

## REPORTS AND MEMORANDA

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### *Alvin Toffler on the Future*

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This important book<sup>1</sup> has the supreme merit that it makes one think. One's conclusions may differ from the author's even on his own very voluminous data and may differ more on attaching weight to factors of which he is deemed to take insufficient account. Let the eloquent blurb speak for itself:—

[This book] is about change and how we adapt to it. It is about those who seem to thrive on change as well as those multitudes who resist it or seek flight from it. It is about our capacity to adapt. It is about the future and the shocks that its arrival brings.

Jobs are changed more frequently, homes moved, fashions adopted and discarded, knowledge gained and outdated, ideas created and used up faster and faster; marriage, possessions and information become increasingly temporary; sub-cults and ways of living and working become more diverse. Totally new concepts in biology and technology reduce us to naive visitors in a world set on an acceleration course towards advances far exceeding anything that man is yet psychologically or morally prepared to live with.

Not surprisingly, we feel disorientated. We contract the primary disease of the future—future shock. The symptoms are already apparent: they range from anxiety and senseless violence to physical illness, depression and apathy. Victims often display erratic swings in interest and life-style, followed by an effort to “crawl into their shells” through social, intellectual and emotional withdrawal. They feel continually aggravated or harassed and want desperately to reduce the number of decisions they must make.

We cannot arrest the future but we can come to terms with it.

<sup>1</sup> I. Alvin Toffler: *Future Shock: a study of mass bewilderment in the face of accelerating change*. London: The Bodley Head, 1970. £2.50.

The book is admirable in its scaffolding. Its contents pages display not only the titles of twenty chapters but of the 120 sections, so that perusal of these latter alone tell the reader a good deal of what the book is about, if one has sometimes to take a deep gulp to swallow titles like, "Catholics, Cliques and Coffee Breaks"; "Twiggy and the K-Mesons." There are 426 notes, a bibliography of 359 titles and an excellent index. Let us look at some of the author's facts.

#### *Evidence of Accelerating Change*

Early on he quotes George Thomson: "the nearest historic parallel with today is not the industrial revolution but rather the invention of agriculture . . ." and, for Herbert Read, today the historic point is possibly "the one that took place between the Old and the New Stone Age." Of the last 50,000 years, there were 800 lifetimes; of these 650 were spent in caves. "Within the same lifetime a society . . . not only threw off the yoke of agriculture, but managed within a few brief decades to throw off the yoke of manual labour as well. The world's first service economy had been born", i.e. in the modern economically active populations, those engaged in services form the majority. Nothing is said about leisure and how to cope with it, surely a major problem of the future. "Leisure" and its nasty stable-companion "boredom" do not appear on the author's index.

A major point in the book is that change is occurring at an accelerated rate. Dr Bhabha is the authority for the statement that "half of all the energy consumed by man in the past 2,000 years has been consumed in the last one hundred". Without doubting that what has happened is something like this, one statistician would like to have a look at Dr Bhabha's method of estimate of world energy consumption during the middle ages. France is cited as exemplifying industrial growth rate, pre-last war and post-war! One might add that in Toffler's own country, the USA, factor productivity in manufacturing increased from 1.1 to 3.0 per cent per annum between 1899-1919 and 1919-1953.<sup>2</sup> The USA, the most economically advanced country, is naturally the main source of the author's reflections on super-industrialisation, over-choice and all the rest.

#### *Elements of Future Shock*

It is impossible to list here (let alone discuss) all the elements of future change with which the author deals—the shorter lives of buildings and longer lives of people, increased travelling and migration and its effects on education, increased recourse to drugs, sex permissiveness, test-tube babies, tinkering with heredity, hippies and other fall-outs from society, sub-cults, human organ transplants and many more. We are scarcely surprised to learn that too much change has had deleterious mental and physical effects on individuals, because too much of anything whatsoever has these effects. And it is impossible to attribute any social evil to a single cause. The mind boggles at the thought of the kind of equations one would have to evolve for full elucidation of social cause-effect.

