not eat.

But is this right? Is this the way it should be? Should whether or not a person is able to prosper upon this planet be determined by whether or not they possess in abundance one small but particular facet of human personality - irrespective of what highly-tuned economic skills they may have worked hard to perfect? Clearly this is not a fair way for a society to operate. The moral question for society therefore is this. Should society be fair? If so, why? And if so, should this state of affairs be allowed to continue, or is it time to rise up and forcibly change the rules?

4) Corporate Marketing

The generic consumer holds to a universal blind belief that the competitive free market naturally brings the best products to the fore. But this belief is false. For it is the best-marketed, not the best-made, products that win in the free market. And this always benefits the producer, never the consumer.

Two Kinds of Competition

Free market competition, so many shallow thinkers will argue, is the driving force of economic progress. Competition, they say, ensures that it is the best products and the best providers of service which survive and prosper within the market. It does not. It is competition, they say, which creates variety and choice within the market, thus giving the consumer what he wants, what he needs, and what is best for him. It does not.

I am by nature fiercely competitive. But not in the commercial sense which is motivated by greed, profit and lust for dominance. My competitiveness is of the intellectual kind. It is motivated by curiosity and the satisfaction of seeing the fruits of my labour making the lives of others more fulfilling and productive. It is this kind of *competition* against the unknown coupled with *co-operation* with others which results in the best products and services. My intention is always to produce things which last and which do not go wrong. In other words: future-safe design realised with zero-defect technology. But as I have learned to my cost: in a capitalist free market this is not the way to succeed.

Some clients have told me that I would make more money if my software were not quite so good. It was robust enough not to require my annual service support scheme. Therefore people generally did not renew their support after the first year. If my software had caused problems, then I would be called out to correct the causes and be able to charge for doing so. This could be one reason why I am not rich.

The Consumer Product

It is never in a manufacturer's best interest to market a future-safe zero-defect product. A product which never goes wrong does not generate any service and repair business. Once the market has become saturated with a product which lasts forever there is no longer a demand for it. Its maker may as well dismiss his workforce and shut up shop. To fulfil his commercial objective of maximising profit, a manufacturer needs a product which meets the minimum legal requirements of 'fitness for purpose' and just outlasts its statutory warranty. In other words it must tend as far as possible towards adopting the nature of a *consumable* commodity like food. The manufacturer may then survive and prosper by servicing, repairing and replacing original items as they wear out.

But consumers have grown wise to products which are deliberately made to fail after a limited time. Furthermore, foreign manufactures who subscribe to a philosophy which reveres artisanic virtue quickly take over the market with long-lasting versions of local products. They have no established sales and service network. Their easiest solution is therefore to invade the indigenous market with zero-defect technology which does not need a sales and service network. Consumers soon get used to buying from a remote unseen source once they are confident that its products will not fail. The manufacturer is also confident to offer attractive on-site delivery and replacement guarantees when he is using a zero-defect approach. Zero-defect means near-zero field support costs.

Continuous Innovation

The only way left to stay in business in the long term is through rapid innovation. The manufacturer must continually improve and extend the design of his product. Then the consumer will be tempted by the improvements and opt to buy a new one despite the fact that the one he already has is still performing perfectly. But this is a tall order. It is not practically possible. Technology cannot move that fast. Ideas and inventions come by inspiration: not to order. What the manufacturer has to do is *deceive* the consumer into thinking that what is now being offered is far better than what he already has.

The process of continuous change to which the manufacturer must subject his product cannot therefore be a process of technical improvement. It can only be one of fashion disguised as technical improvement. This deception becomes increasingly easier for the manufacturer to perpetrate upon the consumer. This is because products are becoming more and more high-tech. It leaves the consumer less and less knowledgeable of what he is buying, and consequently less able to judge what is and what is not a genuine technical improvement. Technical improvement does take place. However, it is a much slower process than the changes we see continuously taking place in product fashion.

Best-Made vs Best-Marketed

Technical improvement is driven by genuine innovation. A change in product fashion is driven by mass-media marketing. The generic consumer is technically ignorant. He is therefore unable to discern the difference between them. Consequently he will accept neither unless it is proactively marketed. So the products which capture and dominate the market are not those which are *best-made*, but those which are *best-marketed*. Likewise the service provider who dominates the market is not he who provides the best service, but he who provides the best-marketed service. It is of course logically possible for the best-marketed product also to be the best-made. However, this would be by chance rather than by consequence. Thus it is the exception rather than the rule.

This has precipitated a change in the primary purpose for which a product is designed. The primary - and indeed the only - purpose of a product was originally to perform a specific and stated function for its end-user. For example, the purpose of a car was to convey its owner and his passengers from one place to another. This is no longer so. The *primary* purpose of a product in today's global free market is to aid the marketing process. In other words, to sell itself. Its function as an aid to its end-user - and indeed its fitness for that purpose - is now purely secondary and incidental.

The result is that products today are designed for visual appeal rather than ease of use. They are sold as solutions to problems rather than as tools to help users to solve them. They are sold as pieces of sculpture rather than machines. They are sold as necessary adjuncts to 'the good life' rather than as performers of tasks. What is now marketed to the consumer is the sizzle, not the sausage. Once a product has been sold it has already fulfilled the primary purpose for which it was created. Its quest from then on is to wear out as quickly as possible without incurring any penalties imposed by consumer law.

There seems to be no end to the list of cases in which the technically inferior of two competing products has won the entire market thereby driving the better one out of existence. Two frequently quoted examples are the battle between the two video recording technologies VHS versus Betamax, and the one between the Windows and OS/2 personal computer operating systems.

Such products easily bewitch the consumer with their pre-sales appeal. But after each all-too-short post-sale honeymoon, the consumer soon becomes disillusioned with the flimsy structure and depleted functionality beneath the tinsel shell. He could transfer his allegiance to another supplier.

But to survive in their fiercely competitive markets all the suppliers who survive have to adopt the same philosophy: the same modus operandus. The consumer is therefore in the same situation no matter to which supplier he goes.

The Means to Survive

They who succeed in the capitalist free market are they who are best at marketing. The natures and qualities of their products are relatively immaterial. The larger their market, the louder they must shout to make themselves heard above their competitors. Today, for almost everything, the market is global. In a global market, the only way to be heard is through large-scale mass-media marketing. This is very expensive. It consumes vast amounts of money. The only businesses who can afford mass-media marketing on such a scale are the large well-capitalised corporates. Capital and the free market thus form a mechanism which empowers the rich to influence the poor to buy only from the rich.

The corollary to the above is that the process of marketing a product in today's global free market is no longer scaleable. A business cannot start small and expand gradually. There is a minimum size below which a business cannot sustain itself. It is like trying to light a fire with two or three small pieces of coal. You can play a powerful gas torch onto it to get the coal alight fully. Nevertheless, as soon as you remove the torch the fire will go out very quickly - long before the coal is fully burned. The fire is too small to be self-sustaining. It is below critical mass. By analogy, the larger the market is, the larger is the minimum size which a business must be in order to be self-sustaining within that market. The critical mass for a business in today's global market is multinational in size. Consequently the existence of the smaller business is increasingly transitory.

Where This Has Left Me

To write good software you need a good brain, a lot of experience, a computer and a quiet environment free from frequent interruption: not a great bustling smoked glass and concrete office complex with thick pile carpets, rubber plants, model-girl receptionists and all the other paraphernalia of corporate imagery. However, being unable, through technical ignorance, to discern the difference between good software and bad, image is the only thing in which the commercial consumer is able and willing to place his trust.

This means that the lone artisan - no matter how knowledgeable, how dedicated, how skilled, how experienced or how accomplished - can never win the consumer's trust without the marketing might of a world-class corporate. Since this is financially out of his reach, the market rejects him. All he can hope for are crumbs which may fall from time to time from the corporate tables. Notwithstanding, this rewards him with nothing better than the living standard of a casual labourer. In fact, for all my dedicated hard work over more than two decades, it has left me destitute.

The image-worshipping culture with which corporate marketing has indoctrinated the consumer mind has thus cut me off from my only means of transforming my labour into my needs of life.

5) Market Prejudice

The constant crescendo of corporate marketing does not merely leave the lone artisan unheard and unknown. It proactively precipitates upon him a negative image, which induces a multiplex of impervious prejudices within the minds of those who would otherwise be his willing customers.

Corporate Marketing

Through their vast marketing machines, the corporate leviathans relentlessly bombard the consumer mind with mass-media advertising. They tirelessly repeat their messages about how big, how stable, how established, how reliable, how honest, how upright, how trustworthy they are. They forever enthuse about how necessary, how useful, how reliable, how long-lasting, how satisfying are their products. By this means they install themselves within the common consciousness as benevolent providers of every need. They quickly become household names, familiar friends, immovable idols of the id.

