REVOLUTIONARY ENGINEERING: Towards A 'Counter-Technology'

We are interested in the (still embryonic) 'Counter-Technology' branch of the "Counter-Culture" movement, as reflected recently, for example, in the appearance of publications such as Radical Software, Mother Earth News, Whole Earth Catalogue, New Alchemy, Domebook, Dome Cook Book, Ant-Farm, & ct. Specifically, we are interested in the possibilities of the formation of automated rural (and urban) communes, possibilities opened by the co-existence of (1) enormous accumulations of "waste-capital" (government-military surplus in particular and commodity surplus and glut in general) with (2) the skills of the growing number of drop-outs, refugees, and renegades from the engineering colleges and the scientific and technical professions in general (among which we number ourselves) -- not mention those expelled involuntarily in the recent surge of unemployment in the technical professions who form the human side, the "software" portion, of this "waste-capital" (what we would call "waste-labour"), and who are just as much "military surplus" and "obsolescence" as the more familiar "hardware", and refer to themselves as such.

We feel that the present movement needs people from scientific, mathematical and technical backgrounds just as badly as scientists, engineers, and technicians need the social consciousness which this movement reflects and which it so often (rightfully) accuses them of lacking, if it is to be able at all to deal with and ultimately transform the present social reality. The ideology of the "abstract negation" and rejection of "Technology" (with a capital "T") which is so popular and prevalent among large segments of the movement reflects this weakness. It is an utterly self-defeating and self-castrating ideology, and one which plays perfectly into the hands of our deadliest enemies. Behind the present "Technology" lie capitalist social relations. One need only break out of the fetishism and
mystification of the use of this term for a moment to see that "Technology" does nothing, creates no problems, has no "imperatives", etc. Only people do; people moving within certain definite social relations, out of which arise certain imperatives, etc. The form that technology assumes in any society is at least in part a reflection, an "objectification", of its basic social relations. Our problem is not "Technology" in the abstract but specifically capitalist technology (and, in the case of the USSR, etc., state-capitalist technology). A new, revolutionary society emerging out of this one would express itself, its new social relations, in a new, critical appropriation of present technology and science; in a transformation of its deployment and physical plant, etc. Communes which have begun with naïve illusions about this question, and have attempted a return to the "idyllic" Neolithic or Paleolithic modes of life, have either quickly disintegrated or compromised their initial ideals, lapsing into pre-capitalist forms of alienation (guru-theocracy, etc.) It is necessary merely to think concretely enough to imagine what a hardship life can be, without the fascilitations and "arts of life" which men have developed, to see the error in this approach. [One might also reflect that the development of Paleolithic and Neolithic societies lead precisely to where we are now, and a return to those conditions, even if it were possible, could only reproduce the original course of development and lead us back here again.] On the other hand, communes which are unafraid to adapt the whole range of modern technology to their needs might serve as an advance scouting and experimental groping process, exploring the possibilities of the re-formation and re-deployment of the physical plant of society, of decentralization and de-urbanization, resulting in knowledge which will be crucial to a society undergoing a radical social revolution, such as the U.S. may be within the next decade or so. It is our belief in addition that communes, from the point of view of their own survival, must begin with the most advanced technologies (such
as automation) evolved by the present capitalist society (though of course not in their most expensive and large-scale forms), and begin to remodel them to congruence with a different totality of social relations. We believe it is both possible and necessary for an intentional community movement, despite its inevitable poverty and financially and economically marginal status, to begin to build an independent economic base for the support and facilitation of the new social and interpersonal formations and relations which are now straining to emerge in this society.

We are presently working with several groups planning to form communities and we are actively exploring possible ecologically compatible, etc. technologies which could be utilized by such communities. Most of our work so far has been done in the area of what we call "the automation of agriculture" (controlled environment agriculture and hydroponics). We have developed several schemas and strategies for the (economic) evolution of such communities. The results of our work to date will soon be published by us as a pamphlet entitled: "POST-SCARCITY COMMUNES". We are also interested in the category of 'counter-technology' which might be called 'Technological Guerilla Warfare'.

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