

## Footnote: Blaming Society

*Blaming yourself for your own predicament is easy. Nobody will ever condemn you for blaming yourself. But blaming society requires courage. For by so doing you reap the indignation of all. [PDF]*

For many years after I became unemployed, I embarked on a serious and desperate quest to find out what was wrong with me. I agonised long and hard over personality, interview technique, résumé content and presentation, clothing, appearance, manner, face-to-face psychology. I read books on these subjects. I attended job clubs and seminars. I did improve myself considerably. But there came a point at which, no matter how much harder I tried or however much more I studied or practised, very little further improvement became possible. I had reached a barrier. I had passed the point of diminishing returns.

Yet I still had no job. I still could not get any work. I had come up against barriers over which I had no control. For instance, no matter how determined I was, I could never reduce my age. Not even Frank Sanatra's dam-busting ram can do that. Impenetrable barriers do exist. I had put right as much about myself as I possibly could. There may still be things wrong with me, but I had to face the real and present fact that there was a lot more wrong with society as a whole.

Most people seem to think poorly of any who would blame society instead of self. They seem to think that blaming society is the malingerer's way of diverting people's attention away from his own faults and justifying his lazy neglect of social duty. But they're wrong. Blaming self for one's unemployment, poverty or lack of opportunity is easy. Nobody will ever condemn you for blaming yourself. But blaming society requires uncommon courage. For in so doing you stand alone against the collective indignation of all who consider themselves part of society.

I have been in the Jobcentre many times. There I have often witnessed a very distraught claimant shouting in overwhelming frustration as the clerk tells him his benefit has been stopped because a petty nonsensical rule appears to have been inadvertently violated. The clerk's argument, as usual, makes no sense in the wider context of the human right to the basic needs of life. The claimant's anger is in every way justified. The clerk cowers under the onslaught of the claimant who is terrified over how he can sustain the lives of his wife and children until he can find a job. A supervisor appears, telling the claimant forthrightly that neither she nor the clerk are paid to put up with such abuse.

In fact, putting up with such 'abuse' is exactly what the clerk is paid for. The clerk did, of free volition, accept her job and its salary to represent the Secretary of State for Employment and Skills, who implacably expedites the rules of benefit disbursement laid down by Act of Parliament, whose members are consequently responsible for the form and actions of these rules. Between them, the rudderless meanderings of an omnipotent socially dysfunctional free market economy and the ruthless blinkered application of idiot rules, have trapped this hapless claimant between a rock and a hard place. He has every right and reason to be exceedingly angry. Hence, as the sole representative of the authors and executors of those rules to the claimant, it is most certainly the clerk's paid job to face that anger.

Observing the attitudes, reactions and body language of other staff and claimants in the Jobcentre, what do I see? I see all - staff and claimants alike - exchanging sighs and glances in unanimous support of the clerk against the irate claimant. They all unthinkingly side with authority - the stronger party, without regard for the rights and wrongs of the matter. They all exhibit the same narrow, blind vacant trust that authority is always in the right and the individual is always in the wrong. There is

always something, they think, that the individual *ought* to have done, even though he had neither the necessary privy knowledge nor any means of acquiring it. They all take the easy cowardly option.

I go into a shop where a customer is complaining about, what is for all to clearly see, a substandard or faulty product. The sales assistant rebuffs the complaint saying it is not the company's policy to reimburse customers for returned goods. Again, the other customers exchange sighs and glances with the sales assistant in unanimous disapproval of the irate customer in blind trust that they could never possibly find themselves in the same position. They make the complainer - no matter how well justified his complaint - feel awkward and out of place. Again, cowards, one and all. It is so easy to side with the powerful, the corporate, the majority without taking thought as to what is right and what is wrong. It is so hard to stand up for the weak and down-trodden - the individual. The public always collectively construes any personal losses in a dispute with authority to be the injured individual's 'own fault'.

Mr & Mrs Average, it seems, have a blind and unshakeable faith that whatever may befall them, there is a clear procedure to follow and a government department to deal with their problem fairly and helpfully. This is a [deliberate illusion](#) fabricated by the establishment, which influences and controls society for its own selfish ends. And this illusion is perpetuated by virtue of the fact that the vast majority never has need to test the social mechanisms it so blindly trusts.

But those of us who have occasion to test certain of these social mechanisms know differently. I have laboured for over 30 years to try to earn a living under the burden of [my wife's mental illness](#). Neither medical professionals nor relatives ever had any real conception of the difficulties created by an inflexible and intolerant labour market under these circumstances. And since doctors didn't recognise the difficulties, they issued no pieces of paper acknowledging them. Without the necessary pieces of paper, our difficulties did not officially exist. Since they did not officially exist, society made no concessions and provided no help, but instead poured upon us its disapproval and condemnation as malingerers. There has to be something wrong with such a society.

The lone individual is not always right, but that does not mean he is always wrong, as society at large seems to presume. It is right and proper to blame society when society is to blame. And society - in the form of every individual within it - has a moral duty to cast off its self-satisfied apathy and its confrontational attitude, and humbly respond in a constructive and compassionate way.

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