Ted Kaczynski
Afterthoughts to Technological Slavery
April 26, 2017

https://www.wildwill.net/blog/2017/04/26/
ted-kaczynski-afterthoughts-to-technological-slavery/

theanarchistlibrary.org

Afterthoughts to Technological Slavery

Ted Kaczynski

April 26, 2017

Be that as it may, we can dispense with the labor movement for present purposes. The revolt of American black people (the "civil rights movement") of the 1950s and 1960s can serve to illustrate the points I tried to make on page [345 note 121] and pages [322-323] of this book. And it's easy to give other examples of cases in which popular revolt, short of revolution, has forced governments to pay attention to people's grievances. Thus, the Wat Tyler Rebellion in England (1381) failed as a social revolution, but it impelled the government to refrain from enforcing the poll tax that was the immediate cause of the revolt.[10] The Sepoy Mutiny in India (1857-58) was ruthlessly crushed, but it caused the British to drop their effort to impose westernizing social changes upon Hindu civilization.[11]

[10] Encycl. Britannica, 2003, Vol. 9, article "Peasants' Revolt," pages 229-230.

[11] Ibid., Vol. 6, article "Indian Mutiny," pages 288-89.

5.

Popular Rebellion as a Force for Reform. On pages [345 note 121, 322—323] of this book I stated that in the early 20th century labor violence in the United States impelled the government to carry out reforms that alleviated the problems of the working class. This statement was based on my memory of things read many years earlier. Recent reading and rereading lead me to doubt that the statement is accurate.

It's true that labor violence during the 1890s seems to have spurred efforts at reform by the government and by industry between about 1896 and 1904, but the effect was short-lived.[6] The great turning point in the struggle of the American working class was the enactment in the 1930s of legislation that guaranteed workers the right to organize and to bargain collectively, and this turning point was followed by a "sharp decline in the level of industrial violence."[7] But I'm not aware of any evidence that the legislation was motivated by a desire to prevent labor violence.

The data support the conclusion that labor violence was damaging to labor unions and counterproductive in relation to the workers' immediate goals.[8] On the other hand, it seems clear that labor violence could not have been ended except by addressing the grievances of the working class.[9] Thus, the threat of violence could have impelled the government to enact legislation guaranteeing the workers' right to organize and to bargain collectively. But, again, I don't know of any evidence that this was actually what happened.

[6] Foster Rhea Dulles, Labor in America: A History, third edition, AHM Publishing Corporation, Northbrook, Illinois, 1966, pages 166-179, 183-88, 193-99, 204-05.

[7] Hugh Davis Graham and Ted Robert Gurr (editors), Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives, Signet Books, New York, 1969, pages 343-45, 364-65.

[8] Ibid., pages 361-62.

[9] Ibid., pages 364-66.

Contents

For present purposes the answer to this question is not important. The objective fact is that since the advent of the Industrial Revolution democracy has been generally associated with economic and technological vigor. Whether this association has been merely a matter of chance, or whether there is a causative relation between democracy and economic and technological vigor, the fact remains that the association has existed. It is this objective fact, and not a human desire for a freer or a more humane society, that has made democracy the world's dominant political form.

It is true that some peoples have made a conscious decision to adopt democracy, but it can be shown that in modern times (at least since, say, 1800) such decisions have usually been based on a belief (correct or not) that democracy would help the peoples in question to achieve economic and technological success. But even assuming that democracy had been chosen because of a belief that it would provide a freer or a more humane form of government, and even assuming that such a belief were correct, democracy could not have thriven under conditions of industrialization in competition with authoritarian systems if it had not equalled or surpassed the latter in economic and technological vigor.

Thus we are left with the inescapable conclusion that democracy became the dominant political form of the modern world not through human choice but because of an objective fact, namely, the association of democracy, since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, with economic and technological success.

It is my opinion that we have now reached the end of the era in which democratic systems were the most vigorous ones economically and technologically. If that is true, then we can expect democracy to be gradually replaced by systems of a more authoritarian type, though the external forms of democratic government will probably be retained because of their utility for propaganda purposes.