The artisan, on the other hand, does not have the capital to maintain a constant mass media marketing campaign to keep himself, and what he does, in the forefront of the consumer mind. Relentless corporate advertising, whether by intent or default, creates a *contrast* within the consumer mind between the familiar corporate and the unfamiliar small provider. Corporate advertising thus, intentionally or otherwise, actively labels the small provider as unstable, embryonic, unreliable, dishonest, shady and untrustworthy. Likewise, his products are undeservedly reputed to be useless, unreliable, short-lived and unfit for their stated purpose.

Consumer Mentality

The generic consumer is an individual. When he seeks to buy something for himself, his concern is that he get good value for his money. When he seeks to buy on behalf of his corporate employer, his concern is that he avoid a bad buy so as not to damage his career. In both cases his mentality is essentially the same. He is normally ignorant of the technology of what he is buying. He therefore cannot judge his prospective purchase at face value. His only option is to put his trust in the judgement of others. But in whom?

His natural tendency is to put his trust in that which is most familiar to him within the context of what he is seeking to buy. This is the corporate whose advertising voice he hears loudest above the general mêlée of the marketplace. The one whose relentless powerful shamelessly self-aggrandising message he has swallowed and absorbed. This is invariably the relevant corporate supplier with the biggest marketing budget. The one with the most capital. The largest. This is the image he trusts. This is the image from which he buys.

His purchase decision is therefore nothing to do with the proven quality or suitability of what he is buying. Neither is it related to the proven quality of service which the chosen supplier provides. It is purely to do with the effectiveness of the supplier's marketing.

Market Influencers

The conduits of corporate marketing are the media. The most influential of these is the intrepid user magazine. It carries the main thrust of corporate advertising. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, it carries editorial reviews and evaluations of advertised products and services, plus

journalistic profiles of the companies which provide them. User magazines rely heavily on corporate advertising for their revenue and hence their survival. They do not therefore want to upset in any way those who provide it, namely their corporate advertisers. They will therefore not carry a bad review of the products or services of any of their big-name corporate advertisers - established or potential.

Journalists want work. If a journalist has a good permanent job on the editorial staff of a user magazine, he not only wants to keep it but would also like to further his career. A freelance journalist wants his articles printed by the magazines with whom he deals. Both must therefore write what is acceptable to the magazine editors. This must be in the interest of the magazines' survival and prosperity. What the journalists write must therefore be what will please the magazines' corporate advertisers.

Success of a product is determined almost entirely by the amount of money its vendor spends in marketing it. Consequently, if a journalist gives the product a good review he cannot other than be proved right by events. Furthermore, his review can only hasten and further guarantee the product's success. If, on the other hand, the journalist writes a critical review of the product, its inevitable success will make him a fool. The product of a lone artisan is unlikely to succeed in a capitalist free market. The lone artisan does not have enough capital to compete against the marketing machines of the corporates. A journalist can therefore safely dump his literary assassinations upon the meticulously researched and designed products of these small dedicated hard-working 'also-rans'.

The effect on the market of the industry consultant (or professional advisor) is almost identical to that of the journalist. The consultant's advice is shaped by both corporate advertising and industry editorial. All he does is extend and particularise what he sees and reads to suit his client's situation. By recommending a market leader, a consultant cannot be other than proved right by events. His advice cannot do other than increase the market leader's dominance of the market. But if, on the other hand, the consultant recommends a technically and functionally superior product from a market outsider, its inevitable demise will make him a fool. It will leave his client up a blind ally as regards the future maintenance, development and expansion of his system.

A consultant's clients are exposed to the same corporate advertising as he is, although perhaps not to the same depth. The client therefore expects the advice he gets from the consultant to be consistent with what that corporate advertising has already planted in his mind. In other words, it is in the consultant's interest to tell his client what he wants to hear.

So what is the essence of this advice which the market receives from its influencers?

Small Equals Cowboy

"Never buy from a small supplier." This is the clear and present message of corporate advertising. It is the evergreen of industry editorial which is conformingly reiterated by every smart-suited lap-dog advisor. It results in an end-user purchasing policy which appears to be based on a form of 'logic' which I feel sure neither Boole nor Aristotle would recognise. For instance, it accepts the assertions:

- "We've never heard of you, *therefore* you must be a cowboy."
- "We've never come across your product, *so* it can't be much good."
- "You're a one-man-band: *so* you'll be here today, gone tomorrow."

as logically sound. It defines the consumer mind's entire mode of thinking. It infects not only the actual purchaser, his advisors and the industry press but also those who supply the loans with which the purchaser makes the purchase. All are convinced that the lone artisan has insufficient knowledge

and expertise to design and build a complex product which is reliable enough to be trusted in a mission-critical role.

According to this logic, if you want your portrait painted you should naturally engage an art firm employing at least 100 young freshly qualified arts graduates: they have the up-to-date knowledge and resources to paint the best possible portrait. It would be rash and foolish to go to a one-man-band like Rembrandt.

Among the legion of possible valid reasons as to why "We've never come across your product..." could be:

- "therefore your *marketing* can't be much good"
- "so we may not have been looking in the right place"
- "because we may not have been paying proper attention"

The other overwhelming reason the market gives for rejecting the one-man business is doubt concerning his long-term survivability. All fear that by intent or by fate he will immediately disappear, leaving them high and dry without technical support. "What happens to us if you go under a bus?" I was asked by many. Yet these would happily trade with a medium size limited liability company whose propensity for legal demise must be considerably greater than that for the physical demise of a human being.

Where Are My 50 Fools?

The do-gooder user magazines forever 'warn' buyers to 'beware' of computer software which has not already got at least a certain minimum number of satisfied independent users. "Never buy from any vendor who cannot refer you to at least 50 satisfied users" is their typical advice.

But a little thought soon reveals that if absolutely everybody were 'sensible' enough to take this advice then clearly no vendor would ever be able to sell the first 50 copies of his product. It also implies that anyone who buys a product which does not already have 50 satisfied users is a fool. It thus brands the first 50 purchasers of any new product as fools. What then does this make the people who subsequently take this advice? Could one describe as 'sensible' anybody who would buy a piece of computer software recommended by 50 fools?

If this advice were meticulously followed by all then clearly no new software could ever enter the market. Most people assume that although this be true in theory, there is always some way into the market for everybody. Not so. I have seen this false and irresponsible advice force the demise of many a good piece of computer software into which skilled professionals have poured hundreds of hours of dedicated effort. For the lone artisan it raises a barrier which relentlessly denies him that vital first sale. In fact it delayed my first sale for over 5 years, until happily I met a 'fool'.

The Ignorant Judge The Wise

"Always evaluate before buying," say the do-gooder magazines. And to 'help' their readers do so they print 'check lists' showing what each genre of product should contain, and how it should look and feel. These check lists are invariably based on the corporate market leader's offering in each case. They blindly assume that all software packages which address a given business task must use the approach adopted by the market leader. This precludes the possibility that other smaller software producers may have adopted different - perhaps even better - approaches with regard to which their check list makes no sense.

A computer software package is the result of thousands of hours of work by experienced dedicated specialists who have in-depth knowledge both of software techniques and of the business task which

the package addresses. The prospective user normally has little or no experience or knowledge of designing computer software and is often too close to the business task to view it analytically. Nevertheless, the magazine, with its check list, supposedly equips the prospective user to 'evaluate' the package during a stolen half hour and then tell its designers whether or not it is any good. This kind of unqualified evaluation is not only arrogant, it also bars many a worthy product from the marketplace.

Technical Award Schemes

Certain professional bodies, industrial sponsors, government departments and notable personalities patronise various technical award schemes. These frequently culminate in well publicised national television presentations. Their aim is to encourage and promote discovery and invention. Unfortunately, such technical award schemes all too obviously restrict their philanthropy to that insignificant minority of innovations which possess the mandatory elements of high visuality, social topicality and entertaining wonderment.

They invite entries. They must receive thousands. They select only a handful to receive an award. The award winners receive capital with which to develop and market their inventions. They also by default receive free publicity and promotion. Most valuable of all they receive universal credibility. This opens the doors to bank loans, further capital from third-party investors and large-scale sales outlets. The thousands whose entries they reject receive nothing. Neither do the tens of thousands who did not apply.

Each scheme has a relatively few 'experts' to sift through the thousands of entries which are submitted. They can afford to spend only a short time assessing each one. In a few minutes, therefore, each 'expert' must assess the merits of thousands of hours of intense effort by a dedicated professional who specialises both in the *business task* which his invention addresses and in the *techniques* he has employed in its design. And in neither of these is the assessing 'expert' likely to be an expert. But this does not matter. He is not assessing the real merit of the invention, but merely the extent to which it meets the three mandatory criteria of high visuality, social topicality and entertaining wonderment.

This is because the primary aim of such an award scheme is to provide public relations exposure for its sponsors and social dignitaries by hosting a novel television event. Its *declared* aim of encouraging and promoting discovery and invention is just part of the public relations paraphernalia. If for some entrants the award scheme happens to fulfil its declared aim then this is merely a fortuitous spin-off.

