

Letter to a Young Intellectual about to Enter Industry

Letter to a Young Intellectual

“I find it rather easy to portray a businessman. Being bland, rather cruel and incompetent comes naturally to me.” — John Cleese, quoted in “Perspectives”, *Newsweek*, 6/15/87.

“Why should I let the toad *work*
Squat on my life?”

— Philip Larkin, “Toads”

“I hate all jobs. Why should I make distinctions?...You won’t catch me singing any hymns of praise...I’d shit on the whole lot of them if I could.” — Celine, Louis-Ferdinand, *Death on the Installment Plan*, New Directions, N.Y., 1971, p. 153.

“From the butchering of youth’s energies to the gaping wound of old age, life cracks in every direction under the blows of forced labor.” — graffito in a doorway in Berkeley

“It is not easy to work for others and accomplish much of anything.” — Descartes

“And many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in reality; for there is such a gap between how one lives and how one should live that he who neglects what is being done for what should be done will learn his destruction rather than his preservation: for a man who wishes to profess goodness at all times must fall to ruin among so many who are not good. Whereby it is necessary for a prince who wishes to maintain his position to learn how not to be good, and to use it or not according to his necessity.” — Machiavelli, Niccolo, *The Prince*, tr. and ed. by Mark Musa, St. Martin’s Press, N.Y., 1964, p. 127.

August 2, 1992

Dear —,

I can understand your decision to get a steady job and I think you are right in concluding that if you must waste time working for others, you might as well be well-paid for it. As you know, I decided many years ago that working in industry was the best way out of the dilemma faced by intellectuals like us who despise the university. Whether that was a good decision, I don’t know. In any case, the following thoughts, collected under various headings, are offered in hopes they will make the going less rough.

How to Survive in a Bureaucracy

First of all, I must tell you that the most important skills you will need to develop for a career in industry — far more important than any engineering or programming skills — are those which

are the equivalent of tradecraft in the spy business, namely, the political skills needed to survive in a bureaucracy — let's call them "bureaucraft". Of course, you already possess some of these or else you wouldn't have survived graduate school. They are summed up in Franklin's Rules:

- (1) Always show M & I (Motivation and Interest), i.e., always appear to be a Team Player.
- (2) Never tell anyone what you really think of them.

Regarding (1), let me assure you from experience that a highly productive worker who openly questions policies he thinks are foolish will be out on the street long before a worker who can maintain the impression of being a Team Player, even if he hasn't done a stitch of work in years.

The importance of maintaining Team Spirit became clear to me recently when I suddenly understood why it bothers managers and fellow programmers if you don't thoroughly learn the programming languages they are currently using. I had suggested that if we indexed the manuals thoroughly, the user would not have to memorize all those commands and parameters, and instead could simply look them up very rapidly when he needed them. But no one was very enthusiastic about the idea. Then I began thinking about the wars that have been fought over language throughout human history. Of course! Not to want to learn a community's language is to deliberately, blatantly place oneself outside the community.

There are other important rules. Perhaps they are best summed up by the following quote from Machiavelli's *The Prince* (which, unquestionably, you should read and re-read):

"Philopoemen, prince of the Achaeans, among the other praises that writers have bestowed on him, is praised because in time of peace he thought of nothing except the ways of making war; and when he was out in the country with his friends, he would often stop and debate with them: 'If the enemy were on top of that hill, and we found ourselves here with an army, which of us would have the advantage? How could we advance to meet them without breaking ranks? If we wished to retreat, how would we do it? If they were to retreat, how would we go after them?' and he brought up to them, as they went along, every predicament an army may find itself in; he would listen to their opinions, he would express his own, supporting it with reasons; so that, because of this constant meditation, when leading his troops no possible incident could arise for which he did not have the solution." — *Machiavelli's The Prince* (bilingual edition), Mark Musa, ed. and tr., St. Martin's Press, N.Y., 1964, pp. 123-124.