The effect of the book and his own reflections going well beyond it was one of exhilaration (qualified by the sobering thought that he was unlikely to experience much of this future). Change is life. Stagnation is death. Change, thanks be to God, is taking

2. J. W. Kendrick quoted in *Productivity and Industrial Growth; the Irish Experience* by K. A. Kennedy (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971).

place all the time. This book could have been written when the wheel, the steam engine, the internal combustion engine or the aeroplane were invented.

Despite the fact that most individuals expect, indeed hope, that tomorrow for them will be much the same as today, the obviously very successful resistance to undesired change (operating through consumer demand, the polling booth and otherwise), the gradual adaptability to change of the great majority in the reasonably long term is to be marvelled at.

All (with striking exceptions) is grist to the author's mill from musical comedy to social experiments, sometimes excellently described. But man occasionally bites dog. Chapters are liable to start with the tale of a New York taxi-driver who is also a rodeo expert, or the tale of a child born old. A critic must point out that most taximen are not rodeo riders and most children are born young. There are too many adjectives and adverbs and verbs tend to be too active. But one of the author's adjectives is absolutely right, when he refers to the "obscene contrast between rich and poor" (page 430). Yet the word "poverty" is not in his index, whereas most thinkers agree that this is one of the major problems of the future; that if it is not dealt with systematically, starting with now, there will occur a "future shock" which will imperil the survival of civilisation and then there won't be any future to speak of; only a fresh start as in Thornton Wilder's play "The Skin of our Teeth". World poverty is a greater menace to survival than is the atom bomb.

The author tells us that he coined the words "future shock" in 1965 and worked for the next five years on the book. And one can well believe that he worked very hard. Unfortunately the book leaves one with the impression that the author set out to prove a thesis, which is an unscientific attitude. Of course, all research starts with some hypothesis but the researcher must keep an open mind as to acceptance, qualification or rejection, in the light of the facts and train of argument. There are many good things here—it is a treasure-house of well-documented fact, but scarcely of an open mind.

### *Stabilising Elements*

The book could inspire, or provoke, another work, perhaps entitled *Future Stability*, which might not be as interesting as *Future Shock*, because change is more titillating than stability and better documented. At the spiritual level the author of such a work would find religion likely to persist, not so much in a fragmentation of subcults (which are of their nature ephemeral, though they will always be there in some form) as in the great historic faiths. He would surmise that there may even be a revival of these faiths, as much for mundane need in the midst of chaos as from spiritual conviction, recognising the force of Voltaire's affirmation "If there weren't a God it would be necessary to invent Him" [initial capital H the commentator's!]. If he finds mention of God in any context embarrassing and unfashionable, he will at least recognise that the vast majority of mankind are decent people, have always been so, that their standard of conduct is improving and, with the explicit recognition of decency in future, likely to improve more, *pace* those crime statistics, pertaining to a small minority.

Vast numbers of things, rightly called "goods", which have persisted down the ages, will continue unchanged in function in their relation to man, though possibly changed in the way they are made. The prestige of that immortal trio wine, woman and song, is undiminished. So is that of art, in essentials, and of natural beauty, if threatened by pollution. We are reminded that future effort must consciously be directed towards preservation of all these precious things against spoliation by industry and vulgarity.

### Bureaucracy

The author, in the face of alleged super-change rejects, as a myth, the Kafkaesque and Orwellian nightmare in which "each man is frozen into a narrow, unchanged niche in a rabbit-warren-bureaucracy . . . squeezing the individuality out of him". To the extent that in free democracies there was even a threat of bureaucracy in the above sense, the author's finding is welcome. Signs of the times, however, are well-organised movements amongst the people resisting attempts of authority to push them around, and these movements, likely to continue, will be a salutary check on any tendency towards bureaucracy (in the pejorative sense). From long experience, the present commentator can aver, with confidence, that in its higher reaches civil service has "infinite variety". A president of an Irish university remarked that "the crisis of today wipes out the crisis of yesterday." If "crisis" be too strong a word, the civil servant's training should enable him to adapt.<sup>3</sup> A characteristic of the competent civil servant is his ability to cope with change and, even if rate of change accelerates, one can have every confidence in the future civil servant being able to deal with the problems that arise. The public service can absorb future shock. Not only in the public service but in every sector, whether change be rapid or slow, there must be organisation. A fossilised organisation is an incompetent organisation.