In keeping with the character of the capitalist free-market system which champions them, technical award schemes create a handful of winners and tens of thousands of losers. Furthermore, whether an entrant becomes a winner or a loser is nothing to do with the benefit his invention could bring to humanity or the revolutionary techniques which brought it into being. By any equitable scale of merit ([if indeed there is such a thing](#)), the winners do not deserve to have received their awards any more than the losers deserve not to have received them.

This undeserved gain by a handful of winners would be tolerable if that is all there were to it. But it isn't. The very existence of the award puts the thousands who do not win it at a forced disadvantage. It positively labels their innovations as having failed. Further, it implies that the failure is technical rather than what it is: a mere lack of visual appeal, social topicality and entertaining wonderment. Consequently, if you have developed and are marketing an innovative product for which there is an award, and you are not the one who won it, then you are, and will forever remain, an 'also-ran'.

The absence of an award, which a competitor has, is seen by the buying market as an anti-recommendation - a real and tangible *but wholly unearned* mark of disapproval.

Negative Image

Corporate marketing generates a destructively negative image of the one-man business. This feeds the career-sensitive journalists of the industry press whose output reinforces the corporate message. These in turn feed the consultant with the basis of the advice he gives to his clients. Award schemes arbitrarily promote certain favoured suppliers. All these then feed the end-purchaser with his decision-making input. His purchases feed corporate profit which further re-empowers the marketing process. Thus is completed the unchecked super-regenerative economic loop which increasingly excludes the lone artisan from his only means of turning his work into his needs of life.

This negative image is the opposite of the reality I observed during the 15 years I was running my own business.

Quality of Service

I provided what my past customers insisted was an excellent software product with a first class support service. This was well evinced by the findings of a transcribed [telephone survey](#) which was conducted by a business counsellor from my local Training and Enterprise Council. Because my package gave such trouble-free service, all but one of its users very soon dropped my support service. My revenue fell.

When I buy a software product from a large company, I know from experience that despite their proclaimed hot-line support, I am essentially on my own. If ever I have a problem and write to them about it, I rarely get a reply. If I phone them, the person on the telephone will not be able to give me an answer and certainly will not get back to me. They seem only able to answer simple button-pushing problems which I invariably find answered in the documentation. Increasingly, any contact by telephone involves waiting for hours on the line listening to silly music sparsely punctuated by off-handed announcements as to your current position in the answering queue.

This is in stark contrast to the quality of support I provided for my clients. When they phoned, they got immediate access to the product's ultimate expert who could there and then answer any answerable question, and on discovery of a product fault had full authority, ability and the sense of obligation to implement and despatch an immediate correction. Which I always did. To get even a critically serious bug fixed in software produced by those who dominate the industry, one must wait until the next release and then *buy* the upgrade hoping that the bug has been fixed. It often isn't.

Continuity

The major fear which corporate marketing has induced into the consumer mind is that small businesses are short-lived and prone to sudden disappearance. The consumer fears that the proprietor will suddenly decide to pack up and take a job with a large company. This may be so in some cases. Nevertheless, the predominant attraction for being a one-man-business is the direct control one has over one's activities. One is not accountable to the non-technical manager who does not understand why research and development, by its nature, cannot be straight-jacketed into a commercially expedient time scale. One is free to develop a completed product rather than one which has to be out of the door by a given deadline. This is not something the dedicated artisan would wish to give up lightly. Besides, in my case, [family circumstances](#) make home-based working the only

practical option. I am not free simply to pack up, relocate family and home, and take a job with an uncertain future with some distant corporate.

The fact is that though I became officially unemployed over 10 years ago, I still support the software I have installed on client systems. I corrected a small fault the other day in a date entry field which flagged 29 FEB 2000 as a date error. It was not a critical fault. The software underneath was still fully Millennium compliant. Nevertheless, correcting the fault provided cosmetic completeness to a package which was written in 1985.

"What happens to us if you go under a bus?" I was frequently asked. Firstly, software does not suddenly stop working if its author dies or otherwise becomes unavailable. There is ample time to replace it before it becomes out-dated or out of fashion. In any case it can still perform its original job. When I released my main software package on the IBM PC in 1985 it was fully Millennium compliant (even though the machines it ran on at the time were not). Secondly, as witnessed by countless large-scale multi-million pound [white elephant](#) software projects over the past two decades, the probability of a software artisan dying within the life-cycle of his product is negligible compared with the likelihood of:

- a project-critical employee leaving a corporate supplier
- a project team becoming critically depleted by poaching
- a company going bust within the life-cycle of its product.

I ran my business for 15 years. I am still supporting customers after 22 years (although to charge for that support would now invoke impossible bureaucratic complications). I think my customers have been supplied with outstanding quality. They still to this day have full continuity of service.

Conclusion

The average purchasing decision-maker is technically unqualified to judge a high-tech product. And the depth of knowledge possessed by his average advisor is not much better. They are both terrified of taking responsibility for making a judgement decision on a product or its supplier. The only criteria by which either of them can judge such a product or service is by what is usually called 'appeal to authority' which is in actuality 'appeal to image'. Judgement of the technical attributes and applicability of a product is therefore supplanted by a judgement of commercial image - who you are, who knows you, what sort of premises you inhabit, what sort of coverage your product has had in magazines and what reputation it has.

Prospective customers and their advisors therefore have a natural prejudice against the one-man business. They look upon the lone artisan as suspicious. They perceive him as unreliable and fly-by-night. They assume that the support they might receive from him is bound to be poor. Consequently, the one-man business is heavily discriminated against in purchase decisions. The majority of purchasers simply will not buy from or take on a one-man-business. Failure of the one-man-business is thus a self-fulfilling prophecy. Corporate marketing thus sustains an insurmountable barrier between the artisan and the only means by which he could otherwise turn his hard work into his needs of life.

6) Restrictive Practices

The term 'free market' implies a system in which all are free to trade their skills, goods and services with anybody else without restriction or hindrance. But the reality is a global clique, riddled with mechanisms that exploit the individual to feed corporate gluttony, stifle the weak and exclude the poor.

Family Ethos

Historically, my family were never labourers. At least, not in the physical sense. They were by tradition and aptitude: teachers, administrators, engineers, clerics, academics, psychologists, masters of merchant ships and one television news presenter. A strong ethos of academic competitiveness pervaded the whole family. It was oppressive. Its philosophy of life was that the way to health, wealth and happiness was to work hard at school, get good qualifications, and then work hard at the enviable job which would be one's automatic reward. Those who worked hard *and* succeeded academically would be rewarded well. Those who failed could expect nothing. "If you don't pass your exams," I was firmly told, "you might as well pick up a spade and learn how to dig." This was the 'Sword of Damocles' which, for the full duration of my school and college life, was forever poised above my head.

Thus from my beginning, a firm and simple picture of economic society was passively instilled into my mind. There were employers and there were employees. Employers were vast mighty economic machines which were created, ordered and preserved by faceless beings of a different and unreachable species. The notion of anybody passing across from one to the other never so much as entered one's mind. I was born into the employee cast. That is where the natural scheme of things had placed me. And that is where, presumably, fate had predestined me to stay. The employers were *them* and the employees were *us*.

A Naïve View

The simple picture is of a level playing field populated with a homogeneous mass of individuals. None has means of his own. To live each must find paid employment. Collectively these form a pool of available labour. Also on this level playing field is a much smaller number of employers. They possess the means by which a potential employee can, if permitted, turn his labour into his needs of life. But it is, and always will be, a buyers market. The potential employee must go cap in hand to an employer in the hope that the employer will condescend to grant him the privilege of employment. The only way for one of the employee cast to maximise his chances of employment is to make himself as useful to his prospective employer as he possibly can.

I was always taught that there was only one way to do this. And that was to gain the best possible academic qualifications. These, it was unquestioningly assumed, were what determined one's usefulness to an employer. These, it was universally believed, were the one and only yardstick which employers used to grade their employees.

I was also taught that the level of academic qualification which one ended up with was simply a matter of the amount of effort one put into one's studies while at school and college. And since education was universal, the opportunity to get qualified was equal to all. Hence so too was opportunity for employment. Consequently any individual within the teaming population of this so-called level playing field was thought to have an equal opportunity to achieve health, wealth and happiness. However, I was soon to discover that what I had been led to believe was untrue.

I was not deliberately deceived by my family and educators. They merely passed on to me what they had been led to believe. But this simplistic notion of a pool of employees on the one side flowing smoothly across to fill a steady procession of jobs benevolently provided by a fair and ordered economic system of employers on the other, is not how it works. This idealist's vision of society as a homogeneous fluid of equal opportunity has never existed. There are powerful sinister forces within society which constantly act to prevent it. These would instantly re-curdle any such equitable sea of tranquillity back into the mottled coagulation of cells, cliques, classes and hierarchies which characterise the real and present society in which we live.

