A few ideas from *People Get Ready: The Fight Against a Jobless Economy and a Citizenless Democracy*

Introduction – Welcome to the Future

(page 2) What the future will look like and feel like and sound like and taste like is concentrated in fewer and fewer hands.

(3) The changes that define the future that is now have nothing to do with job creation. Why would they? They are being developed and implemented by behemoth corporations that seek to maximize profits, not employment.

(4) There is something absurd about engaging in the wishful thinking that says a capitalistic system that by its nature prioritizes profit will somehow evolve for the better.

(4) This is a book about how to bring the rest of us into the process of shaping a future.

(6) The Story of Kodak

(7) The Story of ATT & Google

(8) The transformational moment in which we find ourselves creates challenges that will not be well met by delaying action until after we are kicked in the head by an increasingly jobless economy.

(10) Pope Francis: Our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience.

(11) We must begin a knowing, conscious fight for shared prosperity, genuine opportunity, and the full realization of the promise of new technologies.

(12) The future that is next can be good, and it can get better.

(12) Our only tool is the only tool that has ever taken the power to define the future away from elites and given it to the whole of humanity: democracy.
Chapter 1 – Into the Maelstrom

(page 16) The United States is not a democracy, if by democracy we mean a government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

(17) Martin Gillens and Benjamin I. Page: Economic elites and organized groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on the U.S. government policy, while mass-based interest groups and average citizens have little or no independent influence.

(19) A credible roadmap to a much better future is being developed as extraordinary ideas, extraordinary movements, and extraordinary prospects are being developed by citizens who are almost never covered in what little remains of the news media.

(20) Some technology experts like Ben Way expect a loss of 70 percent of existing jobs in the next three decades, with little hope that very many new jobs will emerge to replace what is lost.

(21) How technologies are developed owes largely to the political economic context. They can be forces for surveillance, propaganda, and immiseration as much as tools of liberation.

(21) Neil Jacobson: Exponential technologies may eventually permit people to not need jobs to have a high standard of living. The emphasis will be less on making money and more on making contributions, or at least creating an interesting life.

(21) The barrier to this brighter future, of course, is capitalism itself.

(22) One would reasonably expect that debates and study concerning the best uses of these radical technologies to benefit all of society would dominate political life.

(24) Contemporary capitalism is very much a product of government policies and subsidies and the federal government is as necessary to the system as corporations and Wall Street.

(29) Zoltan Tibor Pallinger: Democratic infrastructure is the institutions, instruments, and procedures provided by the state that render the use of democratic rights possible.

(31) If you win the battle for democratic infrastructure, you almost certainly will win the war for controlling the nation, and the economy.

(39) Henry A. Wallace: If we define American fascists as one who in case of conflict puts money and power ahead of human beings, then there are undoubtedly several million fascists in the United States.
Only with a full economic embrace of democracy can we put ourselves in position to turn the economic revolution we are in the midst of experiencing into humanity’s greatest victory, rather than its worst nightmare.
Chapter 2 – A Jobless Economy?

(page 45) The rate of growth in American capitalism has been on a downward trajectory for a good five decades, and that process has accelerated in the new century.

(50) We provide not only the total amount of the “official” unemployment, but a broader assessment that includes people who have dropped out of the labor market and are no longer actively seeking employment-the “hidden unemployed.”

(50) Labor market polarization means great jobs for those at the top, a mountain of crappy jobs at the bottom, and fewer and fewer jobs in between.

(65) Although people of color remain disproportionately among the ranks of the poor, they are being joined by a wave of working-class and middle-class whites moving down the economic ladder.

(69) There is a palpable sense that technology is destroying more jobs than it is creating.


(71) By 2025 experts anticipate that one of every three global labor “transactions” will be conducted online as part of the ‘on-demand” or “crowd labor” economy, with a few gigantic digital hiring hall corporations using their networks and apps to get temp labor for employers.

(72) Tyler Cowen: We will move to a society where 10 to 15 percent of the citizenry is extremely wealthy and has fantastically comfortable and stimulating lives, the equivalent of current-day millionaires, albeit with better health care. The other 85 to 90 percent of us? Not so much.

(73) James Galbraith: The big function of the new technologies is to save labor costs.

(75) Norbert Wiener: The automatic machine is the precise economic equivalent of slave labor. Any labor which competes with slave labor must accept the economic conditions of slave labor.

