

**An Open Letter – Professor to
Unabomber / Response addresses
concerns of ‘FC’**

Tom Tyler

July 4, 1995

Here is the text of UC Berkeley Professor Tom Tyler's reply to the Unabomber:

On May 1, The Chronicle published an article using both the Oklahoma bombing and the actions of the Unabomber (FC) as examples of general social malaise in America. I was one of several psychologists interviewed for the article.

I have received a letter from FC commenting on that story, along with a copy of his manuscript, "Industrial Society and its Future." I have read the manuscript and am writing this open letter to address the concerns raised by FC, both in his letter to me and in the manuscript itself.

I regret that we cannot communicate more directly. Hopefully, you will read this reply to the questions you have raised. In your letter, you suggest that we look beyond the questions of whether you have social or psychological problems and consider the substance of the issues you raise in your manuscript. This seems to me a fair request.

There is a widespread feeling of social malaise in our society today and we need to consider why people have those feelings. It is wrong to simply say that people who are dissatisfied are in some way nonrational.

We should also consider whether the structure of society is hurting people and needs to be changed. The manuscript you prepared directly addresses this issue.

I agree that it is important for all Americans to talk about what is wrong with our society and to try to find ways to improve it. By circulating your manuscript you are encouraging us to think about these important issues.

I have tried to read and consider your arguments with an open mind. I think violent actions are wrong, and I am pleased that you have decided to communicate your ideas by sending me (and others) your manuscript.

I cannot completely present or comment on all of the issues you raise in your lengthy manuscript within this letter. But I would like to note what seems to me to be several key arguments. The central point of your manuscript is that the economic and technological changes in our society have had a negative effect on people's lives.

Your concerns about widespread feelings of inferiority and over-socialization into conformity with society's rule are widely shared, as is your suggestion that many people do not find their lives very satisfying. Many people today do feel that they have little control over their lives and few opportunities for autonomy.

As you say, they do not feel that they have power over their lives. I think that your feelings and concerns are widely shared. Many people in America are searching for ways to make their lives more fulfilling. I agree with you that technology is resulting in many social problems and that our society has to address those problems and their solution.

You also argue that industrial- technological society cannot be reformed. Here I am less certain that I agree. There have been increasing signs that people are making choices that create individual freedom and local autonomy for themselves.

People quit jobs in corporations to start their own small businesses, people move from large cities to the country, people voluntarily conserve water, recycle their trash, and lower their use of electricity and natural gas.

People are finding many ways to change their lives in positive ways. It seems to me that the revolution you advocate is already occurring. Instead of being trapped in the system through psychological or biological manipulation, people are finding ways to live better lives. People are developing the type of anti-technology ideology that you advocate in your manuscript.

Of course, many people's lives continue to be difficult, and change takes time.

But, given evidence that people are able to make choices that give them a sense of control, does it not seem possible that society can change?

You suggest two ways of creating social change: Developing an alternative ideology and promoting social stress and instability.

As I have noted, there is already evidence that people themselves are developing an alternative ideology that lessens the importance of technology and increases their control and autonomy over their lives.

But how is it useful to promote social stress and instability, especially through acts of violence?

My impression is that people react to violence by becoming less willing to change. Instead of encouraging social change, threats of violence make people fearful and unwilling to consider new ideas.

How can you encourage people to think about your alternative ideology by creating fear and insecurity?

I think that education is the key to changing people. Would it not be possible to try to develop the core group of intelligent, thoughtful, rational people that you describe in your manuscript?

That core group could articulate and develop a new ideology that allows us to move beyond the problems of technological-industrial society. Many members of our society would welcome new ideas about how to deal with the problems created by technology. That group could change society by showing people a better way to live their lives. Do you have thoughts about how such a group could be formed? Who should be on it? What the most important issues for it to address might be?

Let me close by saying that I especially welcome your suggestion in the manuscript that a "revolution" that changes the economic and technological basis of our society need not be violent or sudden. It can occur peacefully and over a period of decades. In that spirit, I think our society should consider the important issues you raise in your manuscript.

The Ted K Archive

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