

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE  
Solidarity Breakfast  
3CR 31 August 2019

'AI' is supposed to stand for Artificial Intelligence. But in the case we'll be talking about this morning, 'AI' could well stand for Absolute Ignorance. We'll be examining a report from something calling itself the John Curtin Research Center.

The report is called 'Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Work'. Its contents are so woeful that it would not be worth mentioning if it did sum up so much of the ignorance that passes for 'conventional wisdom'.

More importantly, the report is a guide to the politics about the future of work that mis-informs the labour movement. In particular, the report's action plan assumes that Australian-based firms of any kind operate on equal terms. In truth, the 'rules-based order' is imposed by transnational corporates and the warfare state.

The report shows little sense of how the global system is gamed. At the end it warns that

The uptake of ride-sharing company Uber also showed that local regulations have little effect in fact on pressure from foreign AI-enabled services, and demonstrated the ineffectiveness of a purely defensive approach.

That conclusion about the failure of 'local regulations' contradicts the report's second Policy Recommendation which calls for 'Regulation' of the global giants of Google, Facebook, etc.

The trading 'partnership' Agreements insist that corporates have the right to drag governments before special tribunals if – by some oversight – one were to act in the interest of a majority of Australians. For chapter and verse of those demands, look at Clinton Fernandes's latest book *What Uncle Sam Wants*.

#### Author! Author!

To introduce the *Report's* lead author, Adam Slonim, we can't speak fairer than to repeat what he says about himself:

Adam Slonim is an Adjunct Fellow of Victoria University in Melbourne, teaching Cultural Intelligence;

Managing Director of the Blended Learning Group, specialising in Emotional Intelligence training and development;

Director of VorAI Systems, bringing Artificial Intelligence into the workplace;

Co-Convener of the Australia-Israel Labor Dialogue; and Secretary of the John Curtin Research Centre.

Adam is a regular contributor to *The Times of Israel* and *The Spectator* (Australia) magazine.

Adam has been involved in a number of Start Ups, focused on Israeli Technology and Innovation.

You can make of that self-portrait what you will. This tar-baby says nothing.

Except I felt it my duty to see what Slonim's being a Director at VorAI can tell us about bringing Artificial Intelligence into any workplace. Again I report

without comment. According to the web, the market valuation of VorAI is \$8.95 with daily income of 0.15 cents. We'll leave it to listeners to decide whether they think his report is worth more than that princely sum.

### False facts

On the bottom of page 6 we read that

The invention of the steam engine by the Scottish mechanical engineer James Watt in 1776 is another good example ...

It is indeed 'a good example' .... of schoolboy howlers. Is this bit of ignorance the outcome of Slonim's Cultural Intelligence, his Emotional Intelligence, or his Blended Learning? Or perhaps it is further evidence that Mindfulness is synonymous with Brainlessness?

This morning is not the occasion for a history lesson on the 'fire engine'. But we will do one later in the year on why talk about 'industrial revolution' is more capitalist propaganda. In brief, the facts of the matter are that Thomas Savery made the first steam engine of the modern era in 1698.

Suffice it to say that an 'expert' who has not got past what he picked up in primary school about the development of the steam-engine does not inspire confidence.

Not content to repeat once-upon-a-time stories about the steam-engine, Slonim at once goes on to repeat boss-class slanders against the Luddites. The reason the machine-breakers get such a bad press is because they were class conscious and smashed their 'masters'.

Yet, in that very paragraph, Slonin has the gall to put current fears about job losses down to 'ill-informed opinion.' We will not cavil at his expertise in that field.

### Higher nonsense

Before we read those two instances of the Absolute Ignorance, the report has proclaimed its banality in its opening sentence:

'Artificial Intelligence is here and is having a major impact on the jobs market and how we all work.'

It has to be said that tidbit of insightfulness has nothing on the brilliance exhibited by erstwhile Victorian Premier Brumby. Here is Brumby in his role as chair of Centre for Workplace Leadership:

'We all know the workplace is changing and one of the big drivers is because the world itself is changing so profoundly.' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, May 2-3, 2015: Business 10.)

Now, why didn't I think of that?

### Padding

Consultants at self-styled think-tanks decorate their reports with graphs and adorn them with algebra. This report on AI is remarkable for the absence of anything suggestive of mathematical skill. Yet among its proposals is a emphasis on STEM subject. Perhaps innumeracy and maths aversion are prerequisites for becoming an Adjunct Fellow in Emotional and Cultural Intelligence.

However, there is no shortage of graphs. One is on wheat prices since the Dark Ages. It points to a sharp downward trend since the 1940s. Typically,

Pollyanna makes no mention of Monsanto or of the four global oligopolies that control the grain trade.

Then there is Figure 7 which gives the number of AI start-ups in Brisbane since 2000. Those raw figures are all we get. How many still exist? How many have a market valuation greater than \$8.95? If Slonim knows, he's not telling. Nor does he ask whether the capital invested in the start-ups would have been more 'productive', to use his language, if put into any other realm of profit-taking. It seems that for a firm to brand itself 'AI' is all that it takes to get a big tick.

#### Missing in action

Surprise, surprise, there is no mention of 'capitalism' and no hint of 'exploitation'. Nor is the word 'profit' to be found. Instead of 'profitability', the report goes into raptures over 'productivity', which is capitalist-speak for the rate of exploitation.

Unions get three mentions – every time to propose their absorption into the class collaboration of Works Councils for the aristocrats of German labour. That is, the report advocates a return to the arse-end of the Accord processes as the way forward. At no point are unions called on to organise struggle, neither in the workplace nor across the society.

#### Don't panic!

The report pooh-poohs the fear that AI machines will take control from their human inventors. However, its author can evade naughty words like capitalists only by turning 'AI' into an historical actor when he writes:

While AI reduces the need for some labour-intensive occupations ... AI does nothing. Only real, living people can get rid of certain kinds of jobs. Those people are the agents of capital – 'management', in Slonim's weasel-word. Fear not. The report assures us:

One of the benefits of AI-enabled automation is that it slows the relentless search by businesses for people willing to work for lower wages. To combat that bit of boss-class propaganda, it is crucial for wage-slaves to be clear about why the NCOs of capital decide to get rid of jobs, whether labour-intensive or otherwise.

For as long as the application of labour delivers a rate of profit sufficient to ward off the competition, capitalists do not spend on machinery. They will try to make their wage-slaves work longer and harder. Only if neither of those drivers is able to hold up the absolute and/or relative rates of exploitation will the agents of capital invest in equipment. They are then forced to do so to maintain profitability in order to survive.

#### 'AI-enabled'

We shall take our leave of the report with its concluding paragraph about Uber. Remember that Slonim tells us that Uber could defeat local regulators because of the wonders of its 'foreign AI-enabled services'.

Now cast a cold eye on Uber's AI. The company's PR machine has always pretended that it was a high-tech start-up. The fact of the matter is that its communications app is 'shared' with local cab companies etc.

Its high-tech label is another con-job. The automatic vehicle and air-taxis to Tullamarine are part of the same 'propaganda narrative'. Like Musk's mission to Mars, they are intended to distract attention from the bottom-line and the repeated failures to meet production schedules.

The PR machine has suckered in media commentators, many of whom are on the take. It intimidates politicians terrified of being labeled digital troglodytes. Almost no one is prepared to suggest that the *Uber-mensch* have no clothes. Certainly no one at the John Curtin Research Center.

Of course, there is someone - the US transport engineering economist, Hubert Horan, through his postings on *Naked Capitalist*.

Next time, we shall look at the train wreck that is Uber.

Humphrey McQueen