

A Book Review of THE JOBLESS FUTURE

By Stanley Aronowitz & William DiFazio

University of Minnesota Press, 1994

Reviewed by Michael Stack / CPSR

This book ain't about no pork-chop. It's serious stuff. The authors contend jobs work as we know it is going away. They cite the tendency of new jobs to be part-time and/or temporary, and often at minimum wage. Official unemployment figures fail to measure the state of partial employment and those who have given up looking for work. The authors mention the thousands of layoffs at GM, IBM, Boeing, Kodak and Sears and that even "the older and most prestigious professions of medicine, university teaching, law, and engineering are in trouble: doctors and lawyers and engineers are becoming like assembly-line clerks...proletarians" (p. 54). The authors comment: " ... we have yet to feel the long-term effects on American living standards that will result from the elimination of well-paid professional, technical and production jobs" (p. xi).

The mass of layoffs and the destruction of high-quality, well-paid, permanent jobs is produced by three closely related developments:

"First in response to pervasive, long-term economic stagnation and to new scientifically based technologies, we are experiencing massive restructuring of patterns of ownership and investment in the global market. Fewer companies dominate larger portions of the world market in many sectors, and national boundaries are becoming progressively less relevant to how business is done, investment deployed and labor employed....Second, the relentless application of technology has destroyed jobs and, at the same time, reduced workers' living standards by enabling transnational corporations to deterritorialize production..." and thirdly, U.S. corporations are locating not only low-skilled jobs, but also design and development activities in other countries such as India and China where labor is both skilled and cheap (p 8-9).

Their thesis may be synopsized: "All of the contradictory tendencies involved in the restructuring of global capital and computer-mediated work seem to lead to the same conclusion for workers of all collars that is, unemployment, underemployment, decreasingly skilled work, and relatively lower wages. These sci-tech transformations of the labor process have disrupted the workplace and worker's community and culture. High technology will destroy more jobs than it creates. The new technology has fewer parts and fewer workers and produces more products. This is not only in traditional production industries but for all workers, including managers and technical workers...." (p. 3).

Commenting particularly on computer programmers: "The specific character of computer-aided technologies is that they no longer discriminate between most categories of intellectual and manual labor. With the introduction of computer-aided software programming (CASP), the work of perhaps the most glamorous of the technical professions associated with computer technology programming is irreversibly threatened. Although the real job of creating new and basic approaches will go on, the ordinary occupation of a computer programmer may disappear just like that of the drafter, whose tasks were incorporated by computer-aided design and drafting by the late 1980s. CASP is an example of a highly complex program whose development requires considerable knowledge, but when development costs have been paid and the price substantially reduced, much low-level, routine programming will be relegated to historical memory" (p. 21).

Arguing the above is the meat (& potatoes) of the book but chapters are given over to exploring aspects of these developments, particularly the commercialization of science and the university (i.e., the subordination of knowledge to serve profit-motives to the detriment of any other determinant).

Other chapters look at a city-planning office to study the effects CAD has had on the city-drafters and designers over the years; unions and their experience organizing "professionals" such as doctors, teachers and lawyers; the university tiered, tracked and tenure system; and recent writers on class (What!!! Class you say?!).

The authors devote a chapter to class analysis because though soft-pedaling they locate an important nexus of social change in a "New Class" of knowledge workers (after the work of Alvin Gouldner but with important qualifications), especially as the blue-collar worker and the service worker are replaced by automation. They acknowledge that members of the new class have "traditionally been the servant of corporate capital and the state." But Aronowitz and DiFazio see that with the proletarianization of knowledge workers described in their book and while capital still depends on their labor the new class begins questioning their identification with an exploitative ruling elite. Here the authors' argument is weak. They say that computer programmers etc. constitute a new class, yet at the same time while describing its disappearance they are arguing that they really aren't that much different from their blue and pink collar cousins. Why not look to those outside of production the marginalized former factory workers, managers, operators, (and yes, even programmers), etc., unemployed, or barely employed in temp or part-time or minimum wage work, who have little or no stake in the status quo as the "new class"?

An interesting couple of pages in *The Jobless Future* traces the origins of "The War on the Poor." A changing perception amongst "liberals and leftist intellectuals" has seen the resurfacing of the 18th century English ideal that "moral character" is built by economic independence, but without consideration that an unemployable class has no hope of participating in a shrinking labor market.

In the last chapter, the authors suggest some "pathways" for the future, taking into account presuppositions of their book study. "In addition, our proposals assume the goal of assuring the ... possibility ...of the full development of individual and social capacities" (p. 343). Things they argue for: The need to reduce working hours; regulating capital to prevent capital flight; education as a right rather than a privilege (particularly poignant in "knowledge" times); a guaranteed income; a new research agenda steered away from profit to human motives and so on. They argue that we need to go beyond "full employment" toward "no employment" through the steps of shorter work weeks, redistributed work load, and so forth, and work to set things up so that such is possible.

Aronowitz and DiFazio's argument for a jobless future is convincing. It's recommended reading for those trying to get a handle on the changing workplace and its social fallout. Their book also seems to have arrived into a spate of no-future-for-work commentary. There's the FutureWork list (see below).

There is also Breecher writing in *Z Magazine*, a recent *Business Week* article on "Re-Thinking Work," a *Fortune* cover story on "The End of the Job," the Canadian book *Shifting Time* by Armine Yalnizyan, T. Ran Ide and Arthur J. Cordell, and the new book by Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work*.

In the face of these observations and predictions, nothing is being done to address the social dislocation upon us (unless you count prison construction) when the agency by which humans obtain necessities through sale of their skills and abilities is going away. Even worse, as Aronowitz and DiFazio remark at the start of their book, a grand delusion is in operation "as experts, politicians, and

the public become acutely aware of new problems associated with the critical changes in the economy crime, poverty, homelessness, hunger, education downsizing, loss of tax revenues to pay for public services, and many other social issues. The solution is always the same: jobs, jobs, jobs" (p. xi).