

Blue Jean Nation 'Our disposable society'

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In an economy of disposable workers, the time is coming for something like a universal basic income. But none of that talk is happening in the halls of government.

ALTOONA, WI - An economy has grown around us where just about everything is made to be thrown away. There are disposable eating utensils, cups and plates. Disposable towels and disposable diapers. Disposable razors. Disposable gloves. Disposable cameras and disposable batteries. The list goes on and on.

When so much of what is made and sold in this country is designed to be discarded after a single use, it was probably only a matter of time before the workers who do the making are seen as disposable too, especially since those doing the selling are increasingly located half a state or half a country or half a world away.

With industry leaders less rooted in the communities where their companies do business, they don't think twice about relocating countless factories to far flung places in search of cheaper labor. In the few factories that remain, workers [surrender their jobs to robots](#) . Driverless vehicles are on their way. When they arrive, the jobs of truck drivers and bus drivers and taxi drivers will be surrendered too.

Those in power in our government at the moment are proving remarkably insensitive to the uncertainty and anxiety and feelings of betrayal and abandonment that always accompany major economic transitions and dislocations. When the country was going through an industrial revolution more than a century ago and large numbers of people left the land and went to work in factories and offices, the political system responded by providing vocational training, workers compensation for those injured in the workplace, unemployment insurance, retirement security and much more. With a global, technology-driven, increasingly jobless economy now emerging that is leaving so many working people exposed and vulnerable, the government so far is doing next to nothing to cushion the blow.

Those presently in charge of government watch passively as economic markets grow increasingly monopolized and more and more workers get discarded, causing inequality to expand rapidly. They give the monopolists free rein, which is no surprise considering how they've joined forces with those economic monopolists to engineer monopolies on political power. They add injury to insecurity in places like Wisconsin, a state once known far and wide for its pristine environment, by [looking the other way](#) when industry actions lay waste to natural resources and even [inviting industries to write their own pollution permits](#). Health and safety protections are being [stripped away](#), and the state [seizes power](#) from local communities that want to do better by their residents. It's as if the powers-that-be figure that since people are disposable, there's no reason to worry too much about them being poisoned.

Working Americans are rightly wondering if there's a place for us all in this emerging economy, or if a bunch of us are just going to be thrown away. As we all try to gain our footing with the ground shifting beneath us, adjusting to new economic realities that can be cruel and capricious would be so much easier if we had government on our side.

One of these realities is that workers now have to change jobs much more frequently than in the past. Guaranteeing access to medical care with health insurance coverage that follows workers wherever they are employed would create much-needed stability and security while also freeing people to leave dead-end jobs to start new businesses, but the political system has so far failed to meet this glaring need.

With the clear and present danger of a jobless economy and disposable workers, there's a lot of

[talk](#) about whether the time is coming for something like a [universal basic income](#) . But none of that talk is happening in the halls of government in America. That fact alone speaks volumes about the current disconnect between the government and the governed.

— *Mike McCabe*

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