Market Reality

For the first 10 years of my career I worked for large companies as an employee. But in 1976, [family circumstances](#) prompted me to set up on my own. I would sell my skills directly to my market as an independent self-employed artisan. I naïvely assumed that out there was a market for my skills from which I would be able to obtain my fair and proper share of work. I did my market research. I worked out the size, frequency and content of mailshots required to capture enough work to keep me busy. I sent out the mailshots. I placed the advertisements. Statistically, in a homogeneous marketplace, I should not fail to get the predicted amount of work. I then allowed plenty of time for the results to materialise. I kept sending out the mailshots. I kept the ads running.

I did not get good results. I did not get disappointing results. I got no results at all. I extended the coverage of my mailshots from local to national. I eventually got a few responses. I chased all over the country covering hundreds of miles a week following them up. But it was all for nothing. No actual work ever materialised. At first I thought that I must simply be a lousy salesman. But the way in which certain of these 'sales' fell through soon led me to conclude that this could not be the only reason for my failure to get work. I could not even see bad salesmanship as being a major factor. The results were plainly uncanny. They appeared to violate the laws of probability. Something else - something quite powerful - was preventing me from getting the work.

It seemed that I would approach a prospective client and provide a valuable idea. I would then write a proposal as to how I would realise that idea to benefit the client's business. I would hear nothing or be told that the client had decided not to proceed. However, on occasions, by unwitting slips of the tongue over the telephone by one of the client's more naïve employees, I would discover that the revenue-earning work of realising my proposal had gone elsewhere. The prospective client had taken my idea, accepted my proposal and given the actual work to someone else.

Social Cliques

I once visited a former colleague who had also started up on his own. He had been made redundant by our former employer. During my visit he mentioned that he had experienced this trouble. I told him that I had suffered the same problem. It seemed that good ideas and free proposals would be gladly accepted from every direction on this level playing field we call the free market. However, the actual revenue earning business flowed only through certain restricted channels. It was as if, superimposed upon our homogeneous economic plain, a network of routes had been established through which business was exclusively constrained to flow. It was as if a labyrinth of family, social and old-school-tie relationships permeated the whole of free trade.

The first and most natural kind of relationship network is the family. This is as old as the human race. The family is the most basic and essential element of human society. In a truly egalitarian society, family relationships create and preserve order and structure. In a hierarchical society a small proportion of families win land by being the first come, through combat or by favour. The hierarchy

quickly stabilises and becomes long lived. There thus becomes established a ruling class which develops skills of rulership which are passed on and enhanced from generation to generation. They quickly get to know how far they can exploit and oppress their common populous to keep it just below the threshold of insurrection. However, in the lottery of modern capitalism, blind chance and fickle fortune can suddenly catapult any Tom, Dick or Harry into a position of wealth and power. But in doing so, it equips him with neither a sense of equity nor the skills of rulership. His family becomes a formidable instrument of economic oppression and exclusion against outsiders. Once a family gets capital it becomes dangerous.

Nevertheless, it appears to me that there are in our modern capitalist society two kinds of families. Two philosophies. On the one side are the unbridled opportunists. These are those who make up royalty and aristocracy (who gained their wealth by conquest or inheritance), land owners, capitalists, and business proprietors. The latter includes those once lowly opportunists whom fortune catapulted to wealth and hence into the so-called middle class. All are highly nepotistic. Family members are a higher form of life from outsiders. On the other side are the moralists. These are those who seem to be cursed with a strong ingrained sense of *universal* fairness and equity. They live by their labour; be it physical, mental or both. They are thinkers. They strive to understand the world. They consider right from wrong. To them, nepotism is anathema. All human beings are equally precious. Capitalism, if they but knew the truth of it, is not for them.

The first kind form business networks which favour insiders and exclude outsiders. The second kind do not. Those few of the first kind on whom inheritance, good fortune and chance have shone are the rulers, exploiters and oppressors. The remainder of us are the ruled, exploited and oppressed. The nepotistic networks of these favoured families permeate the whole of the so-called free market. They funnel all business and exchange through themselves and their own. Nothing can happen without their percentage being taken. No outsider may gain from his own labour except by their leave.

Within a modern nation, no single family network is large enough to embrace the whole economy. To dominate the whole of a national economy, these family networks must establish an 'Internet'. They have to forge links between individual family networks. The environment which is perhaps the most conducive to the formation of such inter-family links is the upper class private school. Here, boys from different wealthy families board and learn together. By the time they go their separate ways in the outside world they share a long, strong common history. They truly know each other. Similarly, the young ladies of such families attend their secondary and finishing schools where they can do the same. All share a manner of speech and a way of life which is instantly recognisable by each other as uniquely belonging to their kind. This type of relationship is commonly known as the 'old school tie' because of the distinctive ties worn at such schools.

I have had a few fleeting encounters with members of this exclusive class. From them I have gathered that the way they maintain and strengthen their inter-family relationships is through a mechanism called the 'annual bash'. It seems that once a year or so, each member of this exclusive community throws an enormous party. It must cost a fortune. They invite everybody who is relevant. In their unbridled merriment they update and renew their relationships. And somewhere, among truck loads of mindless trivia, they exchange nuggets of valuable strategic business information. "I say, I hear you need a new computer system, what?" "Yes, any ideas?" "Nigel's the chap for that nowadays. He's just bought some outfit or other in Reading." "Oh, jolly good, I'll give him a bell!"

Against such an omnipotent and prohibitively expensive sales and marketing system, all others are shamed. Forget knocking on doors. Abandon mass mailshots and database marketing. Throw out your computerised contact management systems. Disband your telesales teams. Cancel your advertising. Do not even consider exhibitions. These will only pick up what is left. They will never

get you through to those who matter - those with the power and the money. All these are merely tools for marketing to hoi polloi.

Secret Societies

Feeling left out and powerless, the artisans fought back. Those of each trade formed themselves into a guild. Through their guild, they were able to pool their economic power. But these guilds began to diversify their memberships. Each soon reached a point at which its membership represented a large diversity of trades. Now they have become essentially exchanges for business information in a way similar to that of the upper class 'annual bash' - although never anywhere near as powerful or as exclusive. But they are exclusive nonetheless. Not anybody can become a member. One has to be *invited* to join. And to be a candidate for invitation, one has to be *known* by at least one established member of the guild concerned.

As guilds evolved further, they developed weird and secretive rituals. These served to bond members. They instilled a sense of mutual obligation. Members became brothers. Each, who by chance or fortune, found himself in a position to provide business would first offer it to a brother. A godly and virtuous act they thought. Notwithstanding, in a finite economy like ours, actively funnelling business towards one who is a 'brother' is necessarily actively funnelling it away from all who are not. The guilds, and the secret orders they have become, are economically and socially divisive. They favour some and ostracise others arbitrarily and unfairly - with regard for neither merit nor virtue. I sense that these have been a positive contributor to the fruitlessness of my efforts.

The ultimate difficulty for the outsider is that all the special relationships between members of these cliques and guilds is almost always invisible. Some appear deliberately to maintain a veil of secrecy. Whether one person got the job rather than another because of one of these special relationships is therefore always totally unprovable.

Professional Institutes

I have spent almost all the working hours of my 32 year career developing computer software. All, that is, apart from the 5 years I spent as a technical writer researching and writing about it. I have, for the most part single-handedly, expedited every stage in its creation. I have identified human tasks which computer software could perform or in which it could assist. I have specified all the data structures and procedures required to computerise such tasks. I have coded them. I have tested them. I have optimised and tuned them. I have marketed them. I have demonstrated them. I have sold them. I have implemented them on end-user systems. I have helped users to set up their business data. I have trained users. I have provided open-ended telephone support. Yet, since the advent of formal qualifications in this field, I am not allowed to refer to myself, or hold myself out to practice, as a computer software *engineer*.

This is because I do not have a degree in computer science and I am not a member of the British Computer Society. Being unemployed and existing on State [welfare](#) I simply cannot afford the cost of taking such a degree and I do not qualify to become a software engineer in the eyes of the British Computer Society. And since I am over the age of 50, there is no financial assistance from the State. In any case to take a degree in this field would teach me nothing, certainly not in the light of the intense leading-edge personal study which I have done over my 10 years of unemployment. Furthermore, to spend 3 years taking such a degree at this stage in my life and career would be boring, unbearable and soul-destroying.

The result is that I am barred from work at, and extending considerably below, my capability. In fact, I am in effect barred from all work within the IT industry. This is because one or more self-appointed

exclusive professional cliques have engineered themselves into positions which empower them to decide who shall and who shall not be permitted to work in their industry. Their decisions are not based on the material reality of a person's knowledge, experience and achievements. They are based on pieces of paper which in my case are over 30 years old. There was no such thing as a computer science degree at the time I took my degree.

