

Three Paths At The Automated Crossroads.

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1.) Introduction; The Age of Automation.

Rapid advances in Artificial Intelligence as well as progress in robotics in the first quarter of the 21st century increasingly justify using the term 'Automation Revolution' given the speed and scale of the changes taking place. To give three examples of these developments:

i) 'The new global average robot density reaches a record 162 units per 10,000 employees in 2023 - more than double the number measured only seven years ago (74 units). This is according to the World Robotics 2024 report, presented by the International Federation of Robotics (IFR).'

Source: <https://ifr.org/ifr-press-releases/news/global-robot-density-in-factories-doubled-in-seven-years>

ii) 'It is worth emphasizing that during the first decade of the 21st century, market growth, as measured by operational stock, remained relatively stagnant, with the milestone of one million operating units achieved in 2010. Over the following decade, the operational stock of industrial robots across all industries more than tripled, reaching approximately 3.5 million units in 2021.'

Source; <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877050923012073/pdf>

iii) 'In 2010, 2 zetabytes of data was created globally, with only 9% of that data available in a structured format (i.e. data that has been organized or indexed for easier referencing). By 2019, annual data volumes reached 41 zetabytes with over of it being 13% structured.'

Source: <https://globalxetfs.co.jp/en/research/a-decade-of-change-how-tech-evolved-in-the-2010s-and-whats-in-store-for-the-2020s/>

The Automation Revolution is comparable to two previous revolutions - the Electrical Revolution of *La Belle Epoque*, (the period between the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1, and World War One), and the Electronic Revolution of the second half of the twentieth century. Considering these two provides us with great insight regarding the transformation currently under way.

The Electrical Revolution involved harnessing inanimate sources of energy (notably coal, then oil) to power machinery, even at great distances from the fuel source, thanks to the mastery of electricity and the establishment of power grids. This greatly accelerated the **replacement of**

simple manual labour with technology. The Electronic Revolution, characterised by the widespread use of computers and other digital devices, likewise entailed the **replacement of simple mental labour with technology.** The Automation Revolution - the utilisation of robots and artificial intelligence for an ever-increasing set of tasks, raises the prospect of the **replacement of sophisticated mental and manual labour with technology.**

It is no exaggeration to declare that this epochal change brings our species to a crossroads. Leaving aside the option of turning back the clock - and assuming that money will remain significant in the economy¹ - there are now three paths open to us. They will be considered in turn.

11.) The Path of Insanity: Job Creation

‘Madness is rare in individuals - but in groups, parties, nations, and ages it is the rule.’ - Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*.

‘There is nothing new under the Sun’ - this line best sums up the mindset that regards developments in AI and robotics as merely the most recent in a series of technological revolutions that have taken place over the last three centuries. As such, the argument runs, technology doesn’t only destroy jobs, it also creates new ones. This claim deserves closer consideration.

As a matter of fact, technology by itself neither creates nor destroys jobs. Rather, it is the adoption of new technologies by organizations and individuals that - by enabling them to dispense with human labour, leads to job losses. Yet, ironically, the same human creativity that works to free men from the burden of toil, is indeed quite capable of inventing new occupations to reimpose the burden, thereby sparing mankind the unimaginable horrors of a life of leisure...

There are many examples. We have jobs in marketing, notably advertising, created by firms to sell the increased output made possible by technical progress. We have the commercialisation of previously free services, such as housework, child care, and care of the elderly. We have the expansion of bureaucracies by governments - and increasingly, non-governmental and international organizations as well, ostensibly for the public good, but in actual fact, to maintain employment levels and avoid social unrest - giving us jobs like ‘Chairman of the Ethics Commission of the International Handball Federation’.²

The key point to note is that the purpose of work is to meet the needs of humans, other life forms, and increasingly, machines. Once this can be achieved without the labour of men, jobs subsequently created constitute artificial work - tasks that, while disguised as useful activity, in effect do little or no good, and indeed, often do harm, just in order to justify giving a person a paycheque. To the extent that such work meets a need, it is the need of

vested interests to maintain an outdated, dysfunctional, socially harmful, economic system. Therefore, the path of job creation in the Age of Automation, entails a terrible waste of time, energy and resources, all for the sake of maintaining a socially (and environmentally) undesirable system - in short, insanity.

III.) The Path of Slavery: The UBI.

Given that the term **Universal Basic Income** (UBI) covers a range of potential policies, (few, if any, of which have so far been implemented), any analysis of this proposal must be somewhat speculative. Nonetheless, there are three features that seem to be common to various UBI schemes: they are arbitrary, they are political and they rely on conventional methods of financing.

The UBI's arbitrary nature lies in the fact that the actual amount is determined without any reference to the requirements of the economy. This is not to say that the UBI will have no economic basis - on the contrary, it may well be calculated as a proportion of per capita income. However, that proportion is simply a number selected without no more justification - than a number that is a few percentage points higher or lower.

Closely related to the arbitrary nature of the UBI is its intensely political character. While 'all life is politics' as Spengler aptly observed, the UBI is liable to be all politics. This is due to the fact that being an arbitrary number, its value will rest in the hands of the government of the day, with left-wing governments likely to be keen to raise its value, and right-wing ones prone to reduce it. To make what is quite likely to be the main source of income for many, even most, people in the future a matter of political contention, is to promote social strife.

