

BLAMING TECHNOLOGY

WHEN Samuel C. Florman, the vice president of a construction company, wrote a provocative book called *The Existential Pleasures of Engineering*, he found himself invited to take part in dozens of debates with proponents of the anti-technological movement. Visiting the college campuses, he discovered that professors could be deceptively serene. Jovial at dinner, they nonetheless carried theories "under their tweeds like stilettos." Their students, "after disarming a visitor with wide-eyed veneration," delighted in tossing up "challenging statements like cherry bombs." A scientist by training, Mr. Florman decided that academia was not a likely place to hunt for the truth.

It somehow got under Mr. Florman's skin when he heard a young man, with professorial encouragement, disparage farm tractors in comparison with oxen. But Florman's mood really soured when a young woman solemnly arose to an-

nounce that the building they were meeting in should never have been built since it was constructed on terrain sacred years ago to an Indian tribe.

Florman's adventures in academia provoked him into writing a second book, *Blaming Technology: The Irrational Search for Scapegoats* (St. Martin's Press, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010, 206 pp., \$12.95). It is a markedly gentle book considering some of the violent speeches that moved Florman to undertake a work that had to be done.

Florman concedes that we live in a world filled with ambiguities and paradoxes. The good points of oxen can be admitted: they don't consume gasoline, and they provide manure to enrich the soil. Their only drawback is that they are no longer capable of ploughing Kansas in a way to feed the world. As for the Indians who once hunted in Michigan woods, Florman does not quarrel with the idea that they were wronged. But

Hiawatha has been a long time dead. Demolishing a modern building would not give him back his tepee.

Whatever ails business in the United States today, it is not the fault of engineers. Simply by analyzing *Who's Who in America* Mr. Florman deftly refutes the notion that we are run by technocrats. Despite John Kenneth Galbraith, who thinks power resides with the planning staffs of a "technostructure," our industries are still guided by graduates of liberal arts colleges who, in many instances, have gone on to law school. During the past thirty years only 7 per cent of our college graduates have had engineering majors. Lawyers, not engineers, make our laws in Congress. Mr. Florman concludes, quite sensibly, that "the myth of the technocratic elite is an expression of fear, like a fairy tale about ogres."

The army engineers, who have a direct impact on the environment, have been called Public Enemy No. 1 by Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas. Florman does not deny that there is such a thing as "big dam foolishness" in some parts of the West. But the environmentalist in him is pleased every time he sees a barge being propelled gently along a man-made waterway. If we didn't have barge canals—and deepened rivers—we would have to compensate by building more concrete highways for roaring trailer trucks. On

balance, the army engineers haven't done such a bad job in developing our inland waterway system. If they have done harm to wetlands, it was in a day when the worth of wetlands was not clearly understood by anybody.

Florman understands the phenomenon of nuclear *Angst*. When, some three months before the Three Mile Island disaster, he visited the Connecticut Yankee nuclear plant in Haddam, Connecticut, he felt that *Angst* as he gazed at the pale blue glow of the nuclear pool. It seemed unearthly. He recognized his dread as irrational, but he understood the general hysteria that was to come in the wake of Three Mile Island. With people thinking as they do, he takes the need for providing for the disposal of nuclear waste very seriously. The apprehensions of ordinary people, he says, must be factored into our nuclear decisions. Florman is for mixing boldness and caution in going ahead with nuclear projects, but he would take it as a political blessing if fusion (a safe process) would come along to make power from fission academic.

Small Is Dubious in an Age of Mass Production

When Florman encounters smallness in the shape of a canal barge, he delights in it. But the whole "small is beautiful" movement, which produced a book by E. F. Schu-