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MY OPINION FROM BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR

Looking for work

BY CHRIS BRATT

One of my sons is a laser optics engineer designing computerized parts for a variety of new machines. He says large corporations are concentrating their research and development money these days on fabricating machines that make more machines, that make other machines to yield products that will never require any manual skill in their manufacturing. Soon, he says, these final machines (robots) will make a dramatic shift in our economic landscape. They will change forever the way goods are mass produced and eliminate the need for millions of jobs in all our manufacturing industries.

If my son's predictions are correct, what kind of employment is in the future for our nation's skilled workforce who now create useful or desired products? America's population has already passed the 300 million mark and is moving on to 400 million. Also, the world's poorest and already over-populated countries are projected to double their populations by 2050. All of these folks are, or will be, looking for some kind of useful work to pay the bills and survive. Will they be able to become college graduates, an elite and superior class who is able to secure the choice jobs, designing the machines that do the work? I don't think so.

The future tasks for most people who will be looking for work seem to be already set in place. Much work today consists of menial or tedious jobs and jobs that provide services to others. There are also large numbers of part-time or unemployed persons. It's like another

Industrial Revolution with more and more people put out of work from changes in the economy and by how and where goods are produced. (Where are the Luddites when we need them?)

These new conditions are forcing us to reconsider our present beliefs in work as a moral good (work-ethic) and what we considered or assumed was a fulfilling work life. The present entrenched idea that we must work hard and working hard will eventually make you a better person and a success has gone out the window. We are now facing the widespread economic rami-

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fications of fewer high paying jobs, shorter hours of work, lower wages, impoverished living conditions and an overall lower standard of living for most people.

Because these are ongoing changes for people who work for wages, it's obvious to me that we have to start rethinking our ideas of what constitutes a healthy, meaningful, and productive work life

for the people of our nation and the world. Perhaps we need to consider a new Renaissance with a cultural revival in the arts, science, and intellectual activity.

We also need to realize that work is more than an activity that we engage in only as a means of making a livelihood. Investment in these cultural, scientific and social activities also needs to be remunerated as any other occupation or profession. Everyone who does something that is useful, durable and dependable needs a paycheck to cover the bills.

I admit that I don't have all the answers to the worldwide economic and related problems. But one doesn't have to be an expert to know our economic system in its present form is headed for disaster. What would be the matter with a sustainable growth policy for our nation that didn't exploit our workers or our resources; a policy that plans for full employment and a livable wage for everyone who wants or needs work; a policy that gives people hope for their future and doesn't reject the neediest and poorest of our people. We can no longer let the ultra-rich folks and their robots set the rules and call the tune to which we are all presently dancing in order to survive.

Let me know if you want to dance to another tune.

Chris Bratt
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Chris Bratt

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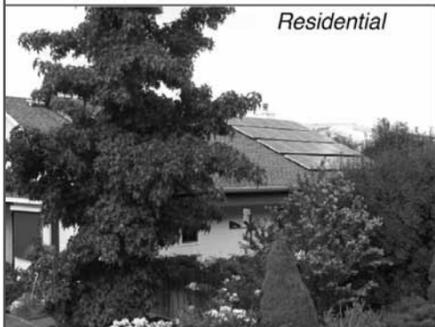
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