You should learn to read people's expressions, detect that glazing over of the eyes, that yawning and looking off into the middle distance, which tells you that you are boring your listeners, which you will tend to do often at first, because you love books and ideas and you will be surrounded by people who, for all their academic degrees, are among the most colossally dull people on earth. You should also learn to detect that unctuousness which is a sign that someone is about to do you in. A sense of humor is essential, not only because it will help you get through otherwise unbearable days of boredom and hopelessness, but also because middle managers seem to find it difficult to fire a Team Player who occasionally makes them laugh, no matter how unproductive he is.

By the way, you will probably run into people who will be shocked when you describe some of the techniques of bureaucraft I am setting forth, claiming that such techniques are nothing but means of deceiving and exploiting others. But these people miss the point, which is simply that the grocer and the landlord don't care one whit that the reason you are unemployed is that you have a pure soul. Bureaucraft is a tool for survival; if you work in an office that has such good managers and such able workers that it doesn't need to be applied, then it would be nothing less than appallingly bad taste to apply it!

Give Us This Day Our Daily Work

Over the years you will frequently find yourself feeling depressed, and you will not understand why. You will think: “Here I am working for an organization that pays me a good salary, gives me low-cost medical insurance and profit sharing and a chance to buy stock at a discount, probably won’t fire me if I observe Franklin’s Rules, an organization in which the boss never yells at me — *why am I so unhappy?*” The answer is contained in an ancient parable:

“The gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back because of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor.” — Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus”.

One source of your depression will be that you know that what you are doing is unnecessary: the world doesn’t really *need* the high-tech junk your company produces. All you are really producing is tomorrow’s solid waste.

It is a measure of the evil of this age that it pays so little attention to the importance of meaningful work. Listen:

“*Work and boredom* — Looking for work in order to be paid: in civilized countries today almost all men are at one in doing that. For all of them work is a means and not an end in itself. Hence they are not very refined in their choice of work, if only it pays well. But there are, if only rarely, men who would rather perish than work without any *pleasure* in their work. They are choosy, hard to satisfy, and do not care for ample rewards, if the work itself is not the reward of rewards. Artists and contemplative men of all kinds belong to this rare breed, but so do even those men of leisure who spend their lives hunting, traveling, or in love affairs or adventures. All of these desire work and misery if only it is associated with pleasure, and the hardest, most difficult work if necessary. Otherwise, their idleness is resolute, even if it spells impoverishment, dishonor, and danger to life and limb. They do not fear boredom as much as work without pleasure; they actually require a lot of boredom if *their* work is to succeed. For thinkers and all sensitive spirits, boredom is that disagreeable ‘windless calm’ of the soul that precedes a happy voyage and cheerful winds. They have to bear it and must wait for its effect on them. Precisely this is what lesser natures cannot achieve by any means. To ward off boredom at any cost is vulgar, no less than work without pleasure.” — Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Gay Science*, Vintage Books, N.Y., 1974, section 42, p. 108.

On the other hand, how could things be otherwise, when, on the one hand, fortunes are to be made by inventing machines that remove certain jobs from the marketplace, and on the other hand, academic careers are to be made by analyzing the problem of the unemployed, homeless, alienated, violent, underprivileged? Of course, being an intellectual, at first you will think that, because you have your own work — your studies, the books you are writing — what you do on the job shouldn’t matter. But this is wrong. The meaningless work of modern industry can destroy the best of us.

Speaking of which, I have a theory about the assumed incompetence of aging workers, namely, that this incompetence has little to do with loss of ability, but rather with boredom. After twenty or thirty years of doing the same thing over and over — and eventually every job in industry amounts to do doing the same thing over and over — you simply no longer give a shit. Doing the bare minimum that enables you to hold on to the job is a way of retaining your dignity.