The author has coined an ingenious term "adhocracy" for the organisation (if it can be so termed) which is to supplant bureaucracy. This commentator holds that the good organisation man has always had to face *ad hoc* events and, even granting that these are to increase, he will be able to deal with them; if he is very competent, he will even welcome them. For the author, a fundamental change will occur necessitating change in terminology. For this commentator, what may be involved is merely a change in degree.

### Organisational Hierarchy

The author has an interesting point that within the organisational structure, hierarchy is likely to "collapse", since the job of each specialist is to become so particular to himself. This commentator thinks that "collapse" is too strong a term. The good organisation can change hierarchical forms has always been able to do so. But in the organisation there must be hierarchy. We may freely grant increased individual competence and responsibility. The fact that one person, or a very small body at the top, must make decisions implies hierarchy down along the line. But hierarchy need not imply master and man status with orders given and accepted, but rather cooperation to a common objective, the decision-maker knowing far less about the details than his staff on any particular job, and frankly admitting it, but having the particular eclectic talent to select the points that matter for making a decision. Relations tend more and more towards discussion and consensus, instead of *fiat*, as formerly. Ordinary observation goes to show that this very welcome change of status is happening all the time. One hopes that it will continue at an accelerating pace, giving more job-satisfaction to the individual and redounding to the efficiency of the organisation, i.e. to the common good.

<sup>3</sup> 3. Transfers between jobs should be routine in any large organisation. These transfers should be most frequent amongst junior staff, to promote job-interest, to help the individual to find his *métier*, all redounding to organisational efficiency. Seniors should try to effect as complete a change of job as possible every decade or less.

*Economics*

The author has hard words about economists: "the world's economists, traumatised by that historic disaster [the great depression] remain frozen in the attitudes of the past." Economists lack imagination in concentrating solely on means whereas "the super-industrial revolution challenges the ends as well."

"Before such a revolution the most sophisticated tools of today's economists are helpless. Input-output tables, econometric models—the whole paraphernalia of analysis that economists employ simply do not come to grips with the external forces—political, social and ethical—that will transform economic life in the decades before us? What does 'productivity' or 'efficiency' mean in a society which places a high value on psychic fulfilment?"

As this commentator has in the past been extremely critical of the discipline of economics his defence of economists may be suspect. We may go along with the author that the pursuit of happiness is a worthy aim (if this is what the author means by "psychic fulfilment"), if we remain sceptical (as Thomas Jefferson was) about attainment, for nirvana is a kind of death. We recall Sancho Panza's "the road is better than the inn". Down the ages the equation wealth = happiness has always been questioned and never more so than at the present day. We even question that rugged American reply (to the Thoreauesque simple life argument) "Money doesn't buy happiness but it buys a dam' good substitute." It is of course undeniable that people should seek happiness, or tranquillity or peace of mind or psychic balance, whatever term one chooses, material wealth being a means and not an end. But it is cant to deny that increased material wealth is conducive to the happiness of the poorer classes, the great majority of mankind. A few economists think that their "mission" is to the poor only, at home and abroad, rejecting the implicit thesis that if total wealth increases, all benefit equally. They don't.

The author gives several examples of the present-day concern of large industrial concerns for non-material welfare, apparently altruistic. And there are also the benevolent activities of the great foundations, financed by past profits of giant firms. This commentator finds it hard to believe that future super-industrialisation will concern itself with ends which are not directed towards increasing profits, even in socialised states where industry is owned by the people. For all one's wish that the sum of human contentment should expand, one doubts whether sub- or super-industry should be its instrument. However, there is room for rational difference of opinion here. Kindness is welcome wherever or however it appears. If in business concerns, however, it is liable to be labelled "paternalism". It is remarkable how words like "paternal", "love", "intimacy" and many more, enshrining fine ideas, have become debased verbal currency. A sign of the times?