Such institutes do have certain associate or affiliate membership grades. Nevertheless I decline these for two reasons. Firstly, on State welfare, I cannot possibly afford the subscriptions. Secondly, they do not in any way reflect what I am. Consequently I refer to myself as a software artisan or developer rather than as an engineer. I think I am still allowed to do this. Notwithstanding, the state of *not* being a member of an appropriate professional body automatically and undeservedly brands me forever as a cowboy.

Corporate Control

The wealthy and powerful family cliques I mentioned earlier do not like to expose their capital to risk. They do not want to lose it. They want to keep it secure. On the other hand, the more lucrative ventures are usually the more risky. Their solution is therefore surreptitiously to off-load as much of the risk as possible on to others. Preferably on to unwitting hoi polloi rather than on to others of their own kind. The need for a means for reducing capital risk was first realised during the vast expansion of British world trade at the beginning of the 19th century. Many gained fortunes. Others lost all. The solution was the [limited liability company](#). A wealthy individual could then invest a small part of his capital in a risky venture without the risk of creditors being able to claim the rest of his personal fortune if the venture went badly wrong. As a result, today these wealthy elite trade exclusively through these faceless corporate entities which insulate them from the raging tempest we call the free market.

Common man is constantly fed with an image of an economy in which companies of all sizes are locked into constant competition for his custom. But the owners and directors of the larger companies - the ones which matter - invariably are members of that same wealthy elite who meet, socialise and talk at the 'annual bash'. They are the same bunch of jolly good chaps who all scratch each other's backs and help each other out in their common endeavour of exploiting the deluded masses. There is no getting away from the fact that they constitute an exclusive clique. Consequently and inescapably, therefore, the corporate entities through which they trade are a cartel. There is nothing on paper. There is no tangible evidence to prove it. Nevertheless, the statistical behaviour of the market towards any unaffiliated individual strongly and inexorably suggests it.

Apart from the power to capture the market by mass advertising and corporate image, the clique has a further way of excluding the outsider from his market share. This is the [proprietary qualification](#). Once a corporate has gained a dominant share of its market, it is able to dictate that only approved outsiders are qualified to operate and maintain its products. To obtain such a proprietary qualification, an independent artisan has to pay. He also has to meet whatever criteria the dominant corporate arbitrarily decides to impose. In other words. The dominant corporate lays down the conditions under which he will or will not be allowed to practice. Though this may carry no legal force, it is invariably every bit as effective, often more so. Proprietary qualifications have thus closed the door to my getting the kind of self-employed work I did for over 15 years.

This elite clique of rich individuals thus now own the market in exactly the same way as their forebears owned the land. The Companies Acts enabled them to commandeer the free market in the same way as the Enclosures Act gave their forebears the mandate to commandeer the land. In both cases, common man almost instantly became deprived of his free and fair share of the natural means

of turning his labour into his needs of life. The lone artisan with no elite family connections is thus securely locked out from any share in the only market for his hard earned skills.

State Constraint

In a purported bid to exorcise the industry of the cowboy operator, the State inevitably finds it necessary to interfere. This recently took the form of a standard for service provision called BS5750. This was later transmuted into an international standard ISO9000.

Having been on a large number of contact databases over many years, my former business was invited to apply for approval under these standards. The literature required the candidate organisation to draft out written procedures which departments and employees would expedite to ensure that output was to a satisfactory quality. They recommended 'consultants' to help with or supervise the drafting. These were normally self-declared 'consultants' who were otherwise unvetted. My impression was for the most part that it was a 'jobs for the lads' situation. The BS5750 documents which resulted usually contained generalised highly subjective statements about what the company concerned would 'endeavour' to do to ensure that its products and services were of a bone fide quality and standard.

Since I was the only productive worker in my business I saw the BS5750 standard as irrelevant. I did not need to write admonitions to myself about working to acceptable standards. I did that anyway. My motive was interest in my work and the desire to maintain a good reputation. Nevertheless, I was told that I ought to produce a BS5750 document and become 'approved'. What I had to do was simply produce a document containing a statement of my intent to work to an acceptable standard. It seemed to me to be tantamount to providing myself with an open reference. Like witnessing my own signature. In fact, the whole thing - irrespective of the size of the business to which it was applied - seemed to be exactly that. It was nothing short of brazenly vouching for one's own honesty, except that because it was done through an official instrument, the market at large would somehow be hoodwinked into seeing it as credible.

Having been thus approved, the business - large or small - could put a little flash on its headed stationery to the effect that it was an 'officially approved' supplier or provider. To me it stank of bullshit. I could not bring myself to go along with something which seemed so false. Another such self-approval scheme which came later was called 'Tick IT'. This too sported a catchy little flash on ones headed stationery which shouted 'bone fide', 'officially approved' 'reliable', 'dependable', 'quality'. But again the hapless punter never had sight of any tangible form of assurance or regulation which may or may not have been behind it. To my mind they are all practically meaningless.

A different kind of State imposition which came in during the zenith years of my former businesses was the requirement to register with an official registrar if you did this or that kind of business. I did work for a certain client. The client had more work than I could handle myself. He asked me if I knew anybody else who I could employ on the project to speed the project. I found two people. We were all home based. Later, the same client asked if I could find the right kind of person to work on another project and suggested that to keep things conveniently coming from a single source and bolster my business I could hire the new person and subcontract him out to the client. This I did. Later, others were taken on board. The work often involved us individually travelling to various parts of Europe. We would visit foreign companies to gather information and then return to the UK. Unpredictably, it would be necessary for some of my people to work on the client's or even the client's client's premises for a sustained period. This was operationally no problem.

Then along came a package of silly legislation. This decreed that anyone subcontracted by me who was working on a client's premises under the client's supervision caused me to be deemed an

employment agency. But I was not an employment agency. I did not advertise. I did not subcontract people outside my own personal domain of technical expertise. I was a simple prime contractor subcontracting effort to my client.

Whether a subcontractor of mine was working under the client's supervision or merely working as an information gatherer under his own initiative was more of a philosophical conundrum than an administrative construct. The demarcation between the two was not definable. However, the penalty for violating the legislation was severe and the fee for registering as an agency was uncomfortably high. At least it was on the established margins on which I was operating. Employment agencies who supplied contract staff to my client made some rather pointed comments about my operation, although none of them was remotely equipped to do what I was successfully carrying out for the client. The area of the law was so grey and the atmosphere so tense that when that client shut down its UK operation I decided to get out of that business and not pursue it further.

The other piece of hob nailed legislation which made my life very uncomfortable was the [data protection act](#). This required that anybody who kept personal data like names and addresses on a computer had to register with the data protection registrar. This was relaxed to include only personal data which was in databases capable of selecting personal data according to criteria such as geographic region or subjects of interest. Since practically all databases are capable of doing this it essentially changed nothing.

It meant that everybody who had so much as a Christmas card list held on a selective database engine had to pay the fat registration fee to the registrar and be recorded as a data keeper. All that is, except those from whom the individual really needs protection, namely the instruments of the State. Again there are penalties for non registration if you are liable to register. At one time I was given to understand that you could even have your equipment confiscated. Nevertheless, the fee has always been beyond my meagre means. It was obviously pitched at reasonably sized companies. Therefore, officially, I have no client information. Nor do I have any contact details for relevant people within prospective employer organisations for the purpose of finding work. How I manage I don't know. The data protection act is thus yet another means through which those in power *restrict* who may practice and trade within the *free* market.

Conclusion

Though I wouldn't change it for the world, my family's traditional ethos is not conducive to faring well in an unbridled capitalist free market. Even less so now than it was in my formative years. My generation had universal education. My children's generation does not. Their tertiary education would have to be paid for. Grants for the underprivileged would never allow them to function as their privately funded peers.

The capitalist free market is not a simple flat plain with a pool of employees on the one side flowing smoothly across to fill a steady procession of jobs benevolently provided by a fair and ordered economic system of employers on the other. On the contrary, it is a putrid convolution of social and economic cells, cliques and hierarchies which are sustained and perpetuated by an elite who hide behind their faceless limited liability corporations which protect them from the very tempests they themselves stir up in the free market ocean, and on whose fury the rest of mankind must ride. The free market is an elite domain. It is their sovereign possession. To them alone it yields its riches. As for me, as indeed for all hoi polloi, there is a wall of iron barring my way to its bounty.

The weapon by which the artisans of old tried to fight back has become a shadow of that which it sought to dislodge. The artisanic guilds have themselves become secret and exclusive cliques which are both economically and socially divisive. They favour their own and ostracise others arbitrarily

and unfairly. They have regard for neither merit nor virtue. Though less secretive, professional institutes do much the same. They exclude according to criteria which are far from necessary and sufficient to determine an individual's *non-qualification* to practice. I am convinced that these have been a positive contributor to the fruitlessness of my efforts to get work for which I am suited.