UBI proposals tend not to challenge the monetary system, and indeed, operate within it. This results in two variants - Redistributive UBIs, which are primarily financed through taxation, and Immersive UBIs, which are financed through government borrowing. The former is likely to be more politically contentious, and could even lead to increased tax evasion and emigration by the wealthy, who might well resent subsidizing the rest of the population. The latter, of course, entails sending the nation further into debt - but because it is less likely to generate ill-will among the well-off sections of society, it will probably be the prevalent variant of the UBI.

At this point, it should be clear that the UBI entails a double submission. First, there is the submission of the public to the will and whims of the government, regarding the actual value of the UBI. Then, in the case of Immersive UBIs, there is the submission of the entire nation to the banks and other moneylenders. Being necessary for providing the funds for the policy, they are in a position to manipulate governments by making future loans contingent on their gratification. In the, not unlikely, scenario that the Immersive UBI becomes the primary source of income for the bulk of the

population in the Age of Automation, the outcome is intensified debt slavery replacing contemporary wage slavery. It is a mockery of humanity to call this progress.

IV.) The Path of Autonomy: The National Dividend.

The National Dividend, in this context, is easiest to understand as the libertarian opposite of the authoritarian UBI. Thus, it has three features that contrast sharply with those of the path of slavery, namely:

- 1) **It is methodical, not arbitrary.**
- 2) **It is macroeconomic rather than political.**
- 3) **It is based on the creation of debt-free money, instead of conventional methods of financing.**

These points require further elaboration.

The National Dividend is not whimsically chosen, but carefully calculated on the basis of the following formula:

Total Consumption (GNP plus Net Imports) **minus total spent income** (total income minus total savings) **divided by the adult population, for a given period of time** (usually a year).

In practice, after the annual figure is calculated, the amount is likely to be disbursed in monthly or even weekly instalments to avoid the disruptive effects that a large single payment would cause.

As the foregoing formula indicates, the National Dividend is primarily macroeconomic in nature, unlike the political UBI. To further insulate it from the vagaries of petty politics, it would be desirable to have it disbursed by a National Credit Commission - an independent government body with the same level of autonomy as a National Election Commission. In other words, political leaders would be no more able to interfere with the payment of dividends than they are to interfere with the provision of votes. (Whilst it is still theoretically possible for a future government to completely scrap the National Dividend, in practice, such a move would be extremely foolhardy, since it would almost certainly backfire in subsequent elections).

Last, but by no means least, the National Dividend is not financed by either taxation or borrowing: instead, it entails the creation of debt-free money through the exercise of the State's coinage sovereignty³. It thereby avoids both debt-slavery as well as the reduction of economic security that taxation inevitably entails (for those who pay more than they receive).

The overall effect of the National Dividend is to increase the economic security and independence of the individual by providing him with a regular source of income that no man - be it his employer or his prime minister - can deny him. *In the age of automation, the dividend is sure to grow over time,*

as GNP increases faster than the amount of money disbursed as wages, salaries, and other forms of remuneration, due to the reduced need for human input in the production of goods and services. Consequently, we can properly appreciate the following observation of Major Douglas:

‘It would have been recognised that the dividend is the logical successor to the wage, carrying with it privileges which the wage never had and never can have, whether it be rechristened pay, salary, or any other alias; because the nature of all these is *a dole of purchasing-power revocable by authority*, whereas a dividend is a payment absolute and unconditional, of something due. The first is servitude, however disguised, the second is the primary step to economic emancipation.’ (Major C. H. Douglas, *Credit Power and Democracy*, pages 43-44, italics in the original).

As he travels down this path, the common man will find himself increasingly in charge of his own life. In other words, he will enjoy ever-growing autonomy.

V.) Conclusion: Cui Bono?

If an age is imbued with an error, some always derive advantage from the error, while the rest have to suffer from it. - Max Stirner, *The Ego and his Own*.

The three paths are far from politically neutral: each has certain beneficiaries whose positions improve relative to the rest, the further down a given track we proceed. Recognizing this is the key to understanding the attention, or lack thereof, that different paths receive.

The path of insecurity benefits those who promise to ‘create jobs’ - primarily businesses and of course, the bankers who provide them with the credit to do so. Going down this road - assuming it does not result in widespread mental and social breakdown - leads to plutolatry and subservience to corporations. We already see signs of this in the way the mass media fawns over billionaires and how governments desperately try to woo foreign investors.

The path of slavery generates its own ominous outcome - namely the empowerment of government, and thus, the political class and the State bureaucracy. The immersive UBI, which, as previously noted, is likely to be the prevalent one, also strengthens bankers insofar as they are financing the policy - and ‘he who pays the piper calls the tune’. Regardless of the type, be it redistributive or immersive, servility towards the State which, in the final analysis, is the entity that controls the UBI - is the likely outcome of following this route.

Finally, the path of autonomy benefits civil society - at the expense of businessmen, bankers and those in positions of political power. Thanks to the constant flow of national dividends, increasingly independent individuals

will neither laud billionaires, not look to the State for succour. Instead, they will, on this trail, blaze their own paths in life, blessed by the happy trinity of autonomy, automation and abundance.

¹ This assumption is necessary to avoid a detour into various non-monetary allocation options.

² Yes, this job actually exists. See: <https://www.ihf.info/media-center/news/information-40th-ordinary-ihf-congress-0>

³ This makes the National Dividend impossible to implement on a national level in countries whose governments no longer possess coinage sovereignty - such as the members of the eurozone.