While no economists or economic statisticians are satisfied with their "most sophisticated tools," it is an exaggeration to describe economists as "helpless". Their difficulties stem mainly from lack of sufficiently up-to-date, accurate and relevant statistics. With mathematics and the computer always improving, there should be no trouble about methodology. The mathematicians have done their homework.

All planning and forecasting depend on the hypothesis that future behaviour will be broadly similar to past behaviour and that relationships based on past experience will subsist in the future, hypotheses which obviously have the less validity the further the time horizon, which only means that one must provide for change in one's models. If all economic events were random in past and future there would of course be no point in these exercises. But then again there would be no point in having economic statistics

at all. Of course, the situation in the past was never like this. In the short term one is more struck by the stability of economic statistics than by their variation; there is also some degree of random variation, which is a real problem; but there *are* some valid relationships. Analysis of the facts of the past are worth while as a guide to the future, with elements of uncertainty.

Economists in setting up their models are entitled to argue that they can isolate meaningfully the factors for which statistics exist; that they are aware that other social factors exist; that not infrequently they possess statistical proxies for such missing variables. For example in envisaging a social variable "good conduct" they may use as a negative proxy the number of indictable offences as percentage of population. At the Centenary Banquet of our Statistical Society in 1947 the then Minister for Industry and Commerce, the late Seán F. Lemass T.D., brought down the (largely statistical) house with his peroration "The best things in life are not measurable by statistics" and, he added, "we may fervently pray that they remain so".

Now we are less sure. Experience goes to show that when statistics are not available or "with the best things in life" not even conceivable on any aspect, that aspect tends to be overlooked. These include happiness (or peace of mind or any of its synonyms), love, piety, though, as already indicated, statistical ingenuity may sometimes provide proxies for these. Those interdisciplinary social studies, which are so much the fashion nowadays, in aspiration if not yet in achievement, must include all social aspects, non-materialistic as well as materialistic (which can be roughly equated to those for which we have statistics).

Admittedly a lot of the foregoing comment in this section is irrelevant to the author's thesis, so the commentator will come quickly to the point that he agrees largely with the author. The explicit goal of social science (using the term in its widest sense) must be to make people happier.

#### *What to do about it*

The most important chapter in the book is Chapter 20, "The Strategy of Social Futurism"—or, in simple terms, what is society to do about future shock. Here this reader found so much to agree with, sometimes enthusiastically, so much good sense for everyone, that he found himself at pains to discover why he differs at all with the author, having discounted the writing for a strong tendency towards exaggeration of language. Even here the reader will sympathise recalling William O'Brien's *dictum* "I exaggerate to make my point".

The nub seems to be that the wealth of data presented and discussed by the author is journalistic in character; through much of the work man is biting dog. In unmetaphorical terms most of the analysis in the other chapters bear on minority phenomena. Of course, society has to cope with these phenomena but, in so coping, prudent authority must never forget the interest of the unnewsworthy great majority who get into the Births, Marriages and Deaths columns only, and then only when they pay. Politicians usually forget all about them except at election time, whereas minorities have disproportionate power in the lobbies, with the help of the press. This commentator, in passing, seriously proposes to the *media* that they should try in future to publicise the lives of decent men and women who constitute the great majority of mankind. Not being a journalist, he doesn't know how. All people have their triumphs and disasters with which they sometimes heroically cope. Many lives are more worthy of biographies than are those that appear on printers' lists. The other evening I spoke to a lady of my own generation. Her

father was a working farmer with primary school education. He sent nine of his twelve children, mostly girls, to the university (sixty years ago!) and all made successes of their lives. Surely this is more heart-warming than is the story of the latest divorce of some Hollywood starlet (albeit with her shapely picture) and other newsfodder of that type. I do not presume to teach newspapers, radio and television their business. I have, however, every confidence in propounding what I conceive to be a major problem of the future. The *media* have some responsibility for the low moral tone and sense of insecurity of people everywhere (e.g. treatment of news in Ireland in the past three years), for their distorted selection of news. They must try to mend their ways in future, in being concerned to present a more balanced view of life.

