Aquarian Engineer: people technology

By Eric Rainey
Alternative Features Service

In high school, Bruce got interested in science. He was one of those kids who built rockets that would blow up in the basement. But he was never over completely by the powerful forward thrust of American technology.

Other kids who built their own rockets in the 1960s moved on more or less automatically to technology. Bruce, however, became something that no one dreamed could exist: a radical engineer.

Today the most interesting thing about Bruce is that he is alienated from society, but not from technology. A few months ago he got together with half a dozen students and formed a group called the Aquarius Project.

Like other counter-cultural technologies beginning to make a ecological impact, the Berkeley group argues that the movement must use technology, turning it to new ends. Bruce believes that proliferating urban and rural communities will pave the road to a gradual revolution. But some of his friends feel that technology is the chief cause of the failures. Aquarius Project is studying relatively simple and automated production techniques that a commune could use to set up a small textile factory or automated bakery.

Its data on hydroponics show how urban-commune could grow its own food both economically and organically, Bruce says. Bruce’s last name does not appear here because the project has another interest – “technological guerrilla warfare” – and wants to stay partly underground.

As an example, notes that the movement’s new technicians want to find ways of coming to grips with the government’s computerised dossier banks.

On the opposite coast, the Center for Movement Research lists its address as the Department of Sociology at Queens College, Flushing, N.Y. “We are a collective whose orientation is communications, multimedia and technology.” a recent announcement said. “We are interested in video, lasers, holography, organic food, geodesics and inflatables.”

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“Wholehearted rejection of technology and scientific method is dangerous to the movement and requires us from tools and techniques which we must understand and use in developing alternatives,” the working group contends.

“Technological people are only beginning to turn on, to get involved,” Bruce observes. “For a long time there is going to be a shortage of them.”

But potent forces are shaking their traditional role as servants of the corporate state. Unemployment has brought a deep malaise to the engineering ranks. At the same time, engineers have begun to relate to the ecology movement, which confounds them with the consequences of misused technology.

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