

Footnote: Social Isolation

The poverty, to which State welfare subjects us, isolates us from the very society to which we are accused of not contributing. Our resulting deprivation of social contact erodes our social skills. This drains our confidence, reinforcing the economic latch that locks us into poverty. [PDF]

From Friends & Relatives

Our [food allowance](#) barely keeps us alive. There is nothing to spare. This has meant that we have nothing to spare to meet the cost of travelling to see friends and relatives. It has also meant that we can no longer invite relatives and friends to visit us. We cannot afford to feed them. There would be no chance of setting an inviting table before them. We certainly could not offer them a drink. We never have any. We cannot afford to have the lights on all over the house or the heating turned up to the comfortable level they would expect. So we cannot afford to go and see them: we cannot afford for them to come and see us. We are almost entirely cut off from those closest to us.

From Work Colleagues

The same is true of meeting colleagues at a pub or restaurant to become updated on industry news and work opportunities. I cannot afford to get there. I cannot even afford to be there. I cannot attend the free trade conferences where I could make useful contacts because I cannot afford to get there. Chargeable technical seminars are simply out of the question.

I desperately wanted to attend a technical workshop on neural networks. This would have given me technical insight into an area in which I was at the time considering re-skilling. It would have enabled me also to get to know other people in that area, including potential employers and possible service clients. But it would have cost me £95 plus travel to attend, so I could not attend.

I still get mailshots from organisers of industry seminars. These are the normal means of keeping up to date with technical developments. They are also essential for 'networking' with other professionals. The cost of attending a typical one or two-day seminar ranges from £200 to £1000. I would have to fast for 100 days to save enough money to be able to attend the cheapest one-day seminar. As a result I have lost all face-to-face contact with my former friends and colleagues in the industry in which I spent over 25 years of my life.

From Our Sons' School

My wife and I would like to take an active interest in our sons' schools. We would like to get to know other parents. We would like to be able to meet teachers on social as well as official occasions. We would like to attend school events like dinners, concerts and fêtes. But we cannot afford to do so.

We would also like our sons to be able to take part in extracurricular activities such as away-matches, camping weekends and school trips. But they cannot because parental money is required. So not only ourselves, but also our sons are deprived of key social contact. I cannot afford the 'preferred' text books and 'mandatory' accessories which the majority of their fellows have for their courses. They are the odd ones out in their not being able to go on the many field trips which are considered to be 'essential' parts of their curricula. They certainly cannot participate in extracurricular activities.

From Recreation & Hobbies

Special-interest groups, sports and social clubs and evening classes are also off limits. I would like to be able to take part in some form of sporting activity with my family. But I can't, because they all cost money. I have been interested from a very young age in short wave radio. The short wave receivers I built when I was young all wore out decades ago and went to the dump. I do not have, and certainly cannot afford, a short wave receiver today. I would dearly like to be able to buy - or even build - a modern short wave receiver. However, because of our poverty, my current endeavours in connection with [short wave radio](#) must remain entirely in the mind.

Even further education and training courses are not free to the unemployed if they are over 50. And the clubs which exist supposedly to help the unemployed to get back to work require money. One, which I attended for about a year cost £5 (2½ days' food) per weekly session. I managed to avoid having to pay by bartering my software skills. I helped the club proprietors to acquire and set up some new computer software.

They All Want Money

Today, there is one common element shared by all these mechanisms of social contact. It is the ever-open hand to take your money. Whether it demands it as a price of entry, expects it as a courtesy, or shames it out of you as a 'deserved' donation, its effect is the same. It excludes the poor. It drives us into social isolation. It effectively places us under what amounts to [house arrest](#).

The Detrimental Effect

Isolation results in loss of social skills and consequential loss of confidence. Being thus increasingly unable to sell myself, therefore, I become ever more securely locked into economic inactivity. My family is able to eat - though not well. We have clothing to keep us warm, but not of the kind or quality that would allow us to be inconspicuous members of the society of which we are supposed to be a part. We have our own shelter, but only because I had already bought and paid for it in full long before becoming unemployed. My sons are getting a good education, but not as full participants.

Conclusion

Like my house, my car and my domestic appliances; my [coterie](#) of personal contacts requires an adequate maintenance budget to keep it operational. State welfare provides adequately for none of these. It thereby cuts us off from society. It robs my sons of school and social opportunities most take for granted. It renders us unable to invite people to come and see us. It denies us freedom of travel more surely than would a martial curfew. I cannot go to visit friends or colleagues, nor can I chase work or business opportunities beyond my home town. It has enforced upon me what is effectively a communications blackout. I have a phone but I dare no longer use it. I ceased to return telephone calls, so my contacts stopped telephoning me. As a result I have lost my advocates, my referees and consequently my credibility. My family and I have become socially isolated with no way back. We are locked out.

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