### *Randomness of Shock*

But back to the author. In this final chapter we are told of an MP exclaiming that "Society's gone random" and a social scientist that "the rate of change increases at an accelerating speed . . . ; and this brings us nearer to the threshold beyond which control is lost." There is a vast volume of appeal for this kind of thing throughout the book to quoted authority (who may, for all this reader knows, prove their statements) but there is nothing like proof in the book itself; and this thesis might be countered by the anti-thesis "Even if faced with accelerating change, ordinary people, the majority of mankind, who have shown themselves wonderfully adaptable in the past will prove themselves better able to do so because they are learning better how to resist undesired change." Ortega y Gasset, not a name in the author's index, reminded us in the 1930s, at the apogee of the dictators, that the people would always win through at the end, whatever their form of government, and ardent revolutionaries everywhere will do well to note that ordinary people everywhere are bourgeois in their aspirations.

There is a very puzzling section entitled "The Death of Technocracy" which begins "What we are witnessing is the beginning of the final break up of industrialism and, with it, the collapse of technocratic planning". This, on the face of it, is nonsense; indeed the author, in citing the USSR plan, *Le Plan* of France and of a few other countries, disproves his statement. He might have added every country and every large firm in every country and (implicitly) every individual who has reached the age of reason. By careful reading it turns out that what the author means is only that the plans are not comprehensive enough and are too short-term. One has to remember that for the author "technocracy" is a naughty word which leads him on to another of his naughty words "economics", in fact he tends to equate the two and he sums up "Technocratic planning is *econocentric*." "Technocratic planning is *short-range*." The economics and economists of the book are largely figments of the author's imagination. As already stated, the fact that economists think they can isolate economic entities for analytic purposes must not be taken to mean that they are unaware of Mr Lemass's "best things in life." Has the author not heard of Pigou's *Economics of Welfare* or can he deny the broad humanity of Alfred Marshall or, for that matter, of Adam Smith? In the last sentence of *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, J. M. Keynes refers to "the soul of man"—scarcely indifference to non-materialistic values! And, as to the alleged shortness of the planning term, it is many years since the very active organisation ASEPELT was founded. The initials (in English translation) mean The European Association for Medium and Long Term Forecasting. As this writer edited, and contributed to, the first book produced by this organisation, he can assure the author that planning economists are acutely aware of these problems. "To transcend technocracy, our social time horizons must reach decades, even generations,

into the future". Quite. But why "transcend"—why not "expand"? Especially since the social inter-disciplinarians will almost certainly be using the mathematical tools invented by the abhorred technocrats?

#### *Futurist Organisations*

"One of the healthiest phenomena of recent years has been the sudden proliferation of organisations devoted to the study of the future" and the author gives many instances of such organisations. This writer shares the author's enthusiasm. The author makes the fundamentally important point that a single group of experts at the top is not enough. Each community, down to the smallest should have its group of futurists, well-informed about the views of technologists, technology being more predictable than the social effects of this or that technology in operation. The most important function of the groups will, however, be to study these possible effects. These studies are not exercises in crystal-gazing but, ultimately, to influence decision. The purpose is "not so much to predict the future, but, by examining alternative futures, to show the choices open" (C. Bertram, London, quoted by the author). The author might be reminded that, interpreted mathematically, this is exactly the approach of the Netherlands Plan Bureau for many years, in the economic context.

"Corporations must not remain the only agencies with access to such services. Local government, schools, voluntary associations and others also need to examine their potential futures imaginatively." If the author implies that amongst "others" are included "individuals with ideas", this commentator is in full agreement. Unless such individuals enter politics, which they rarely wish to do, their ideas are disfranchised (in the sense of being utterly ineffective) in the British parliamentary democracy we operate in these islands.

