

# The Political Economy of Post Labor Value

The rise of artificial intelligence marks a profound turning point in the structure of political and economic life. For more than two centuries, capitalism drew its animating energy from a simple and brutal dynamic: Wealth was generated through human labor, and profit was created by extracting as much value as possible from that labor while giving back as little as conditions allowed. Every major movement in the political history of modernity can be traced to this core relationship. States allied with monarchs, clerics, fascists, or authoritarian generals not because they admired those forces, but because they saw them as reliable partners in the struggle to contain labor. Industrial automation was pursued not because factories loved efficiency or desired the improvement of the conditions of its labor force, but because machines weakened the power of workers to disrupt production. Even the great ideological conflicts of the twentieth century were shaped by the fear that organized labor might one day govern.

The advent of Artificial intelligence, however, introduces something new, something that cannot be understood as a mere continuation of that old pattern.

The historical engine that once drove capitalism depended on labor as the essential and irreplaceable source of value. All previous waves of technology framed themselves as tools that increased the productivity of workers. Even when machines displaced particular jobs, the idea remained that labor in general was the central ingredient in the creation of wealth. Artificial intelligence challenges that assumption in a way that no previous technology ever has. It offers the possibility of *profit without workers*.

This new condition is especially striking because it directly affects the white collar class. For generations, educated workers, professionals, analysts,

designers, and administrators occupied a privileged position. Their specialized knowledge made them hard to replace and gave them political sophistication, cultural influence, and a degree of economic security. They were the stabilizing force of liberal capitalist societies, the group that operated the machinery of state and market alike. They wrote the laws, assessed the risks, interpreted the data, and guided public opinion. Their vision of gradual improvement and managerial competence gave capitalism its sense of legitimacy.

Artificial intelligence erodes this entire structure. It does not simply automate factories or warehouses. It automates thinking tasks, clerical tasks, analytical tasks, and even creative tasks. It erodes the scarcity of expertise that once protected white collar workers. For the first time, a system of production can run without relying on the class that once kept it rational and stable. This is not an extension of previous trends but a rupture. It is a moment of historical significance because it severs the link between labor and wealth at the very moment when the most politically influential segments of the workforce find themselves vulnerable.

When profit no longer depends on workers, capital must confront a new reality. The old adversary, labor, loses its central place in the system. A new force becomes the decisive constraint: the ecosystem that makes artificial intelligence possible. Companies that build large models depend completely on the surrounding world. They require access to public data, public energy grids, public infrastructure, and the legal protections of states. They rely on the education system to train users, the political system to provide stability, and the cultural system to generate the content that models learn from. The entire society becomes the substrate without which artificial intelligence cannot function.

This creates a new form of leverage. In the industrial era, workers could strike and bring production to a halt. In the era of artificial intelligence, society as a whole has the potential to obstruct the conditions that allow automated wealth creation. It can limit access to data, place controls on computation, regulate ownership, and demand that a share of the

automated productivity be returned to the public. The companies do not fear losing workers. They fear losing the ecosystem that sustains them.

The central question of political economy therefore shifts. For two centuries, the struggle was over how much of the value produced by workers should return to workers. Unions formed around the workplace. Parties formed around the interests of labor. Social movements formed around wages, hours, and conditions. All of this assumed that labor was the indispensable creator of wealth.

Artificial intelligence breaks this assumption. If systems can produce value with minimal human involvement, then the old language of wages and workplace rights becomes insufficient. The new struggle is about entitlement to the output of the system. If value comes from data, infrastructure, and collective knowledge, then society has a legitimate claim to the fruits of that value. Property rights, corporate structures, and economic norms that once seemed natural begin to lose their legitimacy. A new distributional conflict arises between the public that enables the system and the corporations that capture its returns.

The result is a transformation of the fundamental antagonism that has shaped modern history. The old conflict was between capital and labor. The new conflict is between capital and society. Labor becomes only one part of a much larger collective that provides the resources on which artificial intelligence depends. Politics will increasingly revolve around control of data, rights to digital resources, access to computation, and the governance of automated systems. Economic demands will focus less on wages and more on universal access to services, guaranteed income, and public claims on automated productivity.

We stand at the beginning of a new era in which the traditional logic of capitalism can no longer organize society. A different form of political economy is emerging, one that recognizes the centrality of the ecosystem rather than the primacy of the individual worker. The task ahead is to shape this new order so that the immense power of artificial intelligence serves the many rather than the few.

