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A Note from the Editor

As Automation Transforms the American Workforce...

What need is there for further immigration?

Technology is advancing at an astonishing rate—indeed, at a higher rate than at any previous point in human history, and will likely only accelerate in the future. As Heather Mac Donald of the Manhattan Institute observed, “We are reaping a whirlwind of unfathomable benefits from scientific research.”

Automation is bringing prosperity, but not across the board. On the contrary, over the short run, at least, it is aggravating the serious problem of wealth distribution. We are now witnessing the automation of all routine jobs. This does not mean that every job will be made obsolete by machines. Rather, far fewer people will be needed to, for example, operate a lunch shift at a fast-food restaurant. Or thirty-five people now can run an auto parts plant that employed thousands of workers in the 1960s and '70s (cf. George Weimer, “Robots Take Over Automotive Plant Floors,” *Material Handling & Logistics News*).

In 1994, Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray forecast the coming Information Age. A study released in 2011 stated that since the dawn of the Information Age, for every ten years that passed, twenty-five percent of all jobs that ever existed have gone away forever, replaced by software and/or robots. People who can do jobs that are not repetitive should have a productive place in the economy. But others, especially drop-outs and people who used to find gainful employment in manual labor, may be permanently unemployed. Technological advances in robotics and automation forecast a future that will impact virtually every profession — from the service sector to salaried white-collar positions.

Brenda Walker has been following these developments (see her website: www.LimitsToGrowth.org). In the feature section of this issue, she presents an overview of the issues involved. Among her conclusions is that automation is making mass immigration obsolete. As she notes, “Washington, D.C. should at least wake up and end immigration. The frontier was declared closed in 1890 because the American West was settled and homesteading was obsolete. Now immigration as a labor supplier is similarly outdated.”

As we were going to press, the U.S. Labor Department’s Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that 94,391,000 Americans (16 or older) were not in the labor force. The percentage of working age men (25-54 years) who do not have a job is actually worse than it was in the Depression of 1940, reports Nicholas Eberstadt of the American Enterprise Institute. What need, then, is there for further immigration? Policy makers should look after the people who are already here... and also their children and grandchildren. ■

Wayne Lutton, Ph.D.