Of course there is that myth, so beloved in the university, that meaningful work is something that only the educated require, indeed demand! The masses are not sensitive to such things. How

naive this belief is (to give the academics the benefit of the doubt) was brought home to me many years ago when I was working on an electronics assembly line. There were four or five of us. Our job was to wire the backs of control panels for jet fighter planes. The wires were soldered to various switches on the panel, then bundled together and tied with string, a process called “cabling” — you tied the string around the bundle, then ran it forward along the cable for an inch or so, tied it around, ran it forward another inch, etc. What could be more boring? Yet each of the men I worked with made a work of art out of it — in the way each joint was soldered just right, so that the solder hardened to a dull-bright silver just at the moment it had soaked around the wires and terminal, in the way the knots were tied, in the way the cables were bent. You could tell immediately who had wired a given panel by the style of the cabling.

(Remember the great line from *Babette’s Feast*: “From the ends of the earth one long cry goes up from the heart of the artist: Give me a chance to do my very best!”)

If there is little or no chance to make something beautiful, the only way work can be meaningful is by its producing something useful. If that is lacking, you are working with Sisyphus, and that is what you will be doing in most industrial jobs. Yet each day you will have to force yourself to take the next step, attend the next interminable meeting, knowing full well that all you are creating is sophisticated garbage.

The second source of your depression will go beyond the question whether the world gives you meaningful work or not; it will lie in your rage over having to work for others at all. Because you, like me, are an intellectual and artist, you have plenty of your own work to do; you will detest the *filth* of the idea that you must go to others for your work. Even if there is nothing for you to do on the job, you will be expected to “look busy” (a skill which becomes instinctive in every worker in a year or two). In other words, you must at all times appear to be doing someone else’s bidding, never your own. Nietzsche had nothing but contempt for the American style of work (which is now the world style), calling it “the distinctive vice of the new world”, which

“is already beginning to infect old Europe with its ferocity and is spreading a lack of spirituality like a blanket. Even now one is ashamed of resting, and prolonged reflection almost gives people a bad conscience. One thinks with a watch in one’s hand, even as one eats one’s midday meal while reading the latest news of the stock market; one lives as if one always “might miss out on something”. “Rather do anything than nothing”: this principle, too, is merely a string to throttle all culture and good taste. Just as all forms are visibly perishing by the haste of the workers, the feeling for form itself, the ear and eye for the melody of movements are also perishing. The proof of this may be found in the universal demand for *gross obviousness* in all those situations in which human beings wish to be honest with one another for once — in their associations with friends, women, relatives, teachers, pupils, leaders and princes: One no longer has time or energy for ceremonies, and for any *otium* at all. Living in a constant chase after gain compels people to expend their spirit to the point of exhaustion in continual pretense and overreaching and anticipating of others. Virtue has come to consist of doing something in less time than someone else...

“How frugal our educated — and uneducated — people have become regarding ‘joy’! How they are becoming increasingly suspicious of all joy! More and more, *work* enlists all good conscience on its side; the desire for joy already calls itself a ‘need to recuperate’ and is beginning to be ashamed of itself. ‘One owes it to one’s health’ — that is what people say when they are caught on an excursion into the country. Soon we may well reach the point where people can no longer give in to the desire for a *vita contemplativa* (that is, taking a walk with ideas and friends) without self-contempt and a bad conscience.

“Well, formerly it was the other way around: it was work that was afflicted with the bad con-

science. A person of good family used to conceal the fact that he was working if need compelled him to work. Slaves used to work, oppressed by the feeling they were doing something contemptible: ‘doing’ itself was contemptible.” — Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Gay Science*, tr. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, 1974, para. 329.

In Pursuit of Mediocrity

Since you are an American, you have been raised to believe in the importance of efficiency. But it is *inefficiency*, not efficiency, that is a major source of our wealth. The legal profession offers the most obvious proof of this. But in industry too, inefficiency, waste, duplication of effort, mean more jobs, which in turn require more managers, as well as more academics and business consultants to study the problems and devise and teach new solutions. “It’s much easier to get funding for a 200-person project than for a two-person project” runs an old saying among engineers at one of Silicon Valley’s model companies.

Now a modern corporation — and I work for one of the “excellent” ones, as you know — is a virtual pig-pen of waste and inefficiency, and if you ask why these corporations don’t go out of business, the answer is that all the rest are just as bad or worse.

