Hit where it hurts

Ted Kaczynski

2002

Contents

10. Hit Where It Hurts.

It is open to argument whether I am right in thinking that biotechnology is the best issue on which to attack the system politically. But it is beyond argument that radicals today are wasting much of their energy on issues that have little or no relevance to the survival of the technological system. And even when they do address the right issues, radicals do not hit where it hurts. So instead of trotting off to the next world trade summit to have temper tantrums over globalization, radicals ought to put in some time thinking how to hit the system where it really hurts. By legal means, of course.

1. The Purpose Of This Article.

The purpose of this article is to point out a very simple principle of human conflict, a principle that opponents of the techno-industrial system seem to be overlooking. The principle is that in any form of conflict, if you want to win, you must hit your adversary where it hurts.

I have to explain that when I talk about "hitting where it hurts" I am not necessarily referring to physical blows or to any other form of physical violence. For example, in oral debate, "hitting where it hurts" would mean making the arguments to which your opponents position is most vulnerable. In a presidential election, "hitting where it hurts" would mean winning from your opponent the states that have the most electoral votes. Still, in discussing this principle I will use the analogy of physical combat, because it is vivid and clear.

If a man punches you, you can't defend yourself by hitting back at his fist, because you can't hurt the man that way. In order to win the fight, you have to hit him where it hurts. That means you have to go behind the fist and hit the sensitive and vulnerable parts of the man's body.

Suppose a bulldozer belonging to a logging company has been tearing up the woods near your home and you want to stop it. It is the blade of the bulldozer that rips the earth and knocks trees over, but it would be a waste of time to take a sledgehammer to the blade. if you spent a long, hard day working on the blade with the sledge, you might succeed in damaging it enough so that it became useless. But, in comparison with the rest of the bulldozer, the blade is relatively inexpensive and easy to replace. The blade is only the "fist" with which the bulldozer hits the earth. To defeat the machine you must go behind the "fist" and attack the bulldozers vital parts. The engine, for example, can be ruined with very little expenditure of time and effort by means well known to many radicals.

At this point I must make clear that I am not recommending that anyone should damage a bulldozer (unless it is his own property). Nor should anything in this article be interpreted as recommending illegal activity of any kind. I am a prisoner, and if I were to encourage illegal activity this article would not even be allowed to leave the prison. I use the bulldozer analogy only because it it clear and vivid and will be appreciated by radicals.

2. Technology Is The Target.

It is widely recognized that "the basic variable which determines the contemporary historic process is provided by technological development" (Celso Furtado*). Technology, above all else, is responsible for the current condition of the world and will control its future development. Thus, the "bulldozer" that we have to destroy is modern technology itself. Many radicals are aware of this, and therefore realize that there task is to eliminate the entire techno-industrial system. But unfortunately they have paid little attention to the need to hit the system where it hurts.

Smashing up McDonald's or Starbuck's is pointless. Not that I give a damn about McDonald's or Starbuck's. I don't care whether anyone smashes them up or not. But that is not a revolutionary activity. Even if every fast-food chain in the world were wiped out the techno-industrial system would suffer only minimal harm as a result, since it could easily survive without fast-food chains. When you attack McDonald's or Starbuck's, you are not hitting where it hurts.

Some months ago I received a letter from a young man in Denmark who believed that the techno-industrial system had to be eliminated because, as he put it, "What will happen if we go on this way?" Apparently, however, his form of "revolutionary" activity was raiding fur farms. As a means of weakening the techno-industrial system this activity is utterly useless.

future cloning of human beings would be of little practical use to the system anyway. But the House of Representatives' action does suggest that this may be a point at which the system is vulnerable, and that a broader attack on all of biotechnology might inflict severe damage on the system and its values.

9. Radicals Are Not Yet Attacking Biotech Effectively.

Some radicals do attack the biotechnology, whether politically or physically, but as far as I know they explain their opposition to biotech in terms of the system's own values. That is, their main complaints are the risks of environmental damage and of harm to health.

And they are not hitting the biotech industry where it hurts. To use an analogy of physical combat once again, suppose you had to defend yourself against a giant octopus. You would not be able to fight back effectively by hacking at the tips of its tentacles. You have to strike at its head. From what I've read of their activities, radicals who work against biotechnology still do no more than hack at the tips of the octopus's tentacles. They try to persuade ordinary farmers, individually, to refrain from planting genetically-engineered seed. But there are many thousands of farms in America, so that persuading farmers individually is an extremely inefficient way to combat genetic engineering. It would be much more effective to persuade research scientists engaged in biotechnological work, or executives of companies like Monsanto, to leave the biotech industry. Good research scientists are people who have special talents and extensive training, so they are difficult to replace. The same is true of top corporate executives. Persuading just a few of these people to get out of biotech would do more damage to the biotechnology industry than persuading a thousand farmers not to plant genetically-engineered seed.

rigorous testing and regulation of genetically-modified crops. People's anxiety will then subside and protest with wither.

