

News from Somewhere

Stuart Blade

Land of the Free 1: The Market

Under capitalism only a few corrupt or lucky characters (bankers, entertainers and suchlike) become very rich. Long live the revolution! This old piece of folklore has a habit of being repeated in the face of all the evidence, but that is not going to deter me from presenting yet more evidence to show that becoming very rich is a better than a one in a million chance. In fact, in America the chances are considerably better than that. By the end of 1986 one American household in 100 had a net worth of one million dollars or more if we are to believe, *US News & World Report*. "The real way people make money is ... hard work for 30 years, six days a week," said Professor Thomas Stanley, a millionaire-watcher at the marketing department of Georgia State University. Entertainers, athletes, writers and the like make up less than one percent of the millionaire population. Eighty per cent of the elite group did not inherit their wealth, but came from middle or working class backgrounds. Most millionaires get rich simply by building a business to cater to the needs of the masses and have never worked in a bank or sung in a pop group. How dull!

Land of the Free 2: The State

John Campbell is a retired policeman in Annapolis, Maryland. He received a letter from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) saying that they had mistakenly overpaid him in the 1984 refund. The overpayment was \$600. They asked for the money *plus interest*, a total of \$743. Mr Campbell immediately posted them a cheque. Some months later the IRS wrote to Mr Campbell that they had received his cheque, but could not work out why he had sent it. They returned his money, plus interest: \$752. Mr Campbell took the letter and cheque to his local IRS office, explained what had happened, and handed them over. Then he started receiving a series of menacing letters from the IRS, asking for the money he had already returned, plus interest: \$792.

He took each letter to the IRS office and was assured that it was a mistake and he needn't worry. The months passed, then suddenly Mr Campbell found his £17,000 savings account frozen by the IRS, because he had not paid \$27.90 interest on the cheque they had sent him, which he had never cashed.

This seems to confirm the rumour that the power of tax collectors in the U.S. is a bit on the excessive side. Some individuals who visited the IRS to negotiate a payment plan have found their cars seized from the car park whilst they were inside negotiating. One response to this sort of thing is to ask for new rights for the taxpayer, protection against state bullying and the rest. I am not against this in principle, but it does not fill me with optimism. Anyone who treats the government as if it were an honourable institution which puts its customers first, should really reconsider their position. I, for one, am hugely entertained by my dealings with the Inland Revenue. Nine-tenths of an iceberg is supposed to lie invisible below the surface of the sea, and nine-tenths of a person's income should likewise be invisible to the taxman.

This may involve the occasional *contretemps* with the paid predators of the government, but any other course is utter madness and definitely not profitable.

A cut-throat business

Yet more restrictions for the valiant Polish entrepreneur. For the past four years a Polish hairdressers' and beauty parlour co-operative has been collecting 120 tonnes of hair cuttings annually and selling them in West Germany, where they are made into wigs. The profit amounted to 50,000 pounds a year. But rather than receive cash, which would have involved paying tax (see above for what then happens), the Poles sensibly chose to be supplied with scissors, curlers and, beating the Western technology boycott, special computers to calculate the length and quality of the permanent wave.

Now the Ministry for Trade (sic) has banned this kind of barter deal. The barbers may continue to export the hair, but they cannot

receive equipment in lieu. Instead they must take money which should then be deposited in a trading account in the state bank. Every time that the hairdressers want to buy a new pair of scissors from the West, they must apply for an allocation of hard currency and that will be hard to come by. With Poland's debt approaching \$30 billion, the government needs every penny. No folks, this is no time to let down your hair in Warsaw. Staying on for hours after work to sweep up hair only made sense if there was direct benefit to the salon. Baldly put, the hair-for-computers East-West trade has been nipped in the bud, not by hawks at the Pentagon, but by commies in Warsaw. The West can win!

1992 and All That

1992 is the year when internal trade barriers within the European Economic Community are supposed to be coming down. Unfortunately, not everything will be coming down. Alan Clark, the Trade Minister (sic) has won EEC support for a curb on the import of millions of pairs of cheap Chinese knickers and underpants which "were threatening British jobs". Mr John Harrison, director of the Knitting Industry Federation, told Clark that 28 million pairs of knickers - costing only 21p a pair - were snapped up by bargain-conscious British housewives in the first seven months of 1987 alone. "It is vital that some action is taken to stop this embarrassing and worrying trend towards buying cheap underwear," said Mr Harrison.