And therein lies your hope. Because all this waste and inefficiency means there are lots of cracks and niches in which to hide and get on with the important business of your life, by which, of course, I mean *your* work, not the company’s. (Just as you should never let your schooling interfere with your education, so should you never let your job interfere with your work.) Intellectuals like us are the weeds that grow in the cracks of modern industry.

You may at this point, just for the sake of argument, remind me of all those books that appeared in the ‘80’s extolling the virtues of certain companies. I will reply that, as far as I know, none of those books was written by people who had spent any time actually working in the corporations they describe. As usual, the books were the work of the sycophants who thrive by telling the emperor what he wants to hear. A man I once worked with suggested to me that the business community would benefit greatly if someone wrote an insider’s account — a truthful account — of what happens in the course of the development of a typical computer or software system. I told him that I knew of no case in which a book or paper or article by an employee had produced any significant changes in the management practice of a large corporation. Even if the employee somehow gained access to all the company’s files, and reported their contents accurately (let us assume it is remotely possible that there could be a company whose files accurately represented the company’s history during some period), the managers could, and no doubt would, dispute unfavorable conclusions, and there would be no way for a useful debate to be carried on, since they would certainly not make public all their files.

I also told him of a proposal that several of us made in the ‘70’s shortly before the cancellation of a \$30-million project that our company had hoped would produce its next generation of computers. We approached the managers with the idea of developing a case history of the project — right then, while the information was still fresh and available — so that later projects could learn from the mistakes made on this one. The managers’ reply was no, because such a history might cause too many people to lose face.

Since this reply would probably be given by any group of managers under the same circumstances, it makes you wonder just what is actually taught in the nation’s business schools. Obviously, the schools teach basic skills such as accounting, and they teach sets of rules, e.g., the tax laws; they also provide informal models of business organization — or, to put it more accurately,

they teach students the meanings of the words most commonly used in business. They teach various theories of modern business and economics, but these theories can only be tested against publicly available data — annual reports, stock prices, news articles, government statistics. In twenty-seven years in three Silicon Valley companies, I have never seen or heard of anyone (from the company itself or from an outside institution) conducting research on the actual functioning of the company — sitting in on meetings, talking to and observing managers and workers, having access to financial data. You may consider it understandable that companies discourage such research, but I do not. Even disregarding all talk, over the past fifty years or so, of “scientific management”, I find it remarkable.

By the way, if all those other non-players can get rich telling businessmen how to run their businesses, there is no reason why you shouldn't do the same if you ever get tired of the intellectual life. Here, in a couple of easy steps, is how to become a successful business consultant: (1) Make a list of modern business virtues: punctuality, attention to detail, not making mistakes, being able to work with other people, paying attention to what the competition is doing, being nice to customers... (2) Pick any of them and construct a series of talks which proclaim that that one virtue is the main key to a company's success. Be sure each talk is illustrated with color slides and a few jokes and, preferably, gives new names to old things.

The reason this method works — assuming you have a certain minimum speaking ability — is that for each business virtue it is always possible to find a few companies, or branches or divisions of companies, which failed primarily for the lack of that one virtue, or which succeeded primarily for the outstanding application of it. Thus no critic can say that you are wrong. On the other hand, of course (and this we do not reveal to the audience), the method provides absolutely no systematic way to determine if this virtue will work for a given company in the future.

This method, incidentally, is similar to that used by stock market experts: (1) Find a type of investment that has yielded large profits in the recent past; (2) Prepare a series of illustrated talks that encourage new investors to make that same investment.

On Middle-Managers

Every religious prophet-to-be should spend a year or two observing how the middle managers in a large corporation behave when they are asked to implement a major new idea. Consider the currently popular idea of paying more attention to the customer. You would think that at least some of these managers would make a few visits or phone calls to customers, or assign someone to do so and write a report, or establish a minimum number of such visits and calls per year for each employee. Instead, they spend several hours a day crafting beautiful memos, complete with color illustrations and half a dozen typefaces, on the importance of the customer. Those who receive the memos do the same, or else, if they are on the bottom of the organization chart, they spend even more hours than they used to arguing over what the customer *really* wants in a product.