The artisanic guilds and the professional institutes do command some small amount of power and control over the free market. At least, in the domain of professional and skilled labour. This must be a thorn in the corporate side. The corporate masters of the free market would, where possible, endeavour to neutralise that power and take it for themselves. Through the instrument of proprietary qualification, they are increasingly succeeding. This allows corporate interest to determine who is and who is not qualified to practice in their market. It thus further renders the market even more exclusive, their conditions and charges closing the door on many with a whole lifetime of knowledge and experience in the field.

Finally the State, probably in a context of bundling ignorance, seeks to 'protect' the consumer by establishing standards. But these are nothing more than words on paper. Self-recommendations. Bullshit. Costly ministrations which achieve no good, yet dispense much ill by excluding from the marketplace those otherwise good providers who have neither the money nor the resources to humour the legislators.

7) Unfair Foreign Competition

Exponents of a global free market are obsessed with the idea of maintaining a 'level playing field' in which every individual and every business must fend for itself in a world wide free-for-all. But while the world is divided into self ruling nations with different currencies, the 'playing field' can never be level.

A cleaning service, by its very nature, can only sensibly be done by somebody who is *local* to where they do the cleaning. It makes no sense for a person or business in the UK to hire a cleaning service provided by a firm based in India or the Caribbean. As a result, a cleaning service provider and his market is completely contained within a small locality. The proprietors of competing cleaning services generally all live and work in the same locality. Their costs and living expenses are roughly the same. They operate on a level playing field.

Other kinds of businesses operate in a nation-wide market. There may be variations in the local costs and prices of things in general. However, prices of goods and services which are exchanged on a nation-wide basis tend to gravitate towards a single national level. Individuals and businesses who operate in a nation-wide market therefore also, for the most part, operate on a 'level playing field'.

But this is not the happy situation for individuals or businesses who, by the very nature of what they do, reluctantly and unwittingly find themselves in a global market. I am a computer programmer. The kind of work I do can be done equally well anywhere in the world. It can also be delivered to anywhere else in the world in seconds. Distance and national boundaries are irrelevant. For me to write computer programs it is not necessary for me to be in my brick box in the endless boring suburbia of South East England. I could be anywhere in the world where there is access to the Internet.

Don't kid yourself. Academic levels in the Third World are every bit as high as they are in the West. India, the Pacific Rim, Latin American countries now have software engineers, systems analysts and programmers who are every bit as good as we are. And despite former embargoes, the countries of the former Soviet Union have world class experts who are equally well versed in *our* latest hardware, software techniques, programming languages and development tools. I know! They sent me some samples, one of which was an image processing suite which, in my opinion, is second to none.

The problem this gives me, and those like me, is that these foreign sources can provide these same software development services at about [a tenth the price](#). The result is that our government and our captains of industry jump at the opportunity to buy software services at such low prices from these Third World providers, leaving us unemployed and languishing on State [welfare](#). Their attitude to our predicament is that we must simply become more competitive. Any form of national protectionism would be anathema to their political ideology. They are determined to uphold their free-market dogma of maintaining what they perceive to be an international 'level playing field'.

What seems to have escaped them in their blind pursuit of their free market dogma is that it is not *we* (programmers etc) who are uncompetitive. It is they - their national economy - which is uncompetitive. We can compete easily with Third World software experts on a fair and equal basis. Our misfortune is that we have to do our competing from within an uncompetitive national economy. The UK economy is so uncompetitive compared with the former-Soviet and Third World economies that it cannot hope to provide an honest hard-working productive software expert with a living - or even a basic existence - for the amount of money it is now prepared to pay for his services.

To place us on the same so-called 'level playing field' as our former-Soviet and Third World competitors, the UK government would have to, among other things:

- instruct UK supermarkets and stores to sell us our food and consumables at the same prices as an Indian street market or Russian State store
- instruct our clients that, when we turn up on a 1957 Lambretta motor scooter wearing jeans and sweater, they take us as seriously as if we had arrived in a BMW wearing a suit
- remove all cost and tax differentials with our Third World competitors on equipment, overheads and profit
- provide us with the same level of help, state subsidies, trade preferences and protections with which their governments provide them

The fact is that, while different currencies exist between which the exchange rates are determined daily by the whims of free market forces, this can never happen. So long as the price (in roubles) of a loaf of bread in Russia is not directly equal to the price (in £s) of a loaf of bread in Britain, there will be no equivalence between the cost of an hour of a British programmer's time and the cost of an hour of a Russian programmer's time.

Therefore a British programmer can never compete with a Russian programmer in a global market. The result must be that the software development industry in Britain must die as did the cotton industry and many others before it. This will quickly lead to an intense [polarisation of skills](#) on a global scale. The Third World will then doubtless hold British industry to ransom by raising its prices which British industry will then have no option but to pay. Moreover, in the event of war or sanctions, Britain could find itself unable to obtain such expertise anywhere at any price.

8) Corporate Bullying

Where there is no law, the mighty prosper: the weak languish. Under rule of law, they who prosper are they for whose benefit the law was made. The law was made to protect the rich from the poor. Its justice has a price that only the rich can afford. Under the rule of law the rich prosper: the poor languish.

The Rule of Law

One can imagine human society in many forms. At its most basic, order is established by a minority, who are both strong and selfish, enforcing their will upon those who are not. The next stage is where dominance is held by a minority who are each skilled in the use of a particular weapon. So far, whether a marauding Viking or a wild west gun fighter, the ruler was also the *enforcer* of his rule. He was the quintessential bully.

Then came the idea of hiring muscle. One who had already gained dominance, and the wealth it had won him, switched to having others enforce his will for him in return for a wage. Perhaps he was getting old. He now restricted himself to deciding what the rules should be, leaving his hirelings to enforce them upon those over whom he ruled. Local populations grew and merged to form nations. This forced local rulers to coalesce into national governments. As a result, local rulers' hireling enforcers became restructured into police forces. These now enforced national law on behalf of national government.

But exactly who is the national government? It is the former local rulers come together to form a centralised ruling minority. How did they each gain their dominance? It was not through brute physical strength. It was not through skill with a weapon of combat. It was through their skill with the weapon or persuasion. It was their skill in the use of the spoken word. It was through their opportunities to build upon their inherited social connections. It was having the means to stand for election. Apart from a few notable exceptions, they are either rich, or lap dog hirelings sponsored by the rich.

He who pays the piper calls the tune. The laws which members of a legislature enact will inevitably benefit their sponsors. In other words they are formulated to preserve and protect the rich, their wealth and their interests from acquisition, erosion and theft by the poor. To maximise its effect, the law is brought to bear upon each individually. To defend oneself when accused of violating it is costly. Only the rich can afford 'justice'. The poor man does not have the means to defend himself against the laws of the rich. Accusation is conviction.

The penalty of the *rich man's law* is then physically executed upon the poor by the rich man's hireling. He is the civil servant or the [policeman](#) who, for a wage, prostitutes himself as its blind instrument of enforcement, leaving behind his conscience and his reason as he hurries off to work each day. But the enforcer cannot escape his guilt. He cannot hide it behind the bastion of official or corporate anonymity. His plea of "I am only doing my job" has no moral substance. Whether he be following prescribed rules or his own considered judgement; whether enforcing them with the gun or the pen, an executive of any kind is always personally responsible for the fruits of his deliberate actions upon another human being. Who is the murderer - the assassin or his hirer?

In the basic state of society where the rule-maker was his own enforcer, he witnessed first hand the reality of what he was doing. Conscience and consequence were forever before him. Not so now. Those who make the rules are distant from those on whom they are brought to bear. Out of sight out of mind. The conscience of the law maker is insulated from the reality of his actions. Since he does

not make the law, the enforcer too is insulated from the reality of what he does. No matter how vile or reprehensible his task of enforcement may be, he appeases his conscience with the words, "Well, I'm only doing my job." The upshot is that the law maker and law enforcer together form a faceless monster which dispenses evil and injustice to many who have done no wrong.

The Power of Wealth

The rich are those who own the Earth. They alone have the power to decide if, when and how the natural resources of the planet's mantle and biosphere are deployed to transform human labour into the needs of life. At any given time, the world wide community of the rich can deploy as much or as little of the planet's resources as they see fit. Their sole motive for deploying any of the resources they possess is to provide for themselves - to fulfil their own needs and desires: nobody else's.

If the rich worked, they could apply their own labour directly to the land and resources they possess and thereby generate their own needs of life. In this case they could only ever deploy a very small fraction of the vast resources they possess. The rest would lie fallow. Nevertheless, they could produce and exchange their needs among themselves as an exclusive closed economy. It would not be a very advanced economy, but there is no reason why it should not work. By possessing the wealth-generating resources of the planet, and being free to deploy them to produce their own needs, the rich do not *need* the poor. They can survive (and indeed prosper) very well without them.

The poor are those who possess none of the planet's natural resources. They possess neither land nor (what is purportedly its equivalent in a modern economy) capital. The poor man thus has under his control no means of turning his labour into his needs of life. To survive, he must hope that the rich man will employ his labour in return for a wage. So the poor *need* the rich. They cannot possibly survive without them.

