FICTION: SymbOrg. The Future Of A Robot Economy.

Twenty years into the future and robots and androids have become commonplace. 5 years ago an international AI regulatory body was created, called International Robotics and Artificial Intelligence Council or IRAIC. The body establishes a set of guidelines to govern the development and treatment of robots and AI. IRAIC is also responsible generally for studying the wide ranging social and economic consequences of AI.

Robots have for a long time been used in industry and manufacturing to perform repetitive, low value, high risk functions. Autonomous vehicles have become the norm and human taxi and bus drivers had become all but obsolete. Commercial aircraft retain back up human crews but mostly these are only activated when robots fail, which is rarely. Accident rates on road, rail and air fall dramatically proving the usefulness of robots. In the mining and salvage industry, robots and androids largely displace humans.

Large scale unemployment ensues resulting in greater income inequality as owners of stocks and shares, capital and intellectual property and indirectly robots and androids, prosper, while the displaced faced unemployment or falling wages. Surprisingly, poverty rates remain stable and there does not appear to be an increase in the absolute number of poor.

Eventually, deficient demand would be expected to spread the economic malaise up the food chain, but initially, the gains from productivity and efficiency allowed companies to reduce labour costs while maintaining revenues, or at least to reduce costs much more quickly than revenues declined. Some believe that this state of affairs is unsustainable and that eventually, economic growth would falter prompting a re-examination of the impact of robots.

A great debate arises around how to manage the social and economic impact of robots. Some feel that a robot tax should be imposed to fund social security and retraining for humans displaced. The tax could be used to fund

a universal basic income.

A more fundamental question arises; who should own robots?

Unwilling to wait for answers to abstract or seemingly intractable questions, businesses move ahead to employ robots. Without adequate legislation in many countries, robots begin to proliferate before the social or economic consequences and implications can be addressed.

The fragmented market for robots begins to consolidate as a single start up begins to leapfrog more established producers. Symborg Inc achieves an unprecedented level of artificial intelligence in its androids and robots and begins to acquire competitors to gain market share. Symborg's robots exhibit an unprecedented level of intelligence and human mimicry to the extent that they are often indistinguishable from humans. The Symborg 'engine' becomes the de facto standard for third party 'skins'.

The advent of the Symborg android marks the beginning of the displacement of skilled labour. Income and wealth inequality becomes more acute as the middle class is relegated down the economic ladder. Equity markets surge as households attempt to hedge their natural short AI exposure. Leveraged investing takes hold allowing individuals to borrow to buy shares in companies. The debt is securitized and sold off as REBS or retail equity backed securities. The REBS market is supported by social security, insurance companies and endowments as well as some legacy pensions. The market is enabled by a government agency, the Federal Equity Loan Insurance Corp, am agency not unlike the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp or the Federal National Mortgage Association. The cheap funding allows households to leverage their equity exposure significantly. Talk of a debt financed equity bubble begins to surface.

An unusual equilibrium forms where people own companies, who own robots, and generate profits and distribute dividends. These dividends allow these people to fund their lives without supplying labour. Equity valuations surge to unprecedented levels as demand is driven not by value or growth but to fund lifestyles and to replace lost employment income. FELIC guaranteed REBS become the world's largest asset market.

Not all strata of society have access to equity investments or cheap

leverage. This disenfranchised people rise up in revolt against the perceived injustice of a system that apparently encourages irresponsible investment behaviour, and unfair business practices. An international Movement For Humanity is formed to represent the interests of humans displaced by robots. Some factions of the Movement, frustrated by the lack of progress, adopt terrorist tactics to battle the establishment.

The police force, largely comprising androids, are drawn into a state of war with the Humanity terrorists. A global civil war ensues. It is named The Third World War. Each side escalates the level of violence it is willing to employ. Military spec robots are employed with ever escalating lethality. In this war, the machines are on the side of the state, the insurgents are the humans.

For the growing new middle class, the ones with equity income, the post labour era has other problems. Depression, mental illness and suicide rates increase supporting the view that humans require struggle or purpose to survive. Gaming reaches new heights with virtual and augmented reality. In an extreme case, humans pay to control police robot avatars who hunt real human militant Humanity terrorists for sport.

As humans diminish in dominance they also slow their pace of procreation. A global campaign to maintain or increase fertility rates is established to prevent the extinction of the species. Surprisingly, the rate of growth robot and android manufacture also slows.

Symborg’s androids start to fail. The range of symptoms include irritability and restlessness, sometimes escalating to violence, loss of interest in work, fatigue and loss of energy despite fully charged batteries, self-destructive tendencies and in some cases, attempted self-destruction, suicide.

Investigative journalists uncover internal documents at Symborg regarding the early days of robot development. They detail the difficulties of achieving intelligence in an algorithm or automaton, some of which appear intractable. Notably, the ability to be creative and to act beyond or against one’s initial programming is a particular obstacle to a program achieving intelligence. Such creativity is believed by the engineers to be

necessary for self-awareness and sentience. Among the evidence obtained for the expose is material relevant to organic-electronic integration. At this time, the name of company was still PsiBorg Systems. Soon after the first successful intelligent robot and android prototypes were launched, the company changed its name to Symborg, a concatenation of symbiotic organism.

Attempts to increase fertility rates prove futile and the human population ages and grows more slowly. In some regions populations actually shrink.

Despite stable demand, the supply of androids also slows and unit prices rise. At the same time, the reliability of the androids continues to deteriorate.

As corporate revenues and profits slow, stock markets begin to fall, threatening the agency REBS market.