# Dismantling the Infrastructure: A Scientific Approach

Contributed by V.I. Postnikov
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I have always been wary about technologies, despite the fact that I graduated as an electrical engineer, and defended two dissertations. The Chernobyl disaster put an end to my infatuation with science, and revived my interest in poetry, philosophy and nature. Since the late '80s, I was gradually converted into the Luddite type of a scientist and stepped onto a shaky path of techno-criticism.

I remember my enthusiasm when, in the mid-'90s, I found in the America House Library a book openly criticizing the technological society. I knew then I was not alone.
The book I stumbled onto was one by James Brook and Iain A Boal (editors,1995, City Lights): Resisting the Virtual Life: The Culture and Politics of Information.

I was running around Polytechnic where I taught, with the book, but no-one could understand my arousal. I wrote to one of the authors, Richard Sclove, and my Luddite journey began: from Tolstoy to Jacques Ellul to Jerry Mander. Then I decided to read a course on ecology for the students in Electrical Engineering Department, but soon had been stripped of the course and had to leave.

The recent United Nations Conference on Climate Change and other international conventions on global ecological security (e.g., Kyoto protocol) seem to be unthinkable without the robust scientific evidence of the threat humanity is posing to our planet.

One cannot deny that this threat comes largely from technological build-up, maintained by hordes of scientists and engineers. Power stations, transport, chemical industries, military installations, weaponry, etc., are technologies on which our life (and death) depends, and, at the same time, the areas where ordinary people have little say, or influence. That's a precarious situation.

This imbalance of rights to decide what is really needed, and which infrastructure can suit us best (and the rest of nature), has been felt by many philosophers and visionaries since Rousseau, but only recently has acquired a really existential span. It is my belief that the successful dismantling of infrastructure could be realized only under supervision and assistance of engineers who are well aware of intricacies and threats of such dismantling. At least, they should know all about these threats. In other words, we need a worldwide collective of converted scientists and engineers of various profiles (similar to the IPCC group) who could begin an independent study of reliable and secure process of dismantling. It is not that dismantling per se is a panacea (although it is better than status quo); in fact, the dangerous and harmful technologies must be replaced by environmentally friendly technologies. The clear definition of "environmentally friendly" technologies, however, is still under scrutiny. And this should become the major topic of discussion by scientists and engineers, general public and politicians.

In my view, the process of dismantling the infrastructure should begin immediately because of the gravity of three major problems: climate change, warfare and pollution/loss of bio-potential.

In terms of climate change, the power stations and transport, based on fossil fuels, should be eliminated as soon as possible. The Copenhagen meeting did not even raised the issue of dismantling the coal-fired stations and its replacement. The cost is huge and cannot be met by industrialized countries. But it is interesting to compare the cost of damage that such stations make to our planet and the cost of their elimination. No-one dared to do this.

Another hard issue is removing nuclear power. It is all based on technology that is highly complex, toxic to all life, and equally unsafe. It is no secret that nuclear power has been used by governments to intimidate political enemies. But

fear is a poor ally. And humans make deadly mistakes even in “peaceful” applications (think of Chernobyl!); such “mistakes” are becoming even more likely in our stressful world. Security based on mutual aid and respect should be the goal of humanity, not intimidation. Besides, the nuclear weapons are an enormous waste for humanity, and can’t be morally validated. Scientists and engineers involved in the development of such weapons, or technologies, should be deemed as criminals [or deemed under the spell of the technological, statist cult. - editor]

The problem of pollution/loss of biopotential is another deadlock that besieges humanity. Now it is clear that pollution is a direct spin-off of the technological Leviathan. The problem can, of course, be “resolved” by itself due to end of resources (oil, gas) and limited carrying capacity (Catton, 1980) But a huge loss of human lives and habitat is inevitable. The additional casualties could result either from techno-catastrophes and/or further pollution, or from loss of bio-potential and hunger.

Therefore, it needs to be stopped. The transition to low-tech living should be accompanied with higher quality living, fresh air and water, more physical exercise, more leisure, more fun.
The scientific background for a low-tech life style, one more environmentally benign, is now in the focus of many adherents of permaculture, and is becoming a growing worldwide movement.

On the other hand, we need to organize concerned scientists and engineers into a coherent international group that will take care of the professional dismantling of the deadly infrastructure. They must work in parallel with permaculturists. Scientists need a change of heart. Possibly, the re-habilitation program should be envisaged for scientists and engineers in poetry, ecology and art, while permaculturists need to know more of the threats of technologies.

Of course, the best practices of the dismantling process should be discussed widely and publicly, and have (at least some) political support through the so-called consensus conferences. I expect that we will face desperate opposition, but that should not stop us.

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Readings:

“Is There a Technology Resistance?”, by Peter Crabb, Nov. 13, 2009: culturechange.org

“Technology Traps”, by Peter Crabb. Culture Change, Nov. 10, 2008: culturechange.org

"Fall of the Technological World", by Jan Lundberg. Culture Change Letter #204, Oct. 7, 2008: culturechange.org

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Catton, William, Jr. (1980). Overshoot: The Ecological Basis of Revolutionary Change. University of Illinois Press.

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