Thus whereas the rich do not need to trade with the poor, the poor desperately need to trade with the rich. When the rich wish to buy from the poor it is therefore a buyer's market. But when the poor need to buy from the rich it is a seller's market. Hereby the rich dominate - and therefore in effect *possess* - the free market. Hence they own both the wealth generating resources of the planet *and* the global free market through which the wealth those resources generate is exchanged.

To the rich, therefore, the vast dispossessed majority of the Earth's human inhabitants is merely a natural resource like the land. It is there to be used if, when and how they wish. Under a system of law which is shaped specifically to benefit the rich and protect them from the poor, the rich certainly have no legal obligation to provide for anybody else but themselves: certainly not for the poor. The rich are unmotivated to employ the poor in return for a wage unless they perceive it to be to their own advantage. But to survive at all, the poor must continually offer themselves to the rich in a way which is sufficiently enticing to gain and hold their employ or trading custom.

Terms and Conditions

Under the morals of the capitalist free market, if I come across one dying of thirst in a desert, I can demand all that he has in return for a cup of water. This is the inflexible basis of every commercial relationship between the corporate and the individual. It is evinced by the fact that all such relationships are defined by agreements which are authored exclusively by the corporate and which the individual has no choice but to accept in full without alteration or not enter into at all. Since the individual (or more generally, the smaller party) is in the position of *having* to enter into an agreement with at least one corporate, he has no choice but to sign at least one such agreement.

Corporates invariably print their terms and conditions in a pale microscopic typeface on a shaded background of almost the same colour. What other purpose could this possibly have been designed to serve other than to discourage reading? Once upon a time I was about to enter into one such typical corporate 'standard' agreement after having read a leaflet. However, neither I nor my wife nor my daughter (even with our reading glasses) could read the terms and conditions on the back. We had no difficulty at all reading the rest of the leaflet. This was one typical example of the corporate ploy to get hapless individuals to sign agreements without reading what they are committing themselves to.

If I made the law, I would introduce the notion of 'omission by de-emphasis'. This would prevent the rich and corporate from burying stings in small print which they inductively discourage their hapless customers from reading prior to commitment. I would deem that the legal importance of a piece of print be in proportion to its size. I would give all small print a supplementary status such that if anybody could read the large print, but not the small print, it would not be legally significant. But alas I am not a law maker, and corporate interests would never allow their puppet parliamentarians to ruin one of their main instruments of deception.

It is so easy and so frequent for somebody's signature to end up at the bottom of a long and complicated agreement they have never read or agreed to, especially in the world of modern word processors and graphics imagers. Individuals are frequently placed into a pressured situation to sign on impulse with two minutes to scan through and understand a complicated legal agreement. I have been subjected to this by official instruments who should know better. In my opinion no legal agreement can ever be safe and fair unless written out in full and signed entirely in the signatory's own hand.

Notwithstanding, under the present system, it is always the larger stronger party which dictates the terms of any commercial 'agreement'. This results in their getting the lion's share of the proceeds and cast iron legal protection. The smaller or weaker party has only the choice to accept or reject the 'agreement'. And if he accepts it he will get little reward and be legally vulnerable.

A Means of Oppression

Sadly, computer projects often turn sour. When they do it is invariably the individual who is made the scape goat. He is branded as the obvious cowboy while all corporate contributors to the project use their power and influence to sustain their impeccable reputations. One particularly [painful example](#) springs immediately to mind.

All too many of the projects I did during the 15 years in which I ran my own business followed the same inevitable course. I did a technically proficient good quality job. The immediate users of what I had produced were happy and satisfied. Yet I was for ever poised on the brink of ruination by legal proceedings threatened by inept and cowardly face-saving little shits hiding safely behind the power of their large corporate employer with its massive capital and its [limited liability](#).

The lone artisan cannot risk ruination through recourse to law. Whatever the law was intended to be, it is a weapon in the hands of the mighty with which they exploit and bully the weak.

Protection Unaffordable

The law of the land applies to each. No one is above the law. All are equal before the law. Nevertheless, the law of the land is not *applied* equally to each. This is because it is applied through an adversarial system. It is a battle between two adversaries. It is a form of armed combat in which the combatants' sole weapon is the law. The winner is he who has the greater skill in its use.

In the capitalist free market such skill can be bought. For a price. A high price. A price which the rich corporate can afford with ease. A price which would ruin the individual. The rich can afford to hire the best and most accomplished legal champions. The poor can afford nothing. In a legal battle between rich and poor, the rich hire a world class heavyweight champion. Against such the poor individual trying to defend himself is like a sick child entering the same boxing ring.

The rich and corporate therefore rest in the sure knowledge that an ordinary individual cannot harm them by means of the law. On the other hand, the ordinary individual has the Sword of Damocles forever poised above his head for the duration of any dealings he may enter into with the rich and corporate. He can of course take out some form of professional indemnity insurance against possible legal proceedings. But it is expensive. It has always been financially out of reach for me. Insurers, like all capitalists, are there to make a profit. To that end they cherry-pick the market for low risk high premium customers. And like most poor individuals I am not a cherry. I would certainly have to work for a long time without such protection in order to be able to afford it. As a result the lone artisan is very vulnerable before the law. He is the inevitable scape goat for any corporate executive seeking to hide a mistake or to satisfy his power-hungry ego.

Intellectual Theft

During the 1980s I spent over 15,000 hours of my own unpaid time developing a computer software package. It ran on industry standard personal computers and networks. That is a tremendous amount of human effort. I set about trying to sell it. More correctly I was trying to sell *licences to use* it. Over the 10 years I managed - with the help of a few sympathetic people - to sell 15 licences. Notwithstanding, considerably more people seemed familiar with my package than I would have expected from the number of licences I had sold. The probable reasons for this soon became apparent.

As the personal computer population exploded I began to witness a most disturbing phenomenon. Whenever I had occasion to visit an organisation which used personal computers I would invariably - and I do mean invariably - see a couple of employees ensconced in front of a computer. Their conversation would typically go as follows.

"You mean all I have to do is enter my figures and it produces a balance sheet and profit & loss account automatically?"

"Yes, I can do the entire end-of-year stuff in an afternoon. It used to take me a week!"

"Wow, I could certainly use this. Where can I buy a copy?"

"Buy one? What do you want to do that for? I didn't pay for this! Bring in a couple of diskettes tomorrow and I'll run you off a copy. Mum's the word! I won't say anything if you won't."

"Great! Thanks. See you tomorrow."

Often, the person receiving the copy was not an employee of the company concerned. He was an employee of a service provider or even a self-employed service provider with his own little business. One such individual once boasted to me that he had over £4,000 worth (circa 1987) of software on his computer which he had acquired in this way. And he was exceedingly proud of this achievement.

Of course people like this take for granted the salaries they receive for the work they do. They take for granted that they should charge the same high fees for the same service when the software they have stolen enables them to do it in less than a tenth of the time. They give no thought about what the programmers of all this software they steal are supposed to live on - especially those who, though [personal circumstances](#), are self-employed developers whose only income is from the sale of user licences. They simply assume unconditionally that ipso facto all software people are highly paid and rich. This could not be further from the truth.

Whenever I have expressed my disgust at what they are doing, such people look aghast. It appears that their code of ethics requires that I and my family should quite rightly live in deprivation and misery so that they can steal my software, and that if I report them I am thereby a nasty treacherous bounder. The average person, it seems, does not see this as stealing. After all, they reason, what was originally there on the developer's computer is still there. Therefore nothing has been stolen. But this is fallacious reasoning.

I started my career in software in the days when computers were large and expensive. At that time software was developed specifically for each individual user. It too was expensive. The total development cost produced one copy. This method of software production was not viable in the personal computer market. So along came the idea of the software package. The same programs would be installed and configured in many computers owned by many different owners. The price of a package would be spread over all the many people who would buy a licence to use it.

At the then going rate for programmers, the time I spent developing my package over 8 years during the 1980s came to about £¼ million. I sold each copy for £300 for a single user licence + £120 for each additional user on a network. An average sale was for a 5-user network. The average revenue was therefore £900. Ignoring the cost of selling, I had to gain at least 278 installations to break even. I expected to surpass this by far. In fact I never sold more than 15. The 'stolen' copies represented (at least part if not more than) the remaining 263 times £900 which in effect I had invested in the package. This loss compounded the stress of my already difficult family circumstances.

How is the software developer meant to survive if at all? Is he not worthy of his 'meat' for the effort he has put into developing his software? I think he is. But who is going to pay for what he can get just by copying straight from a willing user's computer? And who is to know? I do not have the means to police every company in the world to see who is illegally using my software. I therefore have no way of knowing who the illegal users are. Even if I did, I have no power to go into their offices to check or stop them.