Thus the Allies' preponderance in resources and numbers of troops, at least during World War II, was clearly an expression of the democracies' economic and technological vigor. The democracies' superiority was a consequence not only of the size of their economics, but also of their efficiency. Notwithstanding the vaunted technical efficiency of the Germans, it is said that during World War II German productivity per man-hour was only half that of the United States, while the corresponding figure for Japan was only one fifth that of the U.S.[3]

Though the case may not have been as clear-cut in World War I, it does appear that there too the Allies' superiority in resources and in numbers of troops was largely an expression of the democracies' economic and technological vigor. "In munitions and other war material Britain's industrial power was greatest of all…Britain…was to prove that the strength of her banking system and the wealth distributed among a great commercial people furnished the sinews of war…"[4] Authoritarian Russia was not a critical factor in World War I, since the Germans defeated the Russians with relative ease.

Thus it seems beyond argument that democracy became the dominant political form of the modern world as a result of the democracies' superior economic and technological vigor. It may nevertheless be questioned whether democratic government was the cause of the economic and technological vigor of the democracies. In the foregoing discussion I've relied mainly on the example of the English-speaking peoples. In fact, France, following its democratization in 1871 and even before the devastation wrought by World War I, was not economically vigorous.[5] Was the economic and technological vigor of the English-speaking peoples perhaps the result, not of their democratic political systems, but of some other cultural trait?

[3] John Keegan, The Second World War, Penguin, 1990, page 219.

[4] B. H. Liddell Hart, The Real War, 1914-1918, Little, Brown and Company, 1964, page 44.

[5] Encycl. Britannica, 2003, Vol. 19, article "France," page 521.

1.

Último Reducto has recently called attention to some flaws in my work. For example, in ISAIF, paragraph 69, I wrote that primitive man could accept the risk of disease stoically because "it is no one's fault, unless it is the fault of some imaginary, impersonal demon." Último Reducto pointed out that this often is not true, because in many primitive societies people believe that diseases are caused by witchcraft. When someone becomes sick the people will try to identify and punish the witch—a specific person—who supposedly caused the illness.

Again, in paragraph 208 I wrote, "We are aware of no significant cases of regression in small-scale technology," but Último Reducto has pointed out some examples of regression of small-scale technology in primitive societies.

The foregoing flaws are not very important, because they do not significantly affect the main lines of my argument. But other problems pointed out by Último Reducto are more serious. Thus, in the second and third sentences of paragraph 94 of ISAIF I wrote: "Freedom means being in control…of the life-and-death issues of one's existence: food, clothing, shelter and defense against whatever threats there may be in one's environment. Freedom means having power…to control the circumstances of one's own life." But obviously people have never had such control to more than a limited extent. They have not, for example, been able to control bad weather, which in certain circumstances can lead to starvation. So what kind and degree of control do people really need? At a minimum they need to be free of "interference, manipulation or supervision…from any large organization," as stated in the first sentence of paragraph 94. But if the second and third sentences meant no more than that, they would be redundant.

So there is a problem here in need of a solution. I'm not going to try to solve it now, however. For the present let it suffice to say that ISAIF is by no means a final and definitive statement

in the field that it covers. Maybe some day I or someone else will be able to offer a clearer and more accurate treatment of the same topics.

2.

In "The Truth About Primitive Life" and in "The System's Neatest Trick" I referred to the "politicization" of American anthropology, and I came down hard on politically correct anthropologists. See pages [144-149] and [202-203] of this book. My views on the politicization of anthropology were based on a number of books and articles I had seen and on some materials sent to me by a person who was doing graduate work in anthropology. My views were by no means based on a systematic survey or a thorough knowledge of recent anthropological literature.

One of my Spanish correspondents, the editor of Isumatag, argued that I was being unfair to anthropologists, and he backed up his argument by sending me copies of articles from anthropological journals; for example, Michael J. Shott, "On Recent Trends in the Anthropology of Foragers," Man (N.S.), Vol. 27, No. 4, Dec., 1992, pages 843-871; and Raymond Hames, "The Ecologically Noble Savage Debate,"Annual Review of Anthropology, Vol. 36, 2007, pages 177-190.