This reminds me of the time, years ago, when being kind to employees was considered the way to corporate wealth. The result was that it became virtually impossible, at one Silicon Valley company I know of, to fire anyone. The only way to get rid of incompetent workers was to transfer them to other departments (“offer them a chance to make better use of their talents elsewhere”). But no department would accept a transfer who did not have a good performance record, so it became the practice to give incompetent workers glowing performance reviews, the faster to move them out. I know of one case in which after many such transfers, a worker was

fired. The event was so unusual that the Personnel manager took a personal interest in the case, and soon announced that he'd be damned if he was going to let the company acquire a reputation for firing workers with such good performance records, and insisted that this one be rehired, which she was.

Middle management is the bland leading bland; the middle manager is the most overrated professional in industry. The Party line is that he bears the burden of "making decisions", but anyone who has worked in a large corporation, knows that middle managers do not make decisions; they keep track of the prevailing consensus among their peers and superiors, and occasionally announce what this consensus is. Middle-management is largely a task of editing, formatting, and disseminating information, a task which is admirably performed by the computer — a fact that has been causing some embarrassment and "shifting of responsibility" in those highly-paid ranks. (Always remember that the computer provides us with a good measure of the intellectual level of jobs: what is easiest to automate is lowest on the ladder.)

Why Things Are As They Are

As a student of philosophy, you will find that working in industry provides you with at least one unique and invaluable opportunity, namely, that of observing what happens when a Theory of Man is actually put into practice. Modern industry is forever devising Theories of Man, all of the same stamp: Man — i.e., the worker — is defined by a set of needs; when these needs are fulfilled, he will be happy and will therefore be a good worker. The only thing that changes over the years is what these needs are defined to be. In my childhood they were "food, shelter, clothing, and companionship". Later (possibly as a result of the scorn of people like me) the definition was changed: food, shelter, clothing and companionship were only the *first* set of needs; after they were satisfied, then people developed the need for *self-actualization* (self what?). In industry, similar revisions have taken place. At the moment, the basic set appears to be: a steady paycheck, sufficiently high wages to enable you to buy enough of what you don't need so that you don't worry about the fact that you have no savings; clean working conditions; bland managers; partially-paid medical insurance; company picnics; Christmas parties; and a pension that you won't be able to live on even if the company doesn't steal it from you. Almost everything that a human being could ask for except the chance to do one's best making things that other people really need.

In any case, these Theories of Man that periodically sweep through industry demonstrate many of the characteristics of the more radical ones that the world has known over the past 150 years. For one, there is no place for dissent against the Theory itself: your two choices are (1) leave, or (2) become better educated in the Theory (the idea treated at length by Foucault: dissent is the result of either ignorance or illness). Another characteristic — particularly troubling to types like you and me — is the fact that no one seems in the least interested in questioning the Theory as long as it brings material benefits. But that is an old story.

Don't Be a Reformer!

I know that you will often be tempted to try to reform things — blow the whistle on the appalling waste, encourage people to think about simpler ways of doing things. Don't waste your time. If H. Ross Perot couldn't reform the General Motors bureaucracy, you will not be able to reform your company's, and furthermore, unlike him, you will not walk away with \$800,000 for your efforts.

But there is a deeper reason why all attempts at reform from within are doomed, and it is related to what I said about Theories of Man, namely, that in the middle-management culture, there is no right and wrong, there is only the question, Are you a Team Player or not? The middle managers who avoid making decisions, who do away with dissent, often in the most benign ways imaginable, who bend the truth as circumstances require — do not conceive of themselves as doing something wrong. One *cannot* be wrong if one is a Team Player. And the reason why being a Team Player is right is that it leads to higher salaries, bigger houses on the hill, and virtually guaranteed entrance into Harvard and Stanford for one's children. How can such a thing be wrong? When a middle manager is confronted by criticism from the ranks, his words and behavior say, "Anyone who would speak in this way is obviously not a Team Player, therefore he must be treated with tolerance and understanding until he can find an opportunity to make use of his talents elsewhere."

