

## PROGRAMMED JOB-ELIMINATORS: ROBOTS ELBOW PEOPLE OUT OF THE WORKFORCE



The population of America continues to grow but the job growth does not keep up with this increase. On the contrary there are less and less jobs available for the burgeoning workforce. Amongst the many reasons for this, one reason that most economists fail to address seriously, is automation and production improvements that allow machines to do most of the jobs - better, faster and more efficiently than humans. Modern technology is putting more and more labor-intensive jobs within the abilities of robots. Employers find them more cost-effective and hence lay-off the workers, whose work will now be done a machine. Most manufacturing companies in the country, make tall claims of bringing back manufacturing jobs to the country, because rising wages and other reasons have made it less economically viable to outsource manufacturing to China and other Asian countries. However, even though their factories work throughout the day, they employ very few workers. Automation has ensured that robots do most of the manual work, making employers hiring people redundant. Depending on the type of work, it is assumed that each robot can replace up to ten workers. It is estimated that a million robots can be put in place by US companies, meaning that ten million workers are at potential risk of losing their jobs. Online retailing giant Amazon said that it was buying a robot maker called Kiva Systems for \$775 million that would move around warehouses and stock shelves. This, the company said, will enable extremely fast cycle times and reduce labor requirements. Bottom line: Many workers can expect to be given the pink slip. The prime jobs that robots eat into are low-end ones, the low-skill low income jobs. On-going automation and advancing technology can easily perform semi-skilled routine jobs that were the domain of workers with moderate education. Technology is rendering their jobs obsolete. It's not merely these jobs, customer-service agents are interchanged with automated call centers, automated checkout stations are replacing grocery-store clerks, robots are replacing security personnel and they are assisting surgeons in intricate precision surgery. What was science fiction earlier is very close to reality today. Researchers at a Silicon Valley-based company called Willow Garage are programming their PR2 robot to fold laundry, play billiards, and fetch beers for its engineers. Surveys have shown that the employers quickly recover the money that they spend on acquiring robots; they virtually pay for themselves, through labor and productivity savings. Moreover, robots don't require sick leave, they will not take their employers to court, will work in hazardous conditions and are willing to work 24 hours in a seven days a week workplace environment. The human worker on the other hand demands higher wages, increased benefits and threatens the employer with legal consequences if he violates his rights, giving the employer an added incentive to opt for the robots. There is little doubt that the advent of modern technology has opened more employment avenues, but if a machine means that employers can be laid off then, it means that the technology is not creating but eliminating jobs. This is going to have a damning effect on employment going upwards and only adds to the roster of the jobless. It was earlier assumed that there were certain jobs that robots would not be able to handle, for example driving a truck. Google struck an alarming note, last fall, announcing that its robot-driven vehicles had logged thousands of miles. Does this mean that in the near future, with better implementation of this technology, cab drivers, long-distance truckers and even ambulance drivers could be replaced by a robot on the driving seat? Be alerted, there is no domain that is impenetrable. As the world marches into the second decade of the 21st century, occupational jobs, that once belonged to people alone, are now facing an unassailable foe that threatens to encroach upon their work spaces, ousting them as it continues its relentless march forward.