The editor of Isumatag was right. As he showed me, I had greatly underestimated the number of American anthropologists who made a conscientious effort to present facts even-handedly and without ideological bias. But even if my point about the politicization of anthropology was overstated, it still contained a significant element of truth. First, there are some anthropologists whose work is heavily politicized. (I discussed the case of Haviland on pages [145, 202-203] of this book.) Second, some of the anthropologists' debates seem clearly to be politically motivated, even if the participants in these debates do

and Russia. It was during the 18th century, as the Industrial Revolution was gathering force, that authoritarian France lost to semidemocratic Britain in the struggle for colonization of North America and India. France did not achieve stable democracy until 1871, when it was too late to catch up with the British.

Germany as a whole was politically fragmented until 1871, but the most important state in Germany—authoritarian Prussia—was already a great power by 1740[1] and had access to the sea,[2] yet failed to build an overseas empire. Even after the unification of their country in 1871, the Germans' efforts at colonization were half-hearted at best.

Like the English-speaking peoples, the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking peoples colonized vast territories and populated them thickly, but the manpower of their territories could not have been used very effectively in a European war, because these peoples lacked the economic, technical, and organizational resources to assemble, train, and equip large armies, transport them to Europe, and keep them supplied with munitions while they were there. Moreover, they lacked the necessary command of the sea. The Russians did not need command of the sea in order to transport their men to a European battlefield, but, as pointed out on page [340] of this book, note 34, the Russians during World War II did need massive aid from the West. without which they could not have properly equipped and supplied their troops.

[1] Encycl. Britannica, 2003, Vol. 20, article "Germany," page 96.

[2] The fact that Prussia's access was to the Baltic Sea rather than directly to the Atlantic was not a terribly important factor in the 18th century, when round-the-world voyages were nothing very extraordinary; still less was it important in the 19th century, when sailing ships of advanced design, and later steamships, made voyages to all parts of the world a routine matter. Even the tiny duchy of Courland, situated at the eastern end of the Baltic, made a start at overseas colonization during the 17th century (Encycl. Britannica, 2003, Vol. 3, article "Courland," page 683), so there was certainly no physical obstacle to Prussia's doing the same in the 18th and 19th centuries.

the English-speaking ones, were also the most successful countries economically and technologically. Because they were economically and technologically successful, they were also successful militarily. The economic, technological, and military superiority of the democracies enabled them to spread democracy forcibly at the expense of authoritarian systems. In addition, many nations voluntarily attempted to adopt democratic institutions because they believed that these institutions were the source of the economic and technological success of the democracies.

As part of my argument, I maintained that the two great military contests between the democracies and the authoritarian regimes—World Wars I and II—were decided in favor of the democracies because of the democracies' economic and technological vigor. The astute reader, however, may object that the democracies could have won World Wars I and II simply by virtue of their great preponderance in resources and in numbers of soldiers, with or without any putative superiority in economic and technological vigor.

My answer is that the democracies' preponderance in resources and numbers of soldiers was only one more expression of their economic and technological vigor. The democracies had vast manpower, territory, industrial capacity, and sources of raw material at their disposal because they—especially the British—had built great colonial empires and had spread their language, culture, and technology, as well as their economic and political systems, over a large part of the world. The English-speaking peoples moreover had powerful navies and therefore, generally speaking, command of the sea, which enabled them to assist one another in war by transporting troops and supplies to wherever they might be needed.

Authoritarian systems either had failed to build empires of comparable size, as in the case of Germany and Japan, or else they had indeed built huge empires but had left them relatively backward and undeveloped, as in the case of Spain, Portugal,

strive to be honest and objective. Consider for example the article by Raymond Hames cited above, which reviews the anthropological controversy over whether primitive peoples were or were not good conservationists. Why should this question be the subject of so much debate among anthropologists? The reason, obviously, is that nowadays the problem of controlling the environmental damage caused by industrial society is a hot political issue. Some anthropologists are tempted to cite primitive peoples as moral examples from whom we should learn to treat our environment with respect; other anthropologists perhaps would prefer to use primitives as negative examples in order to convince us that we should rely on modern methods to regulate our environment.

