

## Reaction against the age of machines

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I read an interesting and worrying article looking at the beginnings of a

backlash against the age of machines by new "luddites" in the paper yesterday. It looked at a range of reactions against social media and automation. The [luddites](#) were a social movement that attacked spinning machines in the early 1800's. Up until then weaving machinery was looms and was hand operated. A series of entrepreneurs in the UK came up with the idea of using first water power then the new technology of steam to power huge looms in factories. The industrial revolution was born the age of machines started and the rest is history as they say. The luddites had their jobs threatened and attacked the new factories. There have been some arson attacks on tech targets worldwide and a surprisingly large number of organised group attacks on Uber cars (also worldwide). The article went beyond that and looked at the general backlash against social media. Apparently there are also a record number of new communes starting up. This was seen as a reaction against technology but could also be a more general concern about the global political situation. There are parallels with the 1800's but there are also differences. The similarities are that jobs are threatened by new technology. The advocates of the new technology make some good and bad arguments in favour of it. They rightly point out that in the past new technology has created more new jobs than it destroyed (and we cannot know what these jobs are in advance). The article then quoted some crass extensions to this argument stating that lorry drivers should retrain as programmers. This raises the issue that is also raised by globalisation separately from the age of machines. That is those who gain or not always (at least in the short term) not the same as those who lose. There are other big concerns here. Firstly the automation is not confined to one sector (say manufacturing). There are people loosing their jobs in insurance not to robots but algorithms. Robots are starting to appear in shops along with self serve tills. In other words the age of machines is working at multiple levels threatening both working and middle class jobs all the same time. Another difference is there is also a backlash against the fringes of this technology i.e. social media. This is an important difference with the early 1800's (although newspapers were just getting going). The complaints against the big giants of social media are many. However as the article pointed out that does not stop us using them. There are a number of concerns about new technology from social to energy use but in democracies there is no excuse for violence. The whole automation era does need to be handled well though otherwise they could be real trouble. Neil

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