

Saving jobs from extinction

Author: Use 30-hour week to create jobs, volunteers

Is *The End of Work* upon us? That's what Jeremy Rifkin argues in his latest provocative book (Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam; \$24.95; 350 pages). A central theme: The old rule among economists that technology creates more jobs than it destroys because it spurs demand for products is no longer valid.

New industries such as biotechnology aren't creating many jobs, Rifkin argues. Neither are "information age" industries such as telecommunications.



THE ECONOMY
By Mark Memmott

And older industries — autos, financial services and retailing, for example — aren't adding jobs. So, Rifkin presents a policy prescription that is sure to raise eyebrows. To prevent a further deterioration of society into two tiers of "haves and have-nots," employers have to do something radical: Stop using technology to replace workers and start using technology to make workers' lives better by making work easier.

The best way to do that: Cut the workweek to about 30 hours, Rifkin says. Don't cut pay, however. Then how are employers supposed to keep costs in line? Ironically, by using productivity-enhancing technology. And businesses would benefit if saving jobs meant income growth — and then spending — remained healthy. Eventually, that spending would help create more jobs. In the end a shorter week, he predicts, could end up giving more people work.

"The technology we have today is obviously tremendous," he says. "And the potential for this technology to liberate us is very real. The only question is whether we can find it within ourselves to share the potential across society."

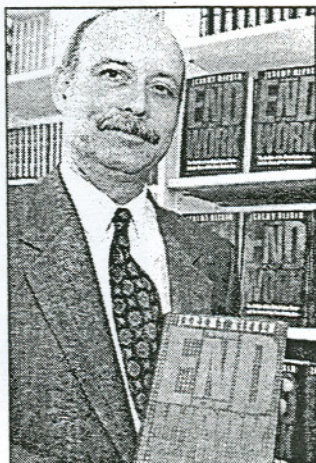
Rifkin also has ideas — ones that once again will seem outlandish to many — for what people could do with the free time from a shorter work week. Give them tax incentives to do volunteer work, he argues, and many would jump at the chance. And eventually, a boom in volunteerism could help the economy as well. Volunteers, for example, might help restore pride and a sense of community to some towns and cities, cutting crime and easing other social problems.

Much of the satisfaction people now get from work, Rifkin says, could be obtained from volunteering. And technology threatens few volunteer jobs.

Rifkin, president of the Foundation on Economic Trends in Washington, is a veteran of previous challenges to conventional wisdom. His book *Beyond Beef* took on the whole beef industry, from rancher to slaughterhouse.

Is he being Pollyanna-ish this time around? Rifkin seems willing to be charged with that. But he's not unrealistic about the chances of his ideas gaining quick acceptance.

"I think it's going to take another recession to force this into the public debate," he says. And even then, "all this is a hard pill to swallow. I'm saying there are millions of people we don't need anymore (at work) and that we've got to do something for them. I would love to see this debate move faster, but I fear it won't until a recession makes it an issue."



By Tim Dillon, USA TODAY
RIFKIN: Says technology doesn't create many jobs.