Another very apt remark in this Chapter 20: "As we move from poverty towards affluence, politics changes from what mathematicians call a zero sum game into a non-zero sum game. In the first, if one player wins another must lose. In the second, all players can win." And may the non-zero sum, in economic and cultural values, be as large as possible.

One way might be to assemble a small group of top social scientists—an economist a sociologist, an anthropologist and so on—asking them to work together, even live together,<sup>4</sup> long enough to hammer out amongst themselves a set of well-defined values on which they believe a truly super-industrial utopian society might be based". One notes, with interest, that, *pace* earlier animadversions on "technocrats", the economist is mentioned first. And one assumes that "utopian" does not mean impossibly idealistic. In line with the author's earlier recommendations, one assumes that such a body would set down all the options open, with full discussion of all specific proposals, the pros and cons of each and their inter-relationships, perhaps with their own recommendations, but mainly as a guide to discussion in all the agencies, down to the thinking individual with full feed-back. One can easily imagine, indeed one might anticipate, this small group's recommending in affluent societies a lower rate of advance in real GNP (the present most sacred cow) if this would bring about some other social good, e.g. a more equitable distribution of income, or a reduction in that social abomination, inflation.

"What would its [the imagined society's] family structure be like? Its economy, laws,

4. But a cynical-colleague remarked that such cohabitation might result in murder!



religion, sexual practice, youth culture, music, art, its sense of time, its degree of differentiation, its psychological problems?" There are many references to religion in the book, invariably in contexts like this. There is no specific references to religion as a great social force. Obviously religion does not play a large part in the author's system and thinking. Taking a contrary view, this commentator will argue later that there is little hope for a "utopian" society, on the strictly terrestrial plane, unless and until our daily conduct is impregnated with the thought of God. Does the author need to be reminded that the inventor of the word *Utopia* is a saint of the Church, one of the greatest? The Ten Commandments still enshrine a great social code: This being so, in this commentator's system, "sexual practices" within the family would be somewhat circumscribed.

"If the humanisation of the planner is the first stage in the strategy of social futurism . . ." Excellent! The author might agree that the word "planner" could extend to "administrator". In a modern society, while there will always be scope for private charity, the great bulk of social welfare must be administered by government (though with maximum devolution). Even though civil servants in their private capacity may be the kindest of people, they have to administer under acts of parliament which are necessarily formalistic having in mind "The greatest good to the greatest number", with its unhappy corollary "the devil take the hindmost". A change must be made so that every individual in the nation can approach government with the least formality and receive, as of right, a sympathetic hearing, financial help and guidance, no matter how exceptional his problem. This commentator has given much thought to this proposal for application in his own country—space does not allow for details—and he is convinced that great good would come of it, at comparatively small cost. Nothing would do more to restore the prestige of government which everywhere is in decline.

"Thus Todd Giffin, a young American radical [student] . . . notes that while 'an orientation toward the future has been the hallmark of every revolutionary [movement] . . .' the New Left suffers from 'a disbelief in the future' . . . He succinctly confesses 'We find ourselves incapable of formulating the future.' " The author finds elements of elitism (the desire to be boss, pushing other people around) and a "passionate penchant for the past" in student movements. Perhaps one should probe a little deeper (remembering one's own student days). The mood then was (as it is now) one of dissatisfaction at the state of the world and therefore of its institutions. Lacking knowledge of consequences and most else, over-simplified solutions made an irresistible appeal. The main differences between student bodies today and a half-century ago is that they are now more numerous, more sophisticated and better organised. Establishment should recognise the generous elements in student movements, their main impulsion, and students might realise the imperfection of their knowledge and experience. In other words both sides would benefit by the exercise of the Divine virtue of Humility. But authority must recognise that student revolt, i.e. of young people at their most self-conscious, intellectually active years, is natural, a phenomenon to be anticipated, a manifestation of personal liberty.

Of great interest is the author's citation of the words of W. R. Ashby stated to be a "mathematically provable law" that "when a whole system is composed of a number of subsystems, the one that tends to dominate is the one that is *least* stable." A kind of social Gresham's Law! The point here is the independence and elitism of the subsystems, weakening society so that the wilder subsystems have disproportionate power. Contrariwise: in a society confident of its values, would thousands of us walk to work for weeks because one employee (justly or unjustly) is dismissed by a bus company?

