

ENGINEERING-ECONOMICS

Prophets of Technocracy Tell How Industry Might be Ruled

Realizing Radical Move Impossible Now, Veblen Outlined Method of Putting Engineers in Control of Industry

This is the first article of a series presented to illuminate the backgrounds and objectives of the movement that has found expression in the discussion of Technocracy. The material is given as information and news, not as our opinion or with our endorsement. The next article will describe the three kinds of experts who would rule the technologic state.

IF THE ENGINEER, technologist and scientist, those makers of the "machine age," are to come into control of our civilization and run our economic life, how would they govern?

This question assumes general importance due to the publicity given to Technocracy¹, the current expression of the idea that technically and scientifically trained persons should control our economics and political destiny. Technocracy has seized the mantle of science, engineering and technology and has announced that the "price system is smashed." It emphasizes the obvious importance of mechanical energy today. It has not made a constructive plan for economic rehabilitation, just yet.

But the idea that science that makes the machines can best tell how to run them is not new. It has not sprung full blown out of the depression of the 1930's.

Rule by technology has its prophets. Just as Thomas Paine in his remarkable and powerful pamphlet of 1776, "Common Sense," stirred the intellectual fires that led to the American Revolution, just as Karl Marx's "Communist Manifesto" of 1847 gave the practical strategy of socialism and became the theoretical driving force behind the Communism of modern Russia, rule by technology has its prophets and manifestos.

Most articulate and challenging of these prophets, perhaps, was Thorstein Veblen. A dark-bearded ironist who received his Ph.D. at Yale, and taught economics at Chicago, Stanford and else-

where for his bread and butter, Veblen has been called the *enfant terrible* of American economics. His professional colleagues looked askance at him often and before his death a few years ago he achieved only a modicum of fame among intellectuals.

Of the penetrating and radical analyses of civilization contained in his nine published books, a single chapter in one of them vividly blue-prints the way in which technology would take over the government.

Another prophet is Prof. Frederick Soddy, the British scientist. His brilliant work on radioactivity and his 1912 theory that a chemical element can exist in different forms or isotopes of different atomic weight, since confirmed widely, won the Nobel prize in chemistry in 1921. He is now Dr. Lee's professor of chemistry at Oxford. With keen scientific eyes he has looked at civilization's economic paradox and his 1926 book, "Wealth, Virtual Wealth and Debt," challenges conventional economics. The charge has been made that the Technocracy group used his ideas freely.

With Veblen, Soddy and other "rule by technology" prophets perhaps the ma-

majority of scientists and engineers will not agree.

But their blue-prints by which technologic government would be built are worth viewing in these unsettled times.

How would technologic rule of government and industry be accomplished? Over a decade before the word "technocracy" obtained current usage, Thorstein Veblen, iconoclastic American economist, visualized the day when serious, widespread consideration would be given to a government by technologists, engineers and scientists.

He wrote a vivid blue-print of technologic government. In 1919 it was published in *The Dial* and later (1921) it became the conclud- (*Turn to Page 62*)

METEOROLOGY

Origin of Newly-Found Stratosphere Clouds Sought

THE EXISTENCE of clouds at heights from 15 to 19 miles above the earth, a region of the atmosphere where clouds have never before been believed to exist, has been established by observations made in Norway by Prof. C. Störmer with the photographic equipment he has successfully used in measuring the height of aurora.

These high clouds have been called "mother of pearl clouds" on account of the pureness of the spectral colors with which they glow and the concentric arrangement of their coloration in band after band similar to the color scheme inside a clamshell. Shades of pink, lilac, purple and blue occur but generally reddish hues predominate. These colors shine about as (*Turn Page*)



"MOTHER OF PEARL" STRATOSPHERE CLOUDS

Twice as high as the lofty clouds heretofore studied, these unusual clouds set an altitude record. They are some 15 to 19 miles above the earth. Prof. C. Störmer, their discoverer, took this photograph at Oslo, Norway, Jan. 13, 1929.

¹Attention is called to the difference between "technology," the application of science to the arts, and "Technocracy," the coined word.

bright as in an average rainbow and may be seen only near sunset, increasing rapidly in brightness immediately after the sun sets.

Mother of pearl clouds have been reported most frequently after the passage of a center of low pressure, but have not been observed generally, on account of the thick low cloud obscuring their view. On the lee-side of mountains, however, the föhn winds dissolve these rain and storm clouds, permitting a view of the extremely high cloud. Mother of pearl clouds have been found to remain stationary for hours and on other occasions to move with velocities up to 100 miles per hour. On January 13, 1929, they were observed to fall a distance of one mile in an hour and a quarter.

