

Excerpts from Letter to M.K. (2nd Edition)

Ted Kaczynski

October 4, 2003

The problem of civilization is identical with the problem of technology. Let me first explain that when I speak of technology I do not refer only to physical apparatus such as tools and machines. I include also techniques, such as the techniques of chemistry, civil engineering, or biotechnology. Included too are human techniques such as those of propaganda or of educational psychology, as well as organizational techniques that could not exist at an advanced level without the physical apparatus—the tools, machines, and structures—on which the whole technological system depends.

However, technology in the broader sense of the word includes not only modern technology but also the techniques and physical apparatus that existed at earlier stages of society. For example, plows, harness for animals, blacksmith's tools, domesticated breeds of plants and animals, and the techniques of agriculture, animal husbandry, and metalworking. Early civilizations depended on these technologies, as well as on the human and organizational techniques needed to govern large numbers of people. Civilizations cannot exist without the technology on which they are based. Conversely, where the technology is available, civilization is likely to develop sooner or later.

Thus, the problem of civilization can be equated with the problem of technology. The farther back we can push technology, the farther back we will push civilization. If we could push technology all the way back to the Paleolithic age, there would be no more civilization.

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In reference to certain actions of mine you ask, "Don't you think violence is violence?" Of course violence is violence. And violence is also a necessary part of nature. If predators did not kill members of prey species, then the prey species would multiply to the point where they would destroy their environment by consuming everything edible. Many kinds of animals are violent even against members of their own species. For example, chimpanzees often kill other chimpanzees. In some regions, fights are common among wild bears and can have fatal consequences.¹

Human beings in the wild constitute one of the more violent species. Carleton S. Coon's survey of hunting-and-gathering cultures provides numerous examples of violence by human beings against other human beings.² Professor Coon makes clear that he admires hunting-and-gathering peoples and regards them as more fortunate than civilized ones.³ But he is an honest man and does not censor out those aspects of primitive life, such as violence, that appear disagreeable to modern people. Thus, it is clear that a significant amount of violence is a natural part of human life. There

¹ The magazine *Bears and Other Top Predators*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, pp. 28-29, shows a photograph of bears fighting and a photograph of a bear wounded in a fight, and mentions that such wounds can be deadly. See also section 6 of "The Truth About Primitive Life," in the 2010 edition of *Technological Slavery*.

² Coon, *passim*.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. XIX, 3, 4, 9, 10.

is nothing wrong with violence in itself. In any particular case, whether violence is good or bad depends on how it is used and the purpose for which it is used. So why do modern people regard violence as evil in itself? They do so for one reason only: They have been brainwashed by propaganda. Modern society uses various forms of propaganda to teach people to be frightened and horrified by violence, because the technoindustrial system needs a population that is timid, docile, and afraid to assert itself, a population that will not make trouble or disrupt the orderly functioning of the system. Whatever philosophical or moral rationalizations people may invent to explain their belief that violence is wrong, the real reason for their belief is that they have unconsciously absorbed the system's propaganda.

Power depends ultimately on physical force. By teaching people that violence is wrong (except, of course, when the system itself uses violence via the police or the military), the system maintains its monopoly on physical force and thus keeps all power in its own hands.

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All of the groups you mention here are part of a single movement. Let's call it the "GA (Green Anarchist) Movement." Of course, these people are right to the extent that they oppose civilization and the technology on which it is based. But, because of the form in which this movement is developing, it may actually help to protect the technoindustrial system and may serve as an obstacle to revolution. I will explain:

It is difficult to achieve the *permanent* suppression of rebellion through the direct application of force. When rebellion is put down by force, it very often breaks out again later in some new form in which the authorities find it more difficult to control. For example, in 1878 the German Reichstag enacted harsh and repressive laws against the Social-Democratic movement, as a result of which the movement was crushed and its members were scattered, confused, and discouraged. But only for a short time. The movement soon reunited itself, became more energetic, and found new ways of spreading its ideas, so that by 1884 it was stronger than ever.⁴

Thus, astute observers of human affairs know that the powerful classes of a society can most effectively defend themselves against rebellion by using force and direct repression only when these are really necessary, and relying instead on manipulation to deflect rebellion. One of the most effective devices used is that of providing channels through which rebellious impulses can be expressed in ways that are harmless to the system. For example, it is well known that in the Soviet Union the satirical magazine *Krokodil* was designed to provide an outlet for complaints and for resentment of the authorities in a way that would lead no one to question the legitimacy of the Soviet system or rebel against it in any serious way. But the "democratic" system of the West has evolved mechanisms for deflecting rebellion that are far more sophisticated and effective than any that existed in the Soviet Union. It is a truly remarkable fact that

