

The Problems of Automation--Part II

Thousands of Americans Losing Jobs Daily to Automation

By HARRY FERGUSON
WASHINGTON (UPI) — You own a small candy store located one block from a high school and you have one clerk. One day a man appears at the high school and installs a machine from which the students can

get candy bars by dropping a coin in a slot.

Here, in its simplest form, is the dilemma of automation. The pupils begin buying candy from the machine and your business drops to the point where you have to fire your clerk. But the nation's labor force still is in balance. One job has been lost but one also has been gained—the man who stocks the candy machine.

But then he installs two, then three, then four machines in the school. The time comes when you can't pay the

rent and you go out of business. Now the labor force is out of balance because two jobs have been lost and only one gained.

One estimate is that 40,000 American workers are losing their jobs every week because of automation. It is a guess rather than an estimate because nobody has any hard figures on the problem, nobody has gone from city to city counting heads. Even if they did so, the statistics would be deceiving because many of the 40,000 might have moved to another town and found work.

Pro and Con
You will not find here any definitive answer to the question of whether, over-all and in the long run, automation causes unemployment. Persons eminently qualified can be found on both sides of the question with statistics and examples that are above reproach. Like this:

—In the first nine months of this year General Motors Corp. employed a total of 346,167 persons in this country. For the same period last year 332,207 were employed. General Motors relies heavily on automation, but here we have the number of workers increasing.

—There are instances where automation causes only a temporary loss of jobs. Cadillac installed an engine cylinder block machining department. It reduced the number of workers needed from 89 to 71. Thus 18 persons were laid off early in July, but all of them were rehired for other jobs in September.

That is the bright side of the automation picture, but there is a dark one, too.

—In 1923 there were 643,200 men employed in this country mining bituminous coal. Over the years labor saving machinery was introduced. By 1960 the number of miners employed had fallen to 139,400. Here you have more than 500,000 men, trained to do only one thing, thrown on the labor market.

—Studies made last June showed that the number of employees in a leading chemical company was down by 8 per cent; a big oil company was down 26 per cent; and a food corporation was down 25 per cent. All of them had gone in heavily for automation.

Basic Factor
Any generalization about au-

tomation is dangerous, but it is fairly safe to say that the competitive position of the industry or corporation involved is a basic factor in the employment picture.

General Motors hired more people this year than last, but it also manufactured more automobiles. Bituminous coal was forced into a bad position when the demand for coal fell off because of the competition from natural gas and petroleum. Those factors, plus the labor saving machinery, spelled disaster for the bituminous labor force.

Persons who look on automation without fear like to cite what happened when the United States emerged from the horse and buggy age. There were about 225,000 persons employed to make wagons, harness and put shoes on horses. The automobile swiftly put them out of work. But within a few years there were 2 million persons employed in manufacturing, servicing and selling automobiles.

Persons who fear automation have this quick reply: If it is true that automation creates jobs, why are there 3.9 million persons unemployed today? They mention "silent firings," meaning that jobs that might be available to the army of unemployed already are being done by automation.

Retraining Roadblocks

Much emphasis is put on the retraining of the unemployed to equip them for jobs in automated factories. The federal government has plunged into it with 12,294 projects all over the country involving 96,335 persons. There are about 6,000 additional persons being trained on the job; that is, they are taught while they are working.

But the program runs into some curious resistance regardless of whether the project is sponsored by the government or private industry. In California, 50,000 unemployed persons were eligible for a 13-week retraining course. Only 38 applied and only 26 actually took the course. A meat packing firm offered retraining to 433 workers displaced by machines. Only 56 actually took the course and only 20 wound up with jobs.

The automobile unions have a saying that "automation in Detroit can mean firings in Fort Wayne." What they mean is that the auto makers can automate one process that eliminates the need for a feeder factory in some other city. Are workers willing to move out of a dead town into a live one?

The fact is that those thrown out of work are the least able to move because they usually are the oldest workers and the lowest paid. A middle-sized company built an automated factory in a new area and offered 325 persons a moving allowance to make the change. It was no market and could not have developed that more than 100 afford to move.

Next: What the machines can and can't do.

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Honor Inmates Worthy of Rating

SAN MATEO, Calif. (UPI) — San Mateo County Sheriff Earl Whitmore announced proudly Monday that 70 inmates at the county honor camp have proven they know the meaning of the word "honor."

Whitmore said he planned to review the sentences of all 70 to determine if "some paroles might be in order."

The sheriff said early Saturday morning the 70 inmates were filing out into the chill air for muster, when deputy Owen Bell — the only officer at the camp between midnight and 8 a.m.—fainted and struck his head on the pavement floor.

Bell, 30, was carrying the keys to all the remote Laguna Honda camp's facilities, plus the keys to three vehicles at the camp.

However, three of the prisoners ran to the camp radio to inform the sheriff's office of Bell's collapse. A few others gave emergency first aid to the deputy, and the rest went about their regular work assignments.

None of the prisoners attempted to escape.

Eisenhowers Due at Palm Desert Resort

SAN BERNARDINO, Calif. (UPI) — Former President and Mrs. Dwight D. Eisenhower were due to arrive here this morning on the way to their winter vacation resort home in Palm Desert, Calif.

The Eisenhowers left Harrisburg, Pa., by train early Sunday morning and were due here at 6 a.m.

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