You would think that this observation would have been made long ago by our prestigious custodians of business theory, but, since none of them has ever spent a day as a white-collar worker in industry, they continue to believe what the self-serving literature of their field wants them to believe. Another indication — if you need one — of how far removed these custodians are from the realities of the workplace lies in their ignorance of the problem of boredom among white collar workers. I have never heard of a course taught in any business school on ways for white collar workers to fight boredom, and "white collar workers" here includes people with Master's and PhD's working in R & D labs. You think boredom among such people is rare? Consider who their bosses are. If you are still in doubt, conduct your own survey, and don't limit it to the aerospace companies. You will find, sadly, all too many cases of people in their thirties and forties who know that they are nothing but the dupes of the high-tech Party line promulgated by the university/industrial complex, a line which promised exciting careers in research for those who could survive the education, and which delivered lifetime opportunities to mark time until retirement. So even if those in the career-selling business, namely, the universities, knew of the problem, they could not afford to admit it by offering courses in fighting boredom.

Don't be a reformer! Instead, be like a weed or a bug, and learn to live off the decay. Interminable meetings mean — if you have to attend them — time to read a decent book hidden inside a three-ring binder, or time to work on your own book; meetings that you don't have to attend mean the bosses are not around, hence again you have time for your own work. The more clogged the lines, the more delays in attempting to accomplish anything for the company, the more time you have for reading and study.

Once you learn to live in the nooks and crannies, there is virtually no limit to what you can accomplish in modern industry. I got a fair amount of my early education by the simple expedient of facing my desk toward the door of my cubicle and keeping an open book in a half-opened top drawer.

"...on his return to Hamburg, true to his promise, he took up his post in the business house of his father. But he was not happy in his work, and at every opportunity read the books which he kept hidden under the counter." — Parker, DeWitt H., "Arthur Schopenhauer", in *Schopenhauer: Selections*, Charles Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1928, p. xi.

So, with a little cleverness, you can do a lot of reading and studying in your cubicle, and, in addition, you can read on the way to and from meetings, you can read in meetings, and even work on math problems and earn points for doing it, since from a distance it will look as though you are merely taking notes — always a compliment to the speaker.

No Reverages!

As the years wear on you will often be tempted by the prospect of sweet revenge against your boss or the entire company. You will think about finding another job and leaving suddenly or writing a book about what life in industry is really like or dropping out altogether and living a hand-to-mouth existence on little or no work (that'll fix them!). But apart from walking into the office with a gun and killing those you particularly despise — a short-lived pleasure — revenge is impossible, because, first of all, as a result of your marginal position in the company, you are easily replaceable (if they want to bother replacing you at all), and second, because, for reasons I gave above, the boss and the company are never wrong. In other words, you can't hurt the business and you can't make the managers feel guilty. I know it's a hard truth to accept, but, if you follow the careers of those who do not accept it, you will see that I'm right.

Exploit the Exploiters!

But all is not one-sided, of course. For one thing, there will be opportunities, albeit very rare ones, when you will be able to help torpedo a hated manager with little or no risk to yourself, and, of course, you should take full advantage of these! Second, you can become as adept as I have at exploiting the exploiters. You can make sure you never buy a single pencil, eraser, pen, or notebook, availing yourself instead of the company supplies. You can steal minutes and hours as I described above, and not only for intellectual tasks but for taking care of personal business. (I have a single rule regarding personal business: if it can be done on company time, don't do it on your own time!)