8. All Biotechnology Must Be Attacked As A Matter Of Principle.

So, instead of protesting one or another negative consequence of biotechnology, you have to attack all modern biotechnology on principle, on grounds such as (a) that it is an insult to all living things; (b) that it puts too much power in the hands of the system; (c) that it will radically transform fundamental human values that have existed for thousands of years; and similar grounds that are inconsistent with the values of the system.

In response to this kind of attack the system will have to stand and fight. It cannot afford to cushion your attack by backing off to any great extent, because biotechnology is too central to the whole enterprise of technological progress, and because in backing off the system would not be making only a tactical retreat, but would be taking a major strategic defeat to its code of values. Those values would be undermined and the door would be opened to further political attacks that would hack away at the foundations of the system.

Now it's true that the U.S. House of Representatives recently voted to ban cloning of human beings, and at least some congressmen even gave the right kinds of reasons for doing so. The reasons I read about were framed in religious terms, but whatever you may think of the religious terms involved, these reasons were not technologically acceptable reasons. And that is what counts.

Thus, the congressmen's vote on human cloning was a genuine defeat for the system. But it was only a very, very small defeat, because of the narrow scope of the ban — only one tiny part of biotechnology was affected — and because for the near

Even if animal liberationists succeed in eliminating the fur industry completely they would do no harm at all to the system, because the system can get along perfectly well without furs.

I agree that keeping wild animals in cages is intolerable, and that putting an end to such practices is a noble cause. But there are many other noble causes, such as preventing traffic accidents, providing shelter for the homeless, recycling, or helping old people cross the street. Yet no one is foolish enough to mistake these for revolutionary activities, or to imagine that they do anything to weaken the system.

3. The Timber Industry Is A Side Issue.

To take another example, no one in his right mind believes that anything like real wilderness can survive very long if the techno-industrial system continues to exist. Many environmental radicals agree that this is the case and hope for the collapse of the system. But in practice all they do is attack the timber industry.

I certainly have no objection to their attack on the timber industry. In fact, it's an issue that is close to my heart and I'm delighted by any successes that radicals may have against the timber industry. In addition, for reasons that I need to explain here, I think that opposition to the timber industry should be one component of the efforts to overthrow the system.

But, by itself, attacking the timber industry is not an effective way of working against the system, for even in the unlikely event that radicals succeeded in stopping all logging everywhere in the world, that would not bring down the system. And it would not permanently save wilderness. Sooner or later the political climate would change and logging would resume. Even if logging never resumed, there would be other venues through which wilderness would be destroyed, or if not destroyed then tamed and domesticated. Mining and min-

eral exploration, acid rain, climate changes, and species extinction destroy wilderness; wilderness is tamed and domesticated through recreation, scientific study, and resource management, including among other things electronic tracking of animals, stocking of streams with hatchery-bred fish, and planting of genetically-engineered trees.

Wilderness can be saved permanently only by eliminating the techno-industrial system, and you cannot eliminate the system by attacking the timber industry. The system would easily survive the death of the timber industry because wood products, though very useful to the system, can if necessary be replaced with other materials.

Consequently, when you attack the timber industry, you are not hitting the system where it hurts. The timber industry is only the "fist" (or one of the fists) with which the system destroys wilderness, and, just as in a fist-fight, you can't win by hitting at the fist. You have to go behind the fist and strike at the most sensitive and vital organs of the system. By legal means, of course, such as peaceful protests.

4. Why The System Is Tough.

The techno-industrial system is exceptionally tough due to its so-called "democratic" structure and its resulting flexibility. Because dictatorial systems tend to be rigid, social tensions and resistance can be built up in them to the point where they damage and weaken the system and may lead to revolution. But in a "democratic" system, when social tension and resistance build up dangerously the system backs off enough, it compromises enough, to bring the tensions down to a safe level.

During the 1960s people first became aware that environmental pollution was a serious problem, the more so because the visible and smellable filth in the air over our major cities was beginning to make people physically uncomfort-

7. Biotechnology May Be The Best Target For Political Attack.

Probably the most promising target for political attack is the biotechnology industry. Though revolutions are generally carried out by minorities, it is very useful to have some degree of support, sympathy, or at least acquiescence from the general population. To get that kind of support or acquiescence is one of the goals of political action. If you concentrated your political attack on, for example, the electric-power industry, it would be extremely difficult to get any support outside of a radical minority, because most people resist change to their way of living, especially any change that inconveniences them. For this reason, few would be willing to give up electricity.

But people do not yet feel themselves dependent on advanced biotechnology as they do on electricity. Eliminating biotechnology will not radically change their lives. On the contrary, it would be possible to show people that the continued development of biotechnology will transform their way of life and wipe out age-old human values. Thus, in challenging biotechnology, radicals should be able to mobilize in their own favor the natural human resistance to change.

And biotechnology is an issue on which the system cannot afford to lose. It is an issue on which the system will have to fight to the finish, which is exactly what we need. But — to repeat once more — it is essential to attack biotechnology not in terms of the system's own values but in terms of values inconsistent with those of the system. For example, if you attack biotechnology, primarily on the basis that it may damage the environment, or that genetically-modified foods may be harmful to health, then the system can and will cushion your attack by giving ground or compromising — for instance, by introducing increased supervision of genetic research and more

D. The propaganda industry. The propaganda industry includes the entertainment industry, the educational system, journalism, advertising, public relations, and much of politics and of the mental-health industry. The system can't function unless people are sufficiently docile and conforming and have the attitudes that the system needs them to have. It is the function of the propaganda industry to teach people that kind of thought and behavior.

