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## Summary:

In my recent visit to a public high school class, a teacher's comment about Apple products launched a discussion I hope will stay with the students when they think about the benefits of capitalism versus government control of our economy and of our school system.

Word Count 892

***“The revolution in personal communications that has taken place over the last twenty years is barely a blip on the K-12 education scene—so far.”***

## Do You Feel Exploited by Apple? — Why Freedom Shouldn't Stop at the Classroom Door

By Steve Buckstein

Many areas of our lives are being revolutionized by technology. Those changing the fastest are the ones subject primarily to market forces. Those changing the least are the ones controlled primarily by government.

How many of us communicate with others at a distance today the same way that we did twenty years ago? In 1992 we all had telephones at home, but very few of us had mobile or cell phones. In 1992 a few of us had personal computers, but very few communicated through email, and the first public web browser was still a year or so away.

The cell phone and personal computer revolutions came very fast, propelled by advancing technology and a capitalist market that promised great wealth to those who successfully met our seemingly unlimited consumer demand for such offerings. No one was forced to pay for any of this; no one was exploited by any of it, either. We gladly paid hundreds of dollars for the communications tools of the future. The collective value we gained likely outweighed the billions of dollars that entrepreneurs like Bill Gates and Steve Jobs earned for themselves.

Now, how many of our children still get their formal education the same way they did in 1992? Virtually all of them. The public school system is owned and run by governments and paid for by tax dollars. The adults who receive those tax dollars have a huge financial interest in making sure that competition and innovation are kept to a minimum. The revolution in personal communications that has taken place over the last twenty years is barely a blip on the K-12 education scene—so far.

One man who foresaw an online education revolution was Lewis J. Perelman. In his 1992 book, *School's Out*, he predicted that our brick school buildings eventually would be replaced by what he called “hyperlearning.” Remember, this was written before most of us had even seen the World Wide Web. One aspect of “hyperlearning” is today's online charter schools—you know, the ones the teachers' unions are so desperate to shut down.

Another aspect of “hyperlearning” is the recent advent of the non-profit [Khan Academy](#), which now features literally thousands of online lessons about everything from basic math to physics to economics and government. Classroom



teachers who aren't fearful of such progress are embracing this new tool to help their students. But if it rises to the level of actually competing with, rather than complimenting, traditional classrooms, look for politically powerful teachers' unions to do what they do best: act as the [status quo lobby](#) to restrict or even outlaw such competition with their dues-paying members.

### **Exploited by Apple?**

One secret weapon in the online education revolution may be the kids themselves. Thanks to compulsory attendance laws, most of them must attend the brick school buildings closest to their homes. Last month I was invited to talk with a class of public high school juniors about the relationship between politics and economics. After laying out my case for capitalism, including how it can enhance learning through online schools, the teacher explained that he believed more in democracy and government than in the power of the marketplace. One example he used was his feeling of being exploited by Apple because until recently it only allowed him to place proprietary applications on his iPhone, thus increasing Apple's profits. I pointed out that he was not forced to buy anything from Apple, even its phone, if he didn't want to. There were, and are, plenty of competitors.

I explained that in a free market, when someone sells a product and another voluntarily buys it, both sides gain value. In the Apple case, for example, if he paid \$200 for his iPhone, then he wanted it more than he wanted to keep his \$200. Apple, on the other hand, would rather earn his \$200 than keep that phone on its shelves. Both sides won. I told the students that when Steve Jobs died last year, he was worth some \$7 billion, but he didn't exploit any of his customers to earn that money. They freely bought what he had to sell.

I then asked the 30 or so students how many of them owned any Apple products, from iPods, to iPads, to iPhones. About 25 raised their hands. I asked how many of them felt exploited by Apple. Not one hand went up, and they laughed when the teacher again said that he felt exploited. That teacher has a monopoly on those students' time every school day this year. But in an hour and a half, I was able to give them a lesson that hopefully will stay with them when they think about the benefits of capitalism versus government control of our economy—and of our education system.

Perhaps I should have suggested the students read *Capitalism and Freedom*, Milton Friedman's classic book in which he argued that economic freedom is a necessary condition for political freedom. If I am invited back I will make that suggestion, but if not, my real-world example of how they have personally benefited from capitalism may be enough to start them thinking about what is wrong with their teacher's pro-government view, and what is right with the free market.

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