The origin and constitution of these clouds has not so far been explained. The highest cirrus clouds formed from floating ice crystals are only eight miles high in these latitudes and until these mother of pearl clouds were discovered, the stratosphere was considered cloud-free except for the noctilucent clouds about fifty miles high and supposed to be associated with volcanic ejecta.

Observers in states and provinces just east of the Rockies would appear to be favorably situated to observe these extraordinary brilliant clouds especially during chinooks. The observer should note the time, arrangement and brilliance of colors as well as the direction and velocity of the cloud.

Science News Letter, January 28, 1933

CHEMISTRY

Find Second Vitamin Is Produced by Ultraviolet

THE ANTI-NEURITIC vitamin B has been produced by the action of ultraviolet rays on adenine sulphate, B. C. Guha and P. N. Chakravorty of the Bengal Chemical and Pharmaceutical Works, Calcutta, reported to *Nature*.

Thus it appears that two vitamins are produced by activation of a chemical with ultraviolet light. Scientists found several years ago that rickets-preventing vitamin D is formed by the action of ultraviolet light on ergosterol.

Vitamin B is found naturally in the bran layers of cereals, in vegetables, milk, eggs, liver and pancreas. Prof. Adolf Windaus of the University of Göttingen isolated the vitamin in pure form a year ago and gave it the chemical formula $C_{12}H_{17}N_3OS$. The Indian report indicates that the vitamin is the type of compound known as a purin.

Science News Letter, January 28, 1933

CHEMISTRY

Improving Processes Keep Alcohol Industry Upset

WHETHER or not we have beer, complete repeal or prohibition as is, ethyl alcohol will continue to be one of the most important chemicals of commerce.

The chemical industry could not do its part in our modern civilization if it were deprived of its copious drafts of the liquid that is at present forbidden as a beverage to Americans.

Ethyl alcohol is an essential solvent in many industries, and many articles in the stores without the least suggestion of alcohol about them could not exist without the utilization of this solvent which ranks next to water in usefulness. In perfumes and in radiator anti-freeze, in medicines and flavoring extracts alcohol is familiar to everyone as itself.

Even before prohibition alcohol used industrially and commercially was treated so that it could not be used as a beverage. In pre-prohibition days the government wished to be sure to collect the tax that was levied upon alcohol that was not denatured. In these days of prohibition the government denatures the alcohol with unpalatable and sometimes poisonous substances. Wood alcohol or methanol, the deadly sister to ethyl alcohol, is used in some cases. When so treated the industrial alcohol is difficult to use as a beverage.

Common alcohol of the ethyl variety is becoming known among chemists as ethonal. Once it could be called with accuracy "grain alcohol" but now large quantities of it are made synthetically from petroleum and coal and even larger quantities are still made by fermentation of molasses rather than by fermentation of grain.

Consternation was caused in the alcohol-by-fermentation industry not many months ago when successful synthetic processes for making ethyl alcohol began to be commercially important. For instance, at a plant at South Charleston, W. Va., alcohol is produced from either petroleum or the gases from coke ovens. The first step in this synthesis is the cracking of ethane, propane and other hydrocarbons obtained from coke oven gas or petroleum. This produces ethylene which is combined with water and then passed over catalysts to produce alcohol, which is purified through the use of

another most useful chemical, sulfuric acid. As yet, however, synthetic production of ethyl alcohol is not so simple as the synthesis of wood alcohol.

While these chemical advances are threatening the market for molasses and grain as alcohol raw materials, there comes the hope that a process used by the Japanese and Chinese for fermenting rice cakes in the sun centuries before the birth of Christ may rescue the industry of making alcohol by fermentation. By a relatively new "amylo" process, utilizing mold fungi instead of the yeast of more familiar alcoholic fermentation processes, chemists believe that the cost of industrial alcohol produced from grain may be reduced so that it may compete with cheaper sources.

Due to the widespread manufacture of bootleg alcohol that has grown under prohibition, chemists are expressing some concern over the fate of the potential two billion dollar industry of light wines and beer if, as, and when re-established under authorization by Congress. They urge that when light wines and beer are legalized there be incorporated into the authorizing laws the requirement that the beverages be of the highest degree of excellence. They do not wish the beverage alcohol industry to be dominated by a class with bootleg standards and they desire to have restored to domination chemists equipped with all the new information that has been produced in the years when America has been "dry." For, although prohibition has been the rule of the land, this has not stopped fruitful scientific research on the making of alcoholic beverages.

Science News Letter, January 28, 1933

ZOOLOGY

Canadian Antelope Herd Healthy and Growing Fast

EFFORTS to raise antelope in captivity have at last succeeded with the growth of a herd of 42 at Nemiskam, Alberta, to nearly 500 animals.

The raising of this most timid of wild animals without its being conscious of captivity was accomplished by Canadian government big game specialists, when they decided to save the antelope