



Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

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11 November 2011

Editor, Taipei Times

Dear Editor:

Martin Ford fears that continuing automation will usher in a future where "virtually no one would have a job or an income; machines would do everything" ("How automation could cause wide-scale unemployment and sink the global economy," Nov. 11).

Not only is he 200 years behind the times - the original Luddites began breaking machines in textile factories in 1811, playing on fears that the loss of jobs such as hand-

weaving would cause ever-rising unemployment, stagnation, and misery - his argument is internally inconsistent. If it's really true that machines will soon do "everything," then all human wants will be met without anyone having to work. Far from most of us being cast into poverty - which is a situation of too many human needs remaining unsatisfied - every last one of us will be fabulously rich because, by Mr. Ford's assumption, all human needs will be satisfied automatically, by machines.

In fact, of course, no such nirvana awaits us. As was true 200 years ago, the falling cost of satisfying

some wants (such as that for food and clothing) enables us to turn our attention to satisfying other wants, many of which today were unimaginable to our 19th-century ancestors. Indeed, it's only because most of the jobs that existed in the past have been destroyed that we today have the luxury to fret about just how we'll pay for our kids' college education, dad's blood-pressure medicine, and next summer's family vacation to DisneyWorld.

10 November 2011

Editor, Washington Post
 1150 15th St., NW
 Washington, DC 20071

Dear Editor:

Fareed Zakaria writes that "The most comprehensive comparative study, done last year by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, found that 'upward mobility from the bottom' ... was significantly lower in the United States than in most major European countries, including Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands and Denmark" ("The downward path of upward mobility," Nov. 10).

Not so.

Here are this OECD study's three bullet points summarizing findings on economic mobility directly (rather than findings on the connection between family background and educational achievement). Does the U.S. stand out from "major European countries"?

"* Parental or socio-economic background influences descendants' educational, earnings and wage outcomes in practically all countries for which evidence is available.

"* Mobility in earnings across pairs of fathers and sons is particularly low in

France, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States, while mobility is higher in the Nordic countries, Australia and Canada.

"* Across European OECD countries, there is a substantial wage premium associated with growing up in a better-educated family, and a corresponding penalty with growing up in a less-educated family. The premium and penalty are particularly large in southern European countries, as well as in the United Kingdom. The penalty is also high in Luxembourg and Ireland. In these countries the wage premium is more than 20%, while the penalty is some 16% or more (relative to wages earned by individuals raised in a family with average education)."

As for this study's other measures of social mobility (which examine family-background's influence on students' educational achievements), on these, too, U.S. mobility simply does not stand out as being significantly or consistently lower than in other - including major European - countries.

7 November 2011

Editor, The New York Times
620 Eighth Avenue
New York, NY 10018

Dear Editor:

Overlook Paul Krugman's dubious suggestion that government can know today what will be the industries and energy sources of tomorrow ("Here Comes the Sun," Nov. 7). (If the cost of producing commercially viable energy from solar radiation really is falling as spectacularly as Mr. Krugman claims, surely private investors can make multiple mints, without subsidies extracted from taxpayers, bringing such energy to market. And just as surely Mr. Krugman is already investing his own money in such efforts.)

Focus instead on Mr. Krugman's complaint that the chief obstacle preventing 'green' energy from blossoming is "politics."

It's way-curious that people such as Mr. Krugman, who are most eager to entrust humankind's fate and fortune to politicians, so frequently complain that their dreams of Beautiful Tomorrows are forever being dashed by politics. Do Mr. Krugman and his

"Progressive" comrades
not realize that politicians
have no more prospect of
being politics-free than
holiday hams have of being
kosher?