



# Technocracy Operates Outside Of Left Or Right

Technocracy cannot be rejected until it is recognized for what it is, and that is a problem. Right-wing republicans and Green New Deal leftists are all “useful idiots” of Technocrats, and have no clue they are being manipulated. □ TN Editor

In 1969, when Theodore Roszak wrote *The Making of a Counter Culture*, it was at least as difficult to be an optimist as it is half a century later. The United States had spent most of the Sixties locked in a bloody, pointless war. At home, its cities had suffered the biggest spike in violent crime since the Great Depression.

In the face of all this, Roszak, then aged 37, conducted a survey of populism among younger generations that was critical in places but recklessly hopeful at its core. “It is the young”, he wrote, “arriving with eyes that can see the obvious, who must remake the lethal culture of their elders, and who must remake it in desperate haste”.

Today, inured to a very different set of stereotypes about the young, one reads passages like this with envy for Roszak’s optimism. In hindsight, few prominent public intellectuals of his generation were so wrong about so many things. Even fewer were so right on the main points.

Roszak is hardly remembered as a great thinker. When he died in 2011, obituaries described him as the wonk whose greatest achievement was to coin the term “counter culture” to describe the liberal anti-institutionalism of Sixties radicals.

In 1969, there were hundreds of radical or quasi-radical groups with vaguely overlapping sensibilities: Krishnas, Black Panthers, doves, stoners, acidheads, hippies, Yippies, Weathermen. Recognising, as many did, that these groups had something in common was much simpler than spelling out where their commonality lay.

By Roszak’s reckoning, the one thing these groups shared was an enemy. What hippies called the Man or the System or the Establishment, he called “technocracy”: the scientific managerial approach that sustained a hyper-organised industrial society. For many of Roszak’s generation, the consummate technocrat was Lyndon Johnson’s defense secretary Robert McNamara, former president of the Ford Motor Company. Mcnamara had tried to run the Vietnam War effort in much the same bloodless manner he’d brought to the factory lines at Ford, with disastrous results.

Technocracy was not left wing (McNamara himself was a Republican), but it wasn’t right wing, either. It was, to be sure, a political ideology—the elevation of bureaucracy above freedom and dignity—but voting Democratic or Republican wouldn’t defeat it. Nor, Roszak argued, would the tactics that the left had been using for the last few decades:

*“If the melancholy history of revolution over the past half-century teaches us anything, it is the futility of a politics which concentrates itself single-mindedly on the overthrowing of governments, or ruling classes, or economic systems. This brand of politics finishes with merely redesigning the turrets and towers of the technocratic citadel.”*

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Yet despite its flaws, Roszak’s analysis of technocracy is still illuminating. The 50 years since the publication of *The Making of a*

*Counter Culture* have been good for technocrats and bad for everyone else, particularly the young. The major hardships people under 40 now face are nightmarish versions of those Roszak identified: wandering aimlessly in a technocratic economy, subjected to algorithmic surveillance and dependent for food, recreation and pretty much everything else on corporations that view people as data points.

And yet nobody on the left seems to be talking about technocracy enough. In the US., the radical left is divided, instead, between Sanders-style socialists and single-issue politicians who can't decide whether capitalism, race, gender, or some intersectional combination of them all is the proper lens for analysing society. If any public discourse about technocracy exists today, it is the bigoted version proffered by right-wing pitchmen — from Steve Bannon, with his rants about the Deep State, to Michael Gove, smugly confident that Brexiteers are sick of McNamara-ish experts.

Surely one key reason for the left's sheepishness about technocracy is that, by and large, it was left-wing people working in places like Silicon Valley who reshaped technocracy into the enormous, charming monster it is today. Thanks to Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and others, today's technocrats have mounds of digitally-reaped data at their disposal, which they use to guide their subjects' thoughts and behaviours more precisely than ever.

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