NHS turns a deaf ear.

Jimmy McElroy got involved in a drunken fight at Bonnie's Night Club in Catford one Saturday night. Not much unusual there except that when he got outside he discovered that one of his ears was missing. He dashed back into the club and found the ear, trampled on the dance floor. Earless in Catford is not much fun, so Jimmy dashed off to Lewisham Hospital and handed the ear to the doctors. They bandaged his head, sent him home, and told him to collect his ear in the morning. Meanwhile the ear was frozen.

Next day Jimmy was given his missing ear in a "little dish" and told to make his own way to the Queen Victoria Hospital, East

Grinstead to have it sewn back on. The operation was a success but Jimmy McElroy is still considering the possibility of legal action. "They should have sent me to East Grinstead with a police car escort so I could have had the chance of urgent surgery. Instead I had to get my mate to take it there in his car. All the time I had my ear on my lap in a little dish."

But surely there is another side to this story. The Queen Victoria spokesman for the "Best Health Service in the World" saw things rather differently. "Even if Mr McElroy had been sent here immediately from Lewisham, our on-call surgeon would not have been called out that night for *an operation of this kind.*" (My Italics). Hard cheese, Jimmy.

Hi-ho, Hi-ho, it's off to work we go (Government Permitting)

The Government has been urged to ban the despicable sport of dwarf-throwing. Twelve contestants are preparing to hurl a 30-year old dwarf through the air at the second British Dwarf Throwing Championship, due to be held at Canvey Island, Essex. The event was denounced by Tom Clarke, Labour's front bench social services spokesman. "This is a horrible kind of blood sport with an ugly twist," he said. Teddy Taylor, Tory MP for Southend chipped in: "Anything which attempts to make a joke out of people's infirmities is degrading and shameful."

But the championship organiser, Danny Bamford put the thing in perspective. Lenny the Giant (for that is the dwarf's name) would be in no danger. He wears a crash helmet and padding, and is thrown on to a mattress. Mr Bamford might have added that being thrown through the air must be an infinitely more pleasant experience than getting into the ring with Iron Mike Tyson and that's not illegal - yet. Lenny himself does not find the idea degrading, and has even suggested a new event, dwarf-conkers, in which two dwarfs are held upside down as contestants try to smash eggs fixed to their crash helmets.

What is more, Lenny picks up a cool 150 quid per evening for flying through the air. Nice work if you can get it.

The Libertarian Alliance is an independent, non-party group, with a shared desire to work for a free society.

N.B. The world record for Dwarf Throwing presently stands at 17ft 9in.

Dead Ringer?

The *News of The World* reports that a taxi driver who looks the spitting image of Salman Rushdie is hiding after a series of crazed attacks by Muslims. Saquib Bhatt has been assaulted in the street, rammed in his car and spat at by fanatics who are convinced he is the writer. "In the name of Allah, the nearest I have got to writing a book is to fill out my passport form... I'm too scared to go out. These mad Mullahs have wrecked my life with their crazy threats," said Saquib.

But the market does offer solutions to the trickiest of problems. Rumour has it that tee-shirts with the message I AM NOT SALMAN RUSHDIE will soon be on sale. Get one quick Saquib - while supplies last.

A Kidney in Time ...

(i) *The Times* reports that specialists have said that 200 people will die in Britain by the end of this year because of a fall in the number of kidneys available for transplant.

(ii) A number of poor people in the Third World want to sell their kidneys for not inconsiderable sums of money.

It seems so simple. Some people have their lives saved whilst some others have a dramatic rise in their standard of living. What is the British government going to do about it? You've got it. A bill is going through Parliament to ban "the obnoxious practice" of selling kidneys. If I am deliberately prevented from going to hospital for a life-saving operation by someone, and die as a result, that person could have an action for murder brought against him. How is it that governments can forcibly prevent life-saving operations and get away with it? Answer please to:

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