As a lone individual with no capital I cannot afford to protect my software. I cannot afford to join any 'Federation Against Software Theft'. I cannot afford to copyright, patent or register my software, especially not in foreign countries such as the USA. Any individual or corporate is therefore quite free to copy or reverse-engineer all or part of it. I cannot of course afford recourse to law. That would be suicidal. Even if I manage to open up a small market niche then sooner or later a large corporate will spot an opportunity for profit and wipe me out of the market.

Software is so easy to copy. Get a box of diskettes and any employee of a licensed user company can copy many thousands of hours worth of software (and data) in a few minutes of his lunch hour without detection. He can then take it home to use on his own personal computer if he has one, or take it to a new employer when he changes his job or starts up on his own. He can even sell it.

None of the legal or technical attempts at solving this problem is effective. Software is something which simply does not lend itself to being sold on a commercial basis. I as a dedicated hard-working software developer could never gain a fair or viable income by selling my expertise or products in a capitalist free market. There has to be a better way - an alternative economic system. Personally, I

would rather have been provided with my adequate needs of life during the 15,000 hours it took to develop my package and then let whoever wanted to use it do so freely.

Non-payment

I have left the absolute killer until last. It is the ultimate, and by far the most devastating and destructive form of corporate bullying. It is the delayed or non-payment of money owed. It leaves the lone artisan with absolutely no idea when - or indeed if - he will be paid for what he has provided. Bills keep coming in. The money keeps going out. The overdraft keeps getting bigger and bigger. It passes the credit limit he has agreed with the bank. A penalty interest rate kicks in. Interest and surcharges accrue. But still the proverbial cheque in the proverbial post has not arrived months after the proverbial 30 days have expired. Stress mounts. He can no longer concentrate properly on his work.

He must interrupt his work to make the daily uncomfortable phone calls to his clients' accounts departments. The reply is always one of a predictable set of stock lies.

- "You *should* have received it by now. I'll chase it up."
- "The cheque's in the post. / I posted it this morning. / It went off yesterday."
- "We haven't had the invoice yet."
- "The manager concerned hasn't cleared the invoice for payment yet."
- "The person dealing with your account is on holiday / off sick."
- "The manager went abroad on business without signing it off."
- "The financial director's put a hold on it for some reason."

The true answer is, "We haven't paid you yet because we want to keep your money so that we can gain interest from it and bolster our cash flow at your expense." Which, of course, the person on each end of the telephone knows full well but never mentions.

Once the above category of lies starts to wear thin, some accounts people move on to a second and more dastardly category of lies such as.

- "We never gave you the official go-ahead for this work."
- "It appears there was some query as to the quality of your work."

I have often been fobbed off by the latter. Each time, I would telephone the person for whom I actually did the work and say, "What's this your accounts department is telling me about my work not being up to standard? Why didn't you tell me?" Each time their surprised reply would be, "I don't know what they're on about. Your work is A-OK, second to none." I phone their accounts department again. They insist that 'somebody' placed a hold on payment because there was a query as to the quality of the work. So it goes round in a viscous circle. Of course, there was nothing wrong with my work. It was always merely yet another, particularly reprehensible, ploy for delaying payment.

At the end of the 1980s a deep recession started to bite. This tended to increase the lengths of payment delays and the incidences on non-payment. It rapidly reached the point at which the one-man business could no longer function - mine included. On the 2nd July 1989 I wrote to my MP on this matter. He sent my letter to the appropriate government minister. The essence of the reply which he forwarded to me from the minister was that small firms did not tend to take up their option of recourse to law.

This is the typical inane reply one expects from the average government minister. This one I think had personal assets at the time of £43 million. It is therefore unreasonable, I suppose, to expect such a person to understand the economic universe as perceived from the point of view of a self-employed

artisan who has not been paid for 9 months or more and, as a result, is currently debt-ridden and penniless. The law regards the large amount of money owed to the hapless artisan as his. He is therefore not without means and so does not qualify for legal assistance. The fact that the money is not even in his possession and is therefore beyond his control seems to be immaterial. The lone artisan's corporate adversary - his debtor - on the other hand has unlimited means (including the money it owes him) with which to mount an unassailable legal defence.

To take legal action against non-payers is dangerous for another reason. I have taken such action only to find that the company to whom I had supplied thousands of pounds worth of goods and service was actually on paper worth about £10. That is all I could ever hope to get as a result of legal action. In return for this I would incur hundreds of pounds in legal costs. This is because, in the meantime, the directors of the company have dispersed its assets throughout a convenient string of other companies which they also own. Thus they keep their expensive houses. Their children continue to attend their expensive fee-paying private schools. For what purpose could the laws of [limited liability](#) (which allow this to happen) have been enacted other than to provide the idle rich with a devious mechanism for ripping off the industrious poor?

Many like me with whom I have discussed this subject agree with me that law is an option only available to the rich and corporate as a viable means of recovering debts. To the lone self-employed artisan, if he does not qualify for full legal aid, it is economic suicide. If the corporate rich decide that they don't want to pay, they don't have to.

The usual payment scenario for me went as follows. A client requests a product or service from me. I supply the product or service and invoice them for it. Time passes. The money never arrives. I chase it. The proverbial cheque in the proverbial post never actually materialises. Then months later they want another product or service from me, or some addition or modification to the product I have previously supplied to them. I refuse to do anything until I have been paid. Two weeks or a month pass. The cheque eventually arrives. I supply the new product, service or modification. I invoice them for it. Then I wait. And wait.

Once upon a time I refused to provide a software upgrade to a bad payer until I had received and cleared their cheque in advance. I got an impatient phone call from a woman in their accounts department asking my fax number. When I asked why she wanted it (I don't have a fax anyway) the woman replied that she wanted to fax me a copy of the cheque so that I could go ahead and implement the upgrade immediately. I jokingly asked her if she thought my bank would accept a faxed cheque. She said no, but it proved that she had written it out and was about to (proverbially?) 'post' it off to me. I said that I did not see the point and declined. The actual cheque arrived by post two weeks later. It always amazes me how the postal services seem to know when an envelope contains a cheque. They always seem to know which ones to 'delay'.

County Court rules (circa 1992) require a late payer against whom judgement is made to reimburse the creditor with interest at a maximum of 15%. I have to pay interest on my bank account at 26.4% plus fixed charges which works out at 43.2% APR on a £500 overdraft. Indeed, if the debtor has to pay interest at a similar rate it is cheaper for him to let it go to court than to pay. I think that the creditor should be able to claim at the rate he has to pay his bank so that he is not out of pocket.

I simply had to accept that I would not get paid for work I had done until the next time they wanted me to do some further work. This meant I would never actually get paid for the final piece of work. In the case of a one-off job or sale (such as the provision and installation of a piece of software) I would invariably have a very long wait before I got paid, and was highly likely never to be paid at all.

The sad fact is that where there is no self-enforcing legal Sword of Damocles poised above the heads of the rich to make them pay, then they won't. Their singular quest is to acquire wealth and then

acquire more. And they can only acquire more by taking it from the poor. So contrary to what the Minister said, I still think that if it be the intent at all of the government to restore the decimated confidence of one in business on their own, then some pain-inflicting means will have to be put in place to motivate the rich and corporate to honour standardised payment terms and periods.

The rich corporate masters of UK industry do not seem to realise that by treating small suppliers this way they are hurting themselves. They're shooting themselves in the foot. Given a choice, the self-employed artisan like myself will always choose to work for a client who pays, and pays on time. Certain foreign countries have laws which require companies, irrespective of their size, to pay within a specified time after invoice. If they do not, they have to justify their reason to an arbitrator who carries overwhelming legal power. Consequently if one works for corporates operating within such jurisdictions, one is paid on time. The stress and worry is removed. One works well and efficiently.

The upshot is that these foreign fast payers, are the ones who will always attract and hold the services of the best professionals. Consequently they are the companies which end up with the best-developed and hence potentially the most competitive products. The fast payer is also the one I will naturally respond to first in an emergency without the delay caused by having to clear up-front payments. Why cannot British companies see that it makes sound business sense to pay on time?

Non-payment is theft. But so is late payment. Both deprive the lone artisan of the use of what is *his* money - his capital. Both also deprive him of the interest he has to pay on the overdraft which it creates by not being there on time. They further deprive him of the interest his money could earn by being in his account. Both are forms of theft. Nevertheless, when perpetrated by the rich and corporate, they seem in effect to be perfectly legal. At least, they incur no penalty. They don't even incur shame. In fact, getting away with late or non-payment is regarded among them as clever. It improves *their* cash flow. And this is a commendable end which, in their eyes, well justifies the suffering and misery it inflicts on others.

So even on the rare occasions when the market does condescend to buy from the lone artisan, he is faced with the foreboding spectre of never receiving payment for what he does. This can cause him, through no fault of his own, to become unable to pay others for what they have supplied or done for him. This earns him an undeserved bad trading reputation. It can ultimately force him out of business.

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