



Shere Hite of the Hite Report spoke at Dal last night

Liberalism lacks

by Michael Clow

Daniel Bell carried the gospel of faith in our technological future to Dalhousie last Friday in the second of this year's Killam lectures. While his faith that technology would solve the major questions of the past dates back several decades, the depth of thought it entails is somewhat disturbing.

Bell's thinking about the future is based on the belief that science-based technological revolution will end the problems of scarcity, and while creating problems in the transition, create a new age of plenty. The problem with this thinking, quite aside from the argument that all problems do not flow essentially from simple scarcity (that is that **economics** is not equivalent to **life itself**), is that, contrary to Bell's assertions, technology is neither public property nor can we expect an age of unlimited affluence.

Firstly, technology does not develop out of thin air along predestined paths . . . modern technology is developed, owned and controlled by institutions and elites which create the type of technology which serves their interests. The result is that "technology", whether it be devices or ideas, is developed and applied in a way that increases the wealth, power and privilege of the elites and institutions in society. For example, we develop a centralized electrical energy technology which strengthens large corporations and utilities rather than alternative technologies: professionalization of health, education and welfare gives the legal, medical and professional elites an increasingly privileged position in society. The result is not the disappearance of ideology but the promotion of ideologies that promote the interests of corporations and technological elites. Bell's recommendations that we condone the actions of multinational corporations, accept liberal individualism as the basis of society, and accept the creations of vast pools of unemployed surplus labour in the name of technology is, clearly an ideological stance, not the end of ideology.

Secondly, the faith that technology can promise a utopian world

of affluence is based on a misunderstanding of technology and the environmental problem. His notion that the world is not a closed system because there is a certain degree of ability to provide technological substitutions is silly; **technology is not magic**, it is a limited capacity to create new things from the materials and energy around us. His bald assertions that it can solve all shortages forever is an act of faith that would make most religious zealots balk. Contrary to his understanding the only ecological problem is not simply a lack of resources or pollution, but the appropriation of vast parts of the ecological network by all our activities. We don't need to utterly destroy the biosphere to bring disaster upon ourselves, all we have to do is carry on as we are, clearing forests, "reclaiming" wetlands and putting substances into the wrong place in the ecosystem to make our land air and water systems inhospitable to the species upon which their stability depends.

Bell's view of the future developing as if by magic and sustained by a deep faith in liberalism and the power of technology lacks the breadth and character of understanding to inspire facile acceptance amongst the thoughtful uncommitted to it by self interest.

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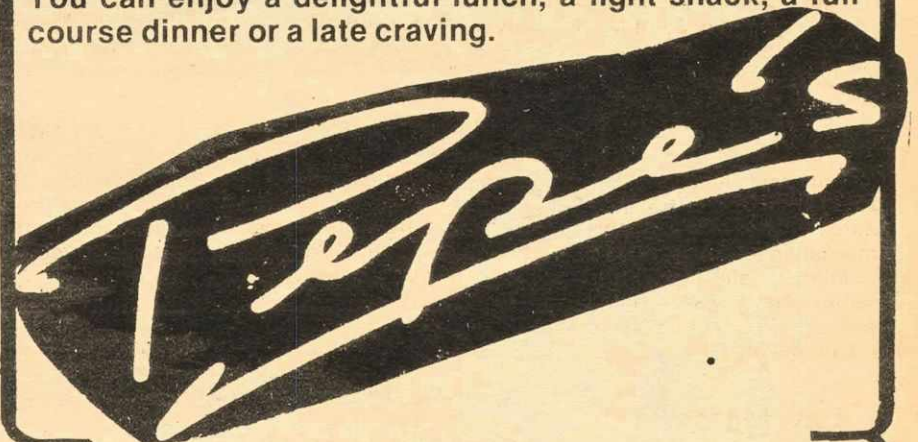


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