E. The biotechnology industry. The system is not yet (as far as I know) physically dependent on advanced biotechnology. Nevertheless, the system cannot afford to give way on the biotechnology issue, which is a critically important issue for the system, as I will argue in a moment.

Again: When you attack these vital organs of the system, it is essential not to attack them in terms of the system's own values but in terms of values inconsistent with those of the system. For example, if you attack the electric-power industry on the basis that it pollutes the environment, the system can defuse protest by developing cleaner methods of generating electricity. If worse came to worse, the system could even switch entirely to wind and solar power. This might do a great deal to reduce environmental damage, but it would not put an end to the techno-industrial system. Nor would it represent a defeat for the system's fundamental values. To accomplish anything against the system you have to attack all electric-power generation as a matter of principle, on the ground that dependence on electricity makes people dependent on the system. This is a ground incompatible with the system's values.

able. Enough protest arose so that an Environmental Protection Agency was established and other measures were taken to alleviate the problem. Of course, we all know that our pollution problems are a long, long way from being solved. But enough was done so that public complaints subsided and the pressure on the system was reduced for a number of years.

Thus, attacking the system is like hitting a piece of rubber. A blow with a hammer can shatter cast iron, because caste iron is rigid and brittle. But you can pound a piece of rubber without hurting it because it is flexible: It gives way before protest, just enough so that the protest loses its force and momentum. Then the system bounces back.

So, in order to hit the system where it hurts, you need to select issues on which the system will not back off, in which it will fight to the finish. For what you need is not compromise with the system but a life-and-death struggle.

5. It Is Useless To Attack The System In Terms Of Its Own Values.

It is absolutely essential to attack the system not in terms of its own technologically-oriented values, but in terms of values that are inconsistent with the values of the system. As long as you attack the system in terms of its own values, you do not hit the system where it hurts, and you allow the system to deflate protest by giving way, by backing off.

For example, if you attack the timber industry primarily on the basis that forests are needed to preserve water resources and recreational opportunities, then the system can give ground to defuse protest without compromising its own values: Water resources and recreation are fully consistent with the values of the system, and if the system backs off, if it restricts logging in the name of water resources and recre-

ation, then it only makes a tactical retreat and does not suffer a strategic defeat for its code of values.

If you push victimization issues (such as racism, sexism, homophobia, or poverty) you are not challenging the system's values and you are not even forcing the system to back off or compromise. You are directly helping the system. All of the wisest proponents of the system recognize that racism, sexism, homophobia, and poverty are harmful to the system, and this is why the system itself works to combat these and similar forms of victimization.

"Sweatshops," with their low pay and wretched working conditions, may bring profit to certain corporations, but wise proponents of the system know very well that the system as a whole functions better when workers are treated decently. In making an issue of sweatshops, you are helping the system, not weakening it.

Many radicals fall into the temptation of focusing on nonessential issues like racism, sexism and sweatshops because it is easy. They pick an issue on which the system can afford a compromise and on which they will get support from people like Ralph Nader, Winona La Duke, the labor unions, and all the other pink reformers. Perhaps the system, under pressure, will back off a bit, the activists will see some visible result from their efforts, and they will have the satisfying illusion that they have accomplished something. But in reality they have accomplished nothing at all toward eliminating the techno-industrial system.

The globalization issue is not completely irrelevant to the technology problem. The package of economic and political measures termed "globalization" does promote economic growth and, consequently, technological progress. Still, globalization is an issue of marginal importance and not a well-chosen target of revolutionaries. The system can afford to give ground on the globalization issue. Without giving up globalization as such, the system can take steps to mitigate the negative

environmental and economic consequences of globalization so as to defuse protest. At a pinch, the system could even afford to give up globalization altogether. Growth and progress would still continue, only at a slightly lower rate. And when you fight globalization you are not attacking the systems fundamental values. Opposition to globalization is motivated in terms of securing decent wages for workers and protecting the environment, both of which are completely consistent with the values of the system. (The system, for its own survival, can't afford to let environmental degradation go too far.) Consequently, in fighting globalization you do not hit the system where it really hurts. Your efforts may promote reform, but they are useless for the purpose of overthrowing the techno-industrial system.

6. Radicals Must Attack The System At The Decisive Points.

To work effectively toward the elimination of the techno-industrial system, revolutionaries must attack the system at points at which it cannot afford to give ground. They must attack the vital organs of the system. Of course, when I use the word "attack," I am not referring to physical attack but only to legal forms of protest and resistance.

Some examples of vital organs of the system are:

A. The electric-power industry. The system is utterly dependent on its electric-power grid.

B. The communications industry. Without rapid communications, as by telephone, radio, television, e-mail, and so forth, the system could not survive.

C. The computer industry. We all know that without computers the system would promptly collapse.