"To master change, we shall therefore need both a clarification of important long-range social goods and a democratisation of the way we arrive at them . . ."

"The time has come for a dramatic reassessment of the directions of change; a reassessment not made by the politicians or the sociologists or the clergy or the elitist revolutionaries, not by technicians or college presidents; but by the people themselves. We need quite literally to 'go to the people' with a question almost never asked of them 'What kind of a world do you want ten, twenty, or thirty years from now?' We need to initiate a continuing plebiscite on the future". The author might accept the following gloss on this excellent statement, to this writer's mind the most important in the book. Expert groups (including some of those mentioned in the quotation) help to formulate the question, to advise as to the choices open. The people give the answers. Of course, we must not idealise "the people" in these contexts, the vast majority of whom can't or won't think (one nearly adds a fervent "Thank God") now or ever. But in even the smallest social units there are people who can, and who would make true democracy work (for the first time?); and can we not try to increase the number of thinkers in society?

"Highly paid executives, wealthy professionals, extremely articulate intellectuals and students—all at one time or another feel cut off from the power to influence the directions and pace of change". Full agreement, if all adjectives and adverbs be regarded as expunged from the statement.

"To master change, we shall therefore need both a clarification of important long range social goals and a democratisation of the way in which we arrive at them. And this means, nothing less than the next political revolution in the techno-societies—a breathtaking affirmation of popular democracy"

*Communications*

The author is enthusiastic about the social potential of improved communications and this commentator agrees with him:

"The encouraging fact is that we now have the potential for achieving tremendous breakthroughs in democratic decision-making if we make imaginative use of the new technologies . . . that bear on the problem. Thus, advanced telecommunications mean that participants in a future assembly need not meet in a single room, but might simply be hooked into a communications net that straddles the globe . . ."

"The mass of voters today are so far removed from contact with their elected representatives, the issues dealt with are so technical that even well-educated middle-class citizens feel hopelessly excluded from the goal-setting."

*Conclusion*

In this review-article I have tried to give some idea of what a remarkable book is about, with considerable recourse to quotation. I agree that Toffler has made his point that social and economic changes are taking place at a vastly accelerated pace. However, in his use of the term "shock" I think that he exaggerates the helplessness of humanity faced with great change and underestimates its adaptability in even the not-so-long run. If great changes are taking place, so are peoples' ability to cope with them, now as in the past. As indeed the author points out, there has been in recent years a vast increase

5. In Ireland the parish would be the ideal social unit, if one could imagine eliminated, if only for the functioning of the unit, traditional family hatreds and party politics.

in organisations designed to cope with the future. With the improvement of communications has come about a greater consciousness of world evils, injustices and absurdities. If efforts to cope have been unimpressive so far, I believe that these efforts are, in charity and self-interest, improving and the working of world conscience, deliberately fostered the world over by men of good will, must in the end prevail. We must identify the elements in our civilisation which are worthy of preservation and consciously cherish them, ruthlessly shedding those historical prejudices which, in the vastly changed circumstances of today no longer apply, including that necrolatry to which we Irish are dangerously prone. I fully agree with the author that means must be found to increase the power and influence on government of the individual citizen, imperfect under the system of parliamentary democracy practised in these islands. All democratic institutions are capable of improvement; let the people set about improving them, not waiting for their political parties to do it, for then they may wait in vain. Finally, let the people continue to regard the achievement or maintenance of freedom, personal and political, as their first principle.

Admittedly this article is redolent of "unsupported expressions of opinion," anathema to the scientific spirit. But dealing with the future, especially the long distance future, how can one "support" one's views, when these views, in the author's term are "utopian", i.e. designed to influence in what one conceives to be the right directions? The reader may, if he wants, set question marks after what he regards as too positive affirmations, on the author's part or mine, and answer the questions posed. I should think that the author attaches more importance to discussion than to insistence that his answers are always right.

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