

The John Galt Effect

Arthur B. Robinson, Ph.D.

A hidden effect of the Nov 4 elections and the national events that preceded them is perhaps best called the “John Galt Effect” in honor of Ayn Rand’s famous character in *Atlas Shrugged*. Although this is occurring on a significant scale, I have not seen a single article written about it.

Our technological civilization stands upon the shoulders of many generations of free Americans and the great accomplishments that they bequeathed to us. Among those Americans and their counterparts in other countries have been a small special group of people whose unusual genius, work ethic, and love for their work were especially outstanding. These men, by their example, their creations, and their leadership of free enterprises, have drawn our civilization upward. One of the greatest privileges of my life has been to know a few such people.

Without this small group of individuals, the technological attainments of their generations would not have occurred. We know the names of a few of them, but there were many more, constituting perhaps as many as one in a thousand. Ayn Rand called such people “men of the mind.” In *Atlas Shrugged*, under the leadership of John Galt, they withdrew their services. They would work only in freedom; they refused to work under tyranny.

In reality, most of these men of the mind do not entirely withdraw. In the decades since Rand wrote her classic novel, socialism in the United States has steadily risen and freedom has greatly diminished—especially for technologists. Oppressive government taxation, regulation, and litigation have reached levels that Rand could only dimly have imagined.

Yet the technologists have continued to work. Prevented from providing the technology that would have truly revolutionized human health, they have built incrementally better technology for the health system that the medical monopoly permits. With many of their chemical substances banned, they make do with the remainder. They have even managed some new technologies, especially computers and the Internet—technologies that give hope that truth about their plight may finally be heard.

Starved of capital for technological advance and surrounded by government rules that make advance almost impossible, they still inch forward to the limits of their abilities. The improvements that they have managed to make obscure the tragic loss of the great advances that they would have made had freedom and free enterprise not been suppressed.

Americans do not know—nor will they ever know—the marvelous world in which they would have lived had not their resources been wasted by thieving politicians and bureaucrats, while their technologists were shackled by socialism and elitism.

While *Atlas* carried the world on his shoulders, it was the mythical Prometheus who stole the secret of fire from Zeus and gave fire to man. This gift and further guidance by Prometheus set off a tremendous technological advance that provided man with brick, mathematics, the alphabet, ships, healing drugs, mining of metals, and many other technological gifts.

Zeus had little interest in man and had intended for humans to live primitively until they died off. Furious with Prometheus, Zeus had him shackled to a crag high in the Caucasus mountains where, each day, an eagle came to dine on his liver—which grew back each night, only to be ripped out again by the eagle. Thus was Prometheus tortured for his gifts of technology to man.

Now, it is time for the torture of the real Prometheuses—the American men of the mind. While their children are being educated—in government, tax-financed schools—to fear and hate the technology that their fathers and grandfathers have created, the older men are condemned to watch the dismantling of the civilization that they and their predecessors made possible.

But still they do not withdraw. They love their work too much to stop, and most of them love their fellow men too much to desert them. The forces of tyranny depend upon this. Without these people, even the technology required by Marxist societies would not function.

Yet, while the men of the mind do not fully withdraw, they have families and other loved ones for whom they are responsible. As the pendulum of politics swings toward tyranny, and dangers to those they love increase, they turn their talents more toward their personal responsibilities. Part of their thoughts, efforts, and ingenuity are lost to society—and this loss cannot be recovered by either positive or negative incentives.

Throughout our country today, the men of the mind (and the women, too) are watching the awful scene in Washington and its reflection in state and local capitals throughout the United States. They understand the consequences of the government oppression that has dogged their own footsteps for many years and that will grow much worse in the near future. So, they are taking actions to protect themselves and their families.

We have no way to measure the societal effects of this distraction of the men of the mind. There are immediate effects on our well-being and the long-term effects from loss of things they are no longer working full time to create. I estimate that the cost of distracting the men of the mind is greater than the trillions of dollars being lost on government printing presses. Call this Y2009K—and this time it’s for real.

Our existing power plants are still operating; our petrochemical plants are still producing; our military defense is still performing; our food supplies are still flowing; our hospitals are still functioning; and the rest of the technological infrastructure upon which our lives depend is largely still in place. But the key people—not those we see on television, but those we do not see because they are constantly engaged in real work—are seriously distracted and now partially engaged in personal survival.

Of one thing we can be certain. If any of the essentials of our civilization seriously falter, and this causes real harm, those who would be our masters, and their fellow travelers in the media, academia, business, and politics will cast blame upon some of these men of the mind—and drag them before us for punishment. The men of the mind know this too—and it is a cause for further distraction.

The readers of this journal know many such people. Some are leading great enterprises. Others are in the basements of power plants and heavy industries. Some are closeted in universities quietly at work on the next generation of advances of science and engineering. Some are in the clinic or operating room. They are not just technologists. They are also bankers, commodity traders, farmers—productive, essential people throughout our civilization. They are easily recognized by their genius and by the love of their work that permeates their whole being.

Such people generally talk about their work constantly to anyone who will listen. Now, they are distracted. Listen to them. What are they talking about today?

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