

VILLAGE VIEW

ANDREA LEONARD

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Across my desk last week came a sheet of paper that attempts to explain the theory of Technocracy, a new term to me, although the program and a number of its adherents have been around since 1919 when a fellow named Howard Scott formed a group of scientists, engineers and economists, known in the 20's as the Technical Alliance. Incorporated in 1933 as a nonprofit, nonpolitical, and nonsectarian membership organization, there now exist units and members of Technocracy in most states of the nation.

The idea, from what I can gather from the information paper, is that 20th-century technology now threatens the social fabric of the country, and unless we do something to rescue the nation from its technological malaise, we face social chaos. There are many things about this program I don't yet understand, but perhaps as I learn more, ignorance will become comprehension, and my many questions will be answered.

As an introduction, the paper traces the development of technology and modern industry. We would all agree that movement in the past hundred years has been toward machines taking over human work, that fewer man-hours are required today to produce baked goods and services than has ever been the case in the past, and that until the 1920's, men were "slaves" who had to work so they could eat, so they could continue to work to produce necessities of life, and that this condition, which had prevailed for thousands of years, has changed.

We would agree that in the first half of the 20th century, the need for men to slave for existence decreased because technology developed electrically-operated machines which became the "slaves" in this country and certain others. Countries where that did not occur we consider backward in development.

A chart accompanying the descriptive paragraphs shows that one man-hour of work now produces the same results that nine hours of a man's labor gave a hundred years ago. Few would argue that we could enjoy today's production capability if electrically-operated machinery ceased to function. To return to a non-electric life-style would mean social upheaval of monumental magnitude.

The theory of Technocracy is that machines, by doing work previously accomplished by human effort, have thrown men out of jobs. The chart illustrates that while production is still increasing, man-hours per unit of production are decreasing. As man-hours per unit dropped from nine to one, industrial employment at first rose from zero in the mid-19th century to a peak of ten (on a scale of one to ten) in 1920, and then declined to two by 1960. At the same time, physical industrial production kept rising from zero in 1850 to a peak in 1960 of nine, and it continues to rise.

Energy production from mineral fuels and water power, if graphed, would show an increase comparable to that of physical production, the paper states. I believe it.

Technocrats see the situation as an enormous threat. "This," they posit, "is the measure of our social instability;" because as we work less, we earn less in purchasing power with which to buy the produce of our tireless machinery. This inability, according to the paper, brought on the economic collapse of 1929 and the Great Depression. Only when WWII demanded many hours of human production, while millions of people who would otherwise have been in the labor pool were serving in the military, and while goods produced were being destroyed almost as fast as they came off the line, were we able to keep people occupied and earning purchasing power adequate to keep ahead of the quantity of goods produced.

Since then, it's been down-hill, all the way, they say.

Exports to other nations have taken up some slack, of course; and our own growing population with its demands for more and more "things" has, to some extent, kept production demands high, but that same population growth, in itself, is a threat because more people need more work to earn more to buy more goods. And as machines take over and put people out of work, jobs become scarcer, power to purchase all that machines can produce is spread thinner and thinner, and no matter how fast money moves from hand to hand, we can't keep up with the quantities of products coming on the market with ever-increasing speed.

For this reason, women have joined the work-force in unprecedented numbers; the two-income family is now the rule instead of the exception. This has only exacerbated the underlying problems: with more than half the women competing with men for fewer jobs, unemployment among the masses of potential workers increases.

"Purchasing power in our present social system depends upon the sale of man-hours; purchasing power drops as more and more kilowatt hours replace man-hours, while production continues to rise unless it is deliberately curtailed. Man works less, yet industry is able to produce abundantly. When man did 98% of the work, he did not have enough goods or services; now, while he does only 2% of the work, he produces so much he can't consume it," or, by implication, earn enough to purchase what he wants or needs.

How is it, then, that disaster hasn't struck sooner? After WWII there was an enormous and sudden demand by civilians for goods and services; we were also sending great quantities of goods overseas to rebuild the devastated countries of Europe and the Orient. As those programs wound

down, the space program heated up. We shot billions of dollars worth of equipment into outer space and to the moon. With the conclusion of government-supported exploration, the space project is being turned over to private industry; perhaps new frontiers will develop to create enough demand to keep technology rolling (and people supplied with purchasing power) to an extent sufficient to prevent the Technocrats' projected disasters.

"Even the rise in public and private debt," they say, though, "has not been sufficient to maintain stability in our economy." But the Technocrats declare they have a plan to solve the problem. They promise a social design for living, engineered for distribution of abundance to all our citizens from birth to death. (Pie in the sky?) "Today," they say, "we are at the crossroads of our destiny. The correct turn will take us to a higher level of life than has ever been experienced in world history. Any other road will lead to national suicide."

They do not, however, describe in this paper what the correct turn should be. To get that information it is necessary to subscribe to Technocracy's Magazine. (I knew there was a catch!) Since subscription costs only \$4 a year, though, I think I'll see if I can find out their secret. The subscription address is The Technocrat, 433 East Market Street, North Long Beach, Calif. 90805 (in case you'd like to join me in investigating this subject). In any event, I'll pursue it and keep you informed.

Maybe this group has something worth considering; maybe it's another wild-eyed scheme. Who knows? For four bucks, I'm curious enough and open-minded enough to try and see.

Whatever my final conclusion, I'll learn something new. That's always exciting.