⁴ Zimmermann, p. 23. See also Kaczynski, *Anti-Tech Revolution* Chapt. Four, section 22.

in modern Western society people “rebel” in favor of the values of the very system against which they imagine themselves to be rebelling. The left “rebels” in favor of racial and religious equality, equality for women and homosexuals, humane treatment of animals, and so forth. But these are the values that the American mass media teach us over and over again every day. Leftists have been so thoroughly brainwashed by media propaganda that they are able to “rebel” only in terms of these values, which are values of the technoindustrial system itself. In this way the system has successfully deflected the rebellious impulses of the left into channels that are harmless to the system.⁵

Rebellion against technology and civilization is real rebellion, a real attack on the values of the existing system. But the green anarchists, anarcho-primitivists, and so forth (the “GA Movement”) have fallen under such heavy influence from the left that their rebellion against civilization has to a great extent been neutralized. Instead of rebelling against the values of civilization, they have adopted many civilized values themselves and have constructed an imaginary picture of primitive societies that embodies these civilized values.

[At this point the letter to M.K. contained a long section debunking the anarcho-primitivist myth. That section is omitted here because it only duplicates some of the material found in “The Truth About Primitive Life,” which appears in the 2010 edition of *Technological Slavery*.]

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I don’t mean to say that the hunting-and-gathering way of life was no better than modern life. On the contrary, I believe it was better beyond comparison. Many, perhaps most, investigators who have studied hunter-gatherers have expressed their respect, their admiration, or even their envy of them.

But obviously the reasons why primitive life was better than civilized life had nothing to do with gender equality, kindness to animals, non-competitiveness, or nonviolence. Those values are the soft values of modern civilization. By projecting those values onto hunting-and-gathering societies, the GA Movement has created a myth of a primitive utopia that never existed in reality. Thus, even though the GA Movement claims to reject civilization and modernity, it remains enslaved to some of the most important values of modern society. For this reason, the GA Movement cannot be an effective revolutionary movement.

In the first place, part of the GA Movement’s energy is deflected away from the real revolutionary objective—to eliminate modern technology and civilization in general—in favor of the pseudo-revolutionary issues of racism, sexism, animal rights, homosexual rights, and so forth. In the second place, because of its commitment to these pseudo-revolutionary issues, the GA Movement may attract too many leftists—people who are less interested in getting rid of modern civilization than they are in the leftist issues

⁵ See “The System’s Neatest Trick,” in this volume.

of racism, sexism, etc. This would cause a further defection of the movement's energy away from the issues of technology and civilization. In the third place, the objective of securing the rights of women, homosexuals, animals, and so forth, is incompatible with the objective of eliminating civilization, because women and homosexuals in primitive societies often do not have equality, and such societies are usually cruel to animals.⁶ If one's goal is to secure the rights of these groups, then one's best policy is to stick with modern civilization. In the fourth place, the GA Movement's adoption of many of the soft values of modern civilization, as well as its myth of a soft primitive utopia, attracts too many soft, dreamy, lazy, impractical people who are more inclined to retreat into utopian fantasies than to take effective, realistic action to get rid of the technoindustrial system.

The GA Movement may be not only useless but worse than useless, because it may be an obstacle to the development of an effective revolutionary movement. Since opposition to technology and civilization is an important part of the GA Movement's program, young people who are concerned about what technological civilization is doing to the world are drawn into that movement. Certainly not all of these young people are leftists or soft, dreamy, ineffectual types; some of them have the potential to become real revolutionaries. But in the GA Movement they are outnumbered by leftists and other useless people, so they are neutralized, they become corrupted, and their revolutionary potential is wasted. In this sense, the GA Movement could be called a destroyer of potential revolutionaries.

It will be necessary to build a new revolutionary movement that will keep itself strictly separate from the GA Movement and its soft, civilized values. I don't mean that there is anything wrong with gender equality, kindness to animals, tolerance of homosexuality, or the like. But these values have no relevance to the effort to eliminate technological civilization. They are not revolutionary values. An effective revolutionary movement will have to adopt instead the hard values of primitive societies, such as skill, self-discipline, honesty, physical and mental stamina, intolerance of externally-imposed restraints, capacity to endure physical pain, and, above all, courage.

⁶ See "The Truth About Primitive Life," section 8.

The Ted K Archive

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Technological Slavery: Volume 1, 4th Edition

Ted describes his experiences in the wilderness and his thoughts on civilization, violence, and green anarchism. The full letter can be found here: Ted Kaczynski's

Interview with a Turkish Primitivist.

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