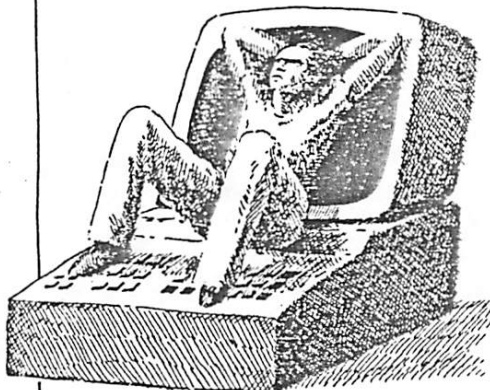


Interrupt is the place in PCW where readers can unburden their grievances and air controversial views. New subjects are always welcome; the 'right of reply' shall be wielded at the discretion of the Editor. Please hold all contributions to within 800 words.

Future-What future?



I am beginning to have strong suspicions that our leaders and the media are actively conspiring to keep the real implications of information technology from the general public. Having always held BBC documentaries in high regard, I was disturbed to see the recent three part production "The Right To Work?" brilliantly obscuring the most important issues.

There was the predictable argument regarding the amount of unemployment which may occur, and how best to minimise it, and a tantalising, albeit superficial, glance at the role of leisure in utilising the spare man hours. Unfortunately, however, any good intentions there may have been collapsed into a familiar political squabble between Sir Keith Joseph and two TUC representatives. The problem was one of approach. "The Right To Work?" provided an excellent example of that little known but highly pervasive phenomenon, best described as 'temporal chauvinism'. This is manifest in the inability of members of a society to envisage any future society without imposing their own contemporary political and economic structures upon it. The best, latter-day example, would be the persistent attitude of unions and government alike towards unemployment; they see it as a social evil to be avoided at all costs.

The real question posed by the present technological revolution was summed up by Peter Large of the *Guardian*; "Do we want to work anyway, if our jobs are unsatisfying or unpleasant, if we are there just for the money? Can we rethink the work ethic and find another way, by whatever political means, of distributing wealth?"

In the present social climate, however, resistance to such ideas is very powerful (A Nation of Scroungers? reads the headline). Even aside from the indignant abhorrence of the average man in the street towards 'living off welfare', there are many respectable academics who would argue that, for the individual, unemployment causes depression and psychological instability. The latter is, of course, bound to be true in a society where a person's educa-

tion and culture, together with the media and the inadequacy of many welfare payments, conspire to make the experience as miserable as possible.

Those of you familiar with the work of Ivan Illich will know that education can logically be considered as preparation for failure. The fact is that in national terms, educational institutions are designed to feed the needs of society. Thus, in a society where intellectual activities are accorded more status than manual, but where manual jobs greatly outnumber those requiring intellect, it is necessary to ensure that

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only a small minority of people finish their education feeling intellectually adequate. In order to achieve this end, examinations with a minority pass rate are held, and those who do not fall within the top twenty per cent or so are stamped 'failures'. Put simply, education is a subtle and apparently benign means of inducing people to accept their position within society.

Many young adults thus enter both manual and clerical jobs accepting that they are unlikely to be satisfying in any real sense, but nevertheless with an intense fear of the ultimate failure — unemployment. The middle class college student, with some sense of intellectual adequacy and personal confidence, will find long periods of unemployment much more acceptable than the individual whose dignity relies heavily upon being able to run a car and buy a round in the pub. Thus we are brought up to think of our status in society almost entirely in terms of the job we do.

This is even reflected in linguistics; when asked "what do you do?" the words "for a living" are immediately implied, and one describes a job. If you were jobless you might say "I'm unemployed at present but. . ."; you would be unlikely to say "I look for a job one day a week, play basketball, read science fiction books and newspapers, go for walks and make love to my wife". Thus although many people are presently unable to accept unemployment — in the conventional sense — this is clearly a result of learning rather than any innate predisposition towards "employment" as such. It should therefore be possible, through

changes in education and parental attitudes, to produce a situation where members of society are capable of achieving a high degree of personal satisfaction, regardless of their source of income.

But what about the profit motive, I hear you scream. Is not man really driven by greed, his career being merely an expression of an overwhelming desire to own more than his neighbour? How can we distribute wealth in a way which will satisfy this inner need without some kind of capitalist employment structure? Isn't the alternative a totalitarian state where nobody is really satisfied? True, one doesn't have to look far for confirmation of the intrinsic nastiness of human nature, and it would be foolish to suggest that this could change overnight, if at all.

Nevertheless, I cannot accept that mankind is incapable of achieving a higher degree of social awareness, or of maintaining a more egalitarian and humanistic social structure. Social evolution, which has long since superseded biological evolution as the major instrument of change in man, is difficult enough to understand — let alone control. The so called 'profit motive' is just one aspect of the complex relationship between the individual and his society which must be understood if we are to survive the hazardous future ahead of us.

I am not alone in the belief that we are entering a period of social change as dramatic and pervasive as the industrial revolution. This change will affect us all whether we choose to have any control over it or not. As individuals we can avoid the issue (and the headaches) by taking the view of Ron Condon (Editor of *Data Link*) that: ". . . as for the future, well, let it look after itself as it is so unpredictable anyway. . ."

I am sure, however, that many of you, feeling as I do, both excited and terrified by the social implications of information technology, will agree that we must at least attempt to direct the course of events if we are to avoid a catastrophic outcome. I am convinced that if we ignore the problems we will face inevitable social collapse and/or totalitarianism.

I have covered only a few of the most obvious points, and clearly there is much ground to be explored before any realistic plans can be made. Those of us already involved will have to carry the discussion across to the general public. Social change can only come from the people, since controlling bodies are, by their very nature, concerned only with social maintenance. Do you want your future to remain in their hands?

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Grow your own

From the way microcomputer hardware is sold these days you'd think that