

Is there anything in common between the age of automation now upon us and the first industrial revolution long ago (circa 1790-1840)? Yes. Both surged ahead with technical progress and production, and eliminated jobs without jobs for the workers. Both claimed that technological progress was inevitable and would automatically put things right. In this respect, the age which first established factories and the age with automates them are alike. We know that the job-killing of the late 18th and early 19th centuries hurt both the cottage workers, and the communities in which men and women lived and which depended on them, and a system of production that extended far beyond pelle like handloom weavers. We know that jobs in the new mechanized industry, to compare with the old, did not multiply for a generation. We know that the workers defended themselves by direct attacks on the new looms and machines intended for factory use. These movements came to be known as Luddism. It is this subject area that David F Noble goes to immediately in order to provide a detailed analysis of the effect of automation in its mechanized and computerized forms. As a historian of technology, he knows, for example, how history has been distorted so that the term Luddie can be used to target any who try to save their jobs or control the condition of life in their immediate work areas, on industrial, office, retail or service jobs. [Eric Hobsbawm] A wonderfully erudite, lengthy polemic against the machine, with a foreword by Stan Weir. Today, when respectable discourse still requires euphemistic substitutes for capitalism, it is difficult to remember that this term was itself a euphemism of sorts, a polite and dignified substitute for greed, extortion, coercion, domination, exploitation, plunder, war, and a murder. This was the list of grievances compiled by the Luddites in their heroic defense of society. Machine breaking was simply a strategy and a tactic for correcting these violations of morality and humanity, violations that were later obscured by myths of the market and technological progress. [David F Noble]

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