If this sounds uncomfortably malicious, let me tell you the private bargain I made long ago with industry: if they let me do my best in working on products which, in my opinion, do some good for the world, I will give up all cheating and stealing and, furthermore, make a lot of money for them. If I *fail* to make a lot of money for them, they won't have to fire me: I'll leave on my own. You may say that such a bargain is unrealistic, that no company can operate under such conditions, and, furthermore, that there is no reason to believe that products that do good for the world will make money. I reply, first, that most workers couldn't care less if their products do good for the world, so that there will only be a minority of workers like me; and given our determination to do our best, who knows? Maybe we can do such a good job on these products that they will be profitable.

There is another reason for my determination to exploit the exploiters, one that only developed in recent years, from the slow realization that despite what we hear on TV, despite all the laws passed by all the politicians, agism is alive and well in modern industry, and perhaps is flourishing more than ever before. Oh, the naivete of the middle-aged American white-collar worker! I strode into my fifties believing that as long as I was eager to work and as long as I was as creative as I was in my forties (and I am), I could land any job I was qualified for. Yet, somehow, things seemed to be different. I handled the interviews as superbly as I always have, I had more experience than ever before, I was bursting with ideas, and yet...somehow I was suddenly over-qualified, or "too theoretical", or didn't have the specialized knowledge required for the job (the "specialized knowledge" was the kind of trivia that no self-respecting intellect commits to memory because it can be learned in a matter of minutes or hours and rightly belongs in a reference manual). Somehow, always a reason for not hiring me. The light soon dawned: the effect of all

those laws amounts to no more than this: whereas in the old days an employer could tell a worker he was too old, now he must find some other excuse. That is the sum total of the effect of all those laws. My reaction, in keeping with what I said above, is not to piss away my life savings in futile lawsuits, but to exploit the exploiters with even more vigor and ingenuity.

A member of the Establishment might say that if attitudes like these became widespread, they would ruin the economy, to which I say, Fuck the economy — my *idleness* is more productive than your 12-hour days. God didn't put me on this earth to spend my life serving the interests of businessmen (Jesus, not *businessmen*). Those who don't like this reply should tell me where the limit is in the argument that one should willingly put up with whatever is good for one's economy.

I hope you will find some of the above useful to you.

Good luck and best wishes,

John

P.S. I can't conclude a letter like this without passing on a few other thoughts accumulated over the years.

Further Suggestions for Surviving in Bureaucracies

1. It's important to learn to think straight about bureaucracies! They are not the evil that everyone thinks they are. First, they are of interest philosophically, since they are the nearest man has come to inventing immoveable objects. Second, they not only provide sinecures for intellectuals like you and me, but they provide employment for armies of mediocrities who, if intelligence and creativity and the desire to do good for someone actually counted in this world, would be on the street. This includes mediocrities on the top as well as on the bottom and in the middle.

2. A few survival techniques in addition to those I mentioned:

2.1. Never put things in terms of yourself; never say "I want", "I don't want"; always say, "Profits will certainly be greater if we ...", "I can't believe it will be in the best interests of this company if we ...". With a little practice, you will find yourself using these phrases without a moment's thought, just as good Marxists learned to say, "History demands that we...", "The verdict of History will be on the side of those who..." "History will not tolerate..."

2.2. If at all possible, try to get a part-time project with another department, one that is physically separated from your own. That way, if your boss ever asks you where you were when he was looking for you, you can simply tell him you were in the other department, when, in fact — as I need not add — you were off during your own reading and studying. If you can't get a part-time project, then do your private reading and studying in the company research library, since it is a rare boss who will want to go on record as being against his employees going to the library.

2.3. Always carry a ruled pad around with you, always have a jumble of pens and pencils in your shirt pocket, and always appear to be deep in thought, preferably with occasional shaking of the head in a manner that says, to all observers, "No, for a company as great as this one, *that* idea will simply not do. I must find a better one, no matter how much it costs me."

2.4. Always appear contrite, self-deprecating, ashamed of yourself for not doing a better job — in short, try to behave like the enterprising employee of the Bank of England played by Alec

Letter to a Young Intellectual

Guinness in the film, *The Lavender Hill Mob*.

Always remember: there's no show business like business.

3. Finally, don't forget Franklin's Theorem: Things in business are never black and white: they are varying shades of black.