Until roughly the middle of the 20th century, industrial society was extremely self-confident. Apart from a very few dissenting voices, everyone assumed that "progress" was taking us all to a better and brighter future. Even the most rebellious members of society—the Marxists—believed that the injustices of capitalism represented only a temporary phase that we had to pass through in order to arrive at a world in which the benefits of "progress" would be shared equally by everyone. Because the superiority of modern society was taken for granted, it seldom occurred to anyone to draw comparisons between modern society and primitive ones, whether for the purpose of exalting modernity or for the purpose of denigrating it.

But since the mid-20th century, industrial society has been losing its self-confidence. Thinking people are increasingly affected by doubts about whether we are on the right road, and this has led many to question the value of modernity and to react against it by idealizing primitive societies. Other people, whose sense of security is threatened by the attack on modernity, defensively exaggerate the unattractive traits of primitive cultures while denying or ignoring their attractive traits. That is why some anthropological questions that once were purely academic are now politically loaded. I realize that the foregoing

two paragraphs greatly simplify a complex situation, but I nevertheless insist that industrial society's loss of self-confidence in the course of the 20th century is a real event.

3.

Disposal of Radioactive Waste. In a letter to David Skrbina dated March 17, 2005, I expressed the opinion, based on "the demonstrated unreliability of untested technological solutions," that the nuclear-waste disposal site at Yucca Mountain, Nevada likely would prove to be a failure. See page [315] of this book. It may be of interest to trace the subsequent history of the Yucca Mountain site as reported in the media.

On March 18, 2005, The Denver Post, page 4A, carried an Associated Press report by Erica Werner according to which then-recent studies had found that water seepage through the Yucca Mountain site was faster than what earlier studies had reported. The more-rapid movement of water implied a greater risk of escape of radioactive materials from the site, and there were reasons to suspect that the earlier studies had been intentionally falsified.

The Week, January 26, 2007, page 24, reported a new study: "Special new containers designed to hold nuclear waste for tens of thousands of years may begin to fall apart in just 210 years," the study found. "Researchers…had pinned their hopes on zircon, a material they thought was stable enough to store the waste…" The scientists had based this belief on computer simulations, but they were "startled" when they discovered how alpha radiation affected the "zircon" in reality.

Zircon is a gemstone. The substance referred to in the article presumably is a ceramic called zirconia. See The New Encyclopdaedia Britannica, 15th ed., 2003, Vol. 21, article "Industrial Ceramics," pages 262-63.

On September 25, 2007, The Denver Post, page 2A, reported: "Engineers moved some planned structures at the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste dump after rock samples indicated a fault line unexpectedly ran beneath their original location…"

On March 6,2009, The Denver Post, page 14A, carried an Associated Press report by H. Josef Hebert according to which the U.S. Government had abandoned the plan to store reactor waste at Yucca Mountain. This after having spent 13.5 billion dollars on the project.

So it appears that the problem of safe disposal of radioactive waste is no closer to a solution than it ever was.

4.

Why is Democracy the Dominant Political Form of the Modern World? The argument about democracy set forth in my letters to David Skrbina of October 12 and November 23, 2004 (pages [283-285] and [292-296] of this book) is incomplete and insufficiently clear, so I want to supplement that argument here.

The most important point that I wanted to make was that democracy became the dominant political form of the modern world not as the result of a decision by human beings to adopt a freer or a more humane form of government, but because of an "objective" fact, namely, the fact that in modern times democracy has been associated with the highest level of economic and technological success.

To summarize the argument of my letters to Dr. Skrbina, democratic forms of government have been tried at many times and places at least since the days of ancient Athens, but democracy did not thrive sufficiently to displace authoritarian systems, which remained the dominant political forms through the 17th century. But from the advent of the Industrial Revolution the (relatively) democratic countries, above all