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news

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Russian Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade Vasily Osmakov believes that industrial robotization can address the labor shortage in Russia by freeing up a significant number of workers.

According to estimates from the Center for the Economics of Continuous Education at RANEPA (Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration), the shortage of skilled workers in the manufacturing sector ranges from 75,000 to 140,000 people. Russian Minister of Industry and Trade Alikhanov stated that the manufacturing sector requires 1.9 million workers, 28% of whom need higher education, with the rest requiring at least secondary vocational training.

Russian officials no longer shy away from openly expressing their class-based stance, while still claiming (or pretending to claim) that their proposals are beneficial and progressive for the country. To some extent, they are even correct — but only partially.

Industrial robotization is undoubtedly a progressive and positive phenomenon when viewed in isolation, abstractly, or metaphysically. However, no process exists in a vacuum; it is always interconnected with countless other processes.

How will this affect the lives of Russians? Will it improve working conditions for wage laborers? Robotization is influenced by hundreds, if not thousands, of conditions and factors, and it must be analyzed within this context. Only then does it become clear that, under capitalism and a market economy, robotization is not a blessing but yet another burden on the working population.

What does the Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade himself say about this? "Robotization will free up a large number of workers." In other words, hundreds or thousands of workers will be laid off and left jobless. They will swell the ranks of the unemployed, all to boost the superprofits of the owners of "modernized" enterprises. This is how progress is implemented under capitalism.

However, business owners will prioritize robotization in areas involving the simplest physical labor. The Ministry of Industry and Trade sees robotization primarily in wholesale operations and warehouses. Why? It's cheaper than automating complex production processes. Large entrepreneurs are driven solely by profit maximization and loss minimization. Osmakov is quite open about this: "You need to understand the sectoral structure, as some industries are harder to robotize".

How can the displaced workers — those essentially pushed out and discarded, who were engaged in low-skilled labor, fill the 1.9-million-worker shortage, especially when 28% of these positions require advanced qualifications and the rest demand at least secondary vocational education? Government officials offer no clear or coherent answer to this question.

Let's analyze the situation abroad, using South Korea as an example, the country with the highest level of robotization in the world. It boasts a low unemployment rate (2.7%) but an extremely high and growing level of household debt. As of the end of September 2024, total household debt reached a record 1,844.9 trillion won (approximately \$1.34 trillion). Meanwhile, youth unemployment stands at 8.8%, and South Koreans work 323 hours more per year than Japanese workers (as of 2019). In 2019, 24.4% of workers were temporary, meaning nearly a quarter of the workforce

lacked stable income, resulting in a significantly lower standard of living.

These official statistics paint a challenging picture for ordinary South Koreans: high workloads, substantial debt burdens, and worsening conditions amid intensifying economic crises. This further proves that, despite technological advancements, capitalism continues to exploit and oppress the working class in every country.

Can robotization benefit workers? Robotization can indeed have a truly positive and progressive effect on society only under socialism, where the means of production are collectively owned by the working class.

The Soviet Union was a global leader in industrial robotization, with widespread use of industrial robots and a robust scientific and technical foundation in this field. At the same time, unemployment was virtually nonexistent, and the population was not burdened by debt.

Open data shows that by 1990, the USSR had significantly more vocational training institutions than modern Russia: 7,489 vocational schools and 4,556 technical colleges compared to 3,600 colleges in Russia today.

The number of students was also higher: 7.711 million in the USSR versus 3.8 million in Russia in 2025. This indicates that the Soviet education system trained twice as many skilled workers than it does today.

What does this tell us? Despite the USSR's world-leading levels of industrial automation and robotization, there was high demand and full employment for skilled workers.

Under socialism, the economy is driven not by profit but by the goal of meeting society's growing material and cultural needs. Capitalism has long become a brake on progress. Eliminating this obstacle and clearing the path for progress is the primary task not only for workers in Russia but for workers worldwide.

Original article