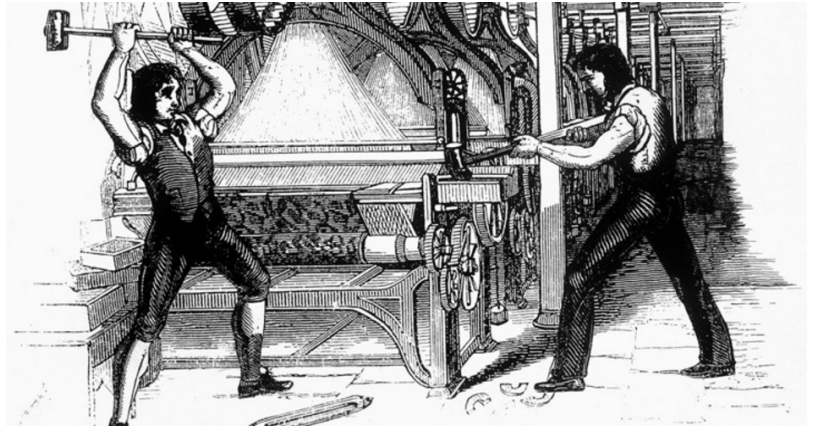




## Return of the Luddites: British Workers Sabotaging Workplace Robots

Several British newspapers, including the *Daily Mail*, *The Sun*, and the *Telegraph*, have reported that some workers in the U.K. who are fearful that they may lose their jobs to workplace robots have resorted to sabotaging the robots.

Professor Jonathan Payne, who led a study at De Montfort University in Leicester that looked into the use of robotics in healthcare, concluded that U.K. workers are often strongly opposed to the introduction of these intelligent machines into their work places. This was in contrast to Norway, where co-working robots are often given affectionate names and welcomed.



Payne, who is a professor of Work, Employment, and Skills, was quoted by the *Daily Mail*: “We heard stories of workers standing in the way of robots, and minor acts of sabotage — and not playing along with them.”

Payne added: “The UK seems to have a problem with diffusion and take-up of technology.”

The *Telegraph* cited Payne’s statement that British employers are less likely than employers in other countries to engage with employees to explain why they want to use robots in the first place, creating tension between humans and the robots that are meant to help them.

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The *Daily Mail* [also noted](#) that incidents of “robot abuse” are currently more publicized in the United States than in Britain. In one such case, a patrolling security robot was found “drowned” in a Washington, D.C., office block fountain under mysterious circumstances. However, Knightscope, the company that manufactured and placed the robot on site, denied that it was sabotaged and claimed that it had slipped.

Across the globe, 1.7 million manufacturing jobs have been lost to robots who can do the same job quicker or more cost effectively, with around 400,000 of those in Europe, according to a report by Oxford Economics.

What the report neglected to mention, however, is that the increased efficiency created by new technologies often leads to the creation of new, previously unknown jobs.

These recent incidents of workers sabotaging robots brings to mind the Luddite movement in early 19th-century Britain. The movement began in Nottinghamshire 1811 and spread rapidly throughout England over the following two years.

On March 15, 1812, the Luddites attacked and destroyed a wool processing plant owned by Frank Vickerman in West Yorkshire. The Luddites also threatened violence against manufacturers who used



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labor-saving machines which, they felt, jeopardized their jobs or made their work routine and dull.

*The New American* published an online article in 2012 entitled "[Bicentennial of Luddite Lawlessness.](#)" The article noted that the anti-technology mindset of the original Luddites, which "imputes evil motives to those who are innovators, producers, and successes in the free market," lives on today.

The article noted: "It is this Luddite mentality that pushes [then-President] Obama to view the potential oil and gas production, using relatively new techniques and technologies, as bad and embrace instead windmills, which were cutting edge and transformative technologies 1,000 years ago, but which are profoundly inefficient today."

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