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## Book Review

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# Fascist policies with a digitalized face

by Martha Quinde

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### Microelectronics and Society— For Better or For Worse

*A Report to the Club of Rome*

Edited by Gunter Friedrichs and Adam Schaff  
Oxford, England: Pergamon Press, 1982

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It is hardly a surprise that this report on microelectronics, commissioned by the Club of Rome, proves to be another forum for the Club of Rome's Malthusian economic theories. Specifically, Club of Rome member Alexander King, who contributed two of the chapters, sets the tone by insisting that Western technology is not suitable for the developing countries.

"As far as the main thrust of this book is concerned, the question which arises here is whether the countries of the Third World, which have not yet been able to assimilate the possibilities provided by the first Industrial Revolution, will be able to benefit by the upsurge of a second and much more complex phase of technology—that of microelectronics," King writes.

As far as King is concerned, they cannot. "Achievement of the threshold of technological competence is, as it were, the entry card to this system. . . . The Third World lies well below the critical threshold of technology."

In the advanced sector, the effect of the microelectronics age will be "the elimination of a high proportion of existing jobs." This could mean a "utopia," if "the inescapable employment aspects of the application of the new microelectronics should be turned into an opportunity to achieve a greater degree of industrial democracy." King describes this utopia as "an equitable distribution of employment through shorter working hours, earlier retirement."

In the developing sector, the situation is much more volatile, according to King. He warns, "By the end of the century, the proportion of the total population residing in the present industrialized countries will be about 20 percent only." Automation "will erode the main comparative advantage of the developing countries, namely their low labour costs" and, therefore, "increase the gap between rich and poor countries."

The idea that the developing countries could educate their

populations and actually assimilate new technologies King rejects as out of the question. "It is suggested in some quarters that the rapid introduction of packaged microelectronic processes to developing countries could be the panacea for the solution of the North-South problem, allowing these nations to leapfrog into the sophisticated industrial world of the twenty-first century. This approach is rejected as unrealistic, misleading and diversionary."

Besides, King continues, the Third World does not want it. This kind of development "will make the emergence of indigenous technologies more difficult and, in the end will erode local cultural values. This will be seen by many in the Third World as a new wave of technological colonialism." One cannot ignore, King says, "many of the deep structural, social and cultural issues . . . as the recent example of Iran has demonstrated all too clearly."

At best, the Club of Rome's prescription for the South is technology in the form of "the village computer . . . assisting in the distribution of effort to ensure that the available biomass is fully used and sustainable" or "development of new labour-intensive technologies using advanced scientific approaches."

The emergence of the microelectronic revolution will represent a major political force very soon, says King, for which governments and labour must be prepared with "contingency measures . . . which will have strong societal impact. The structures of governments were created for earlier, simpler times," and chaos and resource war could ensue.

"There is as yet little understanding in the industrialized countries of the fragility of their material prosperity, of their vulnerability to the withholding of vital imports of the materials and energy on which their industries depend. . . . Such a situation is inevitable in a world in which sovereignty is sacrosanct." But such sovereignty is eroding, King writes. "The applications of microelectronics, which we have described, cannot but accelerate the erosion."

In the remaining nine chapters of this book, little is said that is not in defense of King's position.

In "A Third World Perspective," Juan F. Rada of the Centre for Education in International Management purports to represent Third World opinion. "Information should not be used to infringe on a people's cultural identity and invade a world that is struggling to reach its own identity and development path."

Adam Schaff, with whom King works closely, describes the possible utopia referred to by King. Schaff, a Polish dissident claims that the microelectronics revolution will eliminate work, and he describes an automated world run by "researchers," people like himself. "Pride of place here goes to research which will increasingly become the socially most important tool." Utopia is a society whose "members would pass from the stage of *Homo laborans* to that of *Homo studiosus*, without losing the nature of *Homo ludens* [playful man]. That would mean unquestionable progress."