

JOB-TECH

The Technological Revolution and Its Impact on Society

Midwest Conference on
Technology, Employment and Community

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Introduction

Do you have a job? Is your job secure? Heard about any layoffs? Are you in school? Are you a college graduate? Are you computer literate? Do you use a computer at school, at work, or at home? Are you on the Internet? How different are things now than, say, thirty or forty years ago for you or your parents?

Why do these questions worry so many of us? A group of campus and community leaders organized a conference to begin working on the question. This volume contains the proceedings of that conference.

The fundamental changes transforming industrial society are rooted in a technological revolution. The powerful impact of new technology has led to an economic revolution and in turn a social revolution. Led by such advanced industrial societies as the United States, the world is entering a new epoch of human history. Investigating this process in its early stages will help us understand what is going on and change it to benefit humanity. This is a critical task.

One of the basic needs of the industrial system is continuous innovation. This innovation is in the realms of hard technology (smart machines), soft technology (operational information), and organizational forms of management and administration. In other words, there is an insatiable need for new machines, new information, and new relationships. The motivating force has been the search for profit, how to get the competitive edge to sell the most goods at the highest price for the lowest investment.

New technology is giving us the best of times and the worst of times. Productivity is going up, and unprecedented wealth is being created. But an increasing number of people are experiencing a severe decline in quality of life. In general, this technological revolution is producing an economic transformation by polarizing society into extremes of wealth and poverty. Every aspect of society is impacted by this economic polarization, and society can no longer go on as usual.

Too many of us, while affected every day, have not yet seen the entire sweep of the technological revolution and its social consequences. We need to begin a dialogue to design a future worth living in. The scientists are in their laboratories, the educators are in the schools, and people are in their homes and on their jobs (if they aren't homeless and if they are employed).

The American Dream, a vision based on past realities, is no longer sustaining us. Until we understand current realities and envision our own futures, the visions of the dominant forces in society — in our case the corporate wealth behind the media, educational institutions, think tanks, publishing houses, and so on — carry us along. The development of a vision that represents and comes from the majority of people, working and poor people, is one of the most difficult and yet precious historical moments. We saw at the Midwest job-tech conference that presenting the facts and the issues of technology, employment, and community is a terrific starting point for people to envision their future and come together around practical proposals.

How to Use This Volume

First of all, read it! It details the ideas presented at the Chicago job-tech conference. Then consider pursuing more study, more research, and more conferences.

More study. The conference touched on many topics others have delved into and written about. You can use the “Technological Revolution and Its Impact on Society” course outline at college or in a labor, church, or community group. You can join others studying these issues by connecting via our Web pages and our Internet discussion list, where we will be posting more resources for teaching.

More research. This conference gives the general outline of the current situation, but more work needs to be done on each specific community, each industry, and each new year, because things are changing very rapidly. For students and faculty, this book itself should be a treasure chest of research ideas to follow up on. There are also many publications to monitor, including *Technology Review*, published by MIT; *Wired*, the major popular journal of the high-tech computer revolution and its new culture; the Tuesday science/technology section of *The New York Times*; the technology section of the London *Financial Times*, which is published the first Wednesday of every month; and the *People's Tribune* and other papers printing stories from the perspective of poor people. A monthly newsstand check can turn up major articles from a variety of sources. Get ahold of some zines, the many self-published magazines circulating today. Get from the Internet the news that doesn't even make it into print.

More conferences. A third job-tech conference is scheduled at California State University at Los Angeles, and we encourage every community and

campus to join in conferences as they are able. The most important aspect of future conferences will be assembling diverse groups that include scholars and activists, middle- and working-class people and those already driven deep into poverty, and jumping barriers of color and nationality. We have compiled a handbook on organizing these conferences and would be glad to share this information and to participate in any new conference project.

This book is divided into three parts. Part one, the plenary sessions, takes you from the opening assertions to the final conclusions of the conference. Part two, the workshops, gives you 17 different close-up discussions of the issues debated in the five plenary sessions. The last third of the book, the appendices, are tools we offer to those many readers who will want to carry the debate forward and press for solutions.

It is exciting to be consciously involved in the dawn of a new age. We welcome you to share our thoughts as recorded in these conference proceedings. We hope you invite us to share yours.

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