(80) Martin Luther King Jr: Through our scientific and technological genius we have made of this world a neighborhood and yet we have not had the ethical commitment to make of it a brotherhood.

(97) The four most common occupations in the United States are retail salesperson, cashier food and beverage server, and office clerk. These jobs are highly susceptible to automation.

(102) One industry analyst says that there will be a few million manufacturing jobs left in 2040. In 2003 there were 163 million manufacturing jobs worldwide.
(103) Derek Thompson: Nine out of ten workers are in occupations that existed 100 years ago. Our newest industries tend to be the most labor-efficient: they just don’t require many people.

(105) Technological displacement of workers is likely to be a substantial factor pushing toward more inequality in the future.

(107) Martin Ford: The problem is not with technology; it is with our economic system, and it lies specifically in that system’s inability to continue thriving in the new reality that is being created.

(112) Thompson: We have to imagine how millions of people might find meaningful work without formal wages.

(113) Capitalism as we know it is the wrong economic system for the material world that is emerging.

(114) If the system is left alone, it will not right itself. Instead, structural changes are needed, and government will have to play the central role in determining and instituting these changes.

(114) Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee: It’s time to start discussing what kind of society we should construct around a labor-light economy.

(114) How should technology best be deployed to serve human needs?
Chapter 3 – Citizenless Democracy

(page 115) There can be no democracy in America without informed, engaged, and active citizenry.

(119) For the elites to prevail, it is sufficient if citizens are simply overwhelmed by an empty and dispiriting politics that never seems to go right.

(120) Americans are told that tax cuts for the wealthy and for multinational corporations must simply be accepted on faith as the necessary cost of doing business in modern times.

(132) CEOs and newspaper editors and presidents tell us that, when an issue is really important, democracy and freedom are, indeed, threats to be avoided.

(134) The biggest sellout is of democracy itself.

(139) The bigger the issue, invariably, the more “off-limits” it is.

(139) The news media plays a crucial role in keeping democracy citizenless.

(139) Mainstream journalism, even at its best, generally takes its cues from what the range of legitimate debate is on an issue by what political and economic elites say about the issue.

(148) The United States is barely on the democratic grid when it comes to representative democracy.

(150) No change of consequence, certainly no change for the better will come within the narrow low-information, low-engagement, low-turnout politics that now defines our “democracy.”

(150) How did America’s politics become so decayed and dysfunctional? Why is this county barreling toward citizenless democracy?
Chapter 4 – Democratic Infrastructure

(page 151) The immense economic problems that are being aggravated and accelerated by the technological revolution raise fundamental issues that require popular involvement to be resolved in a humane and sustainable manner.

(152) Robert Dahl: A constitution should maintain political institutions that foster political equality among citizens and all the necessary rights, liberties, and opportunities that are essential to the existence of political equality and democratic governance.

(156) The federal constitution was in significant part a reaction to a series of more democratic state constitutions that had already been drafted and approved in the new Republic.

(157) When Edmund Randolph of Virginia opened the proceedings for the first meeting of the United States Constitutional Convention, he was blunt. “Our chief danger arises from the democratic parts of our constitutions.”

(163) James Madison: Perhaps it is a universal truth that the loss of liberty at home is to be charged to the provisions against danger, real or pretended from abroad.

(163) Madison: Of all the enemies of true liberty, war is perhaps, the most to be dreaded.

(164) George Washington: Avoid the necessity of those overgrown military establishments, which, under any form of government, are inauspicious to liberty, and which are to be regarded as particularly hostile to Republican Liberty.

(165) It is the highest duty of the government to see that a free press actually exists so there is something of value that cannot be censored.

(167) If the United States government subsidized journalism in the second decade of the twenty-first century as a percentage of GDP to the same extent it did in the first half of the nineteenth century, it would spend in the area of $35 billion annually.

(168) Hugo Black: The First Amendment “rests on the assumption that the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources is essential to the welfare of the public, that a free press is a condition of a free society.”

(171) Diane Ravitch: The essential purpose of the public schools, the reason they receive public funding, is to teach young people the rights and responsibilities of citizens... to sustain our democracy.
(176) In his “Second Bill of Rights,” FDR introduced the right to a useful and remunerative job, the right
to earn enough to provide adequate food, clothing and recreation, the right to a decent home, the right
to adequate medical care, the right to a good education, the right to adequate protection from the
economic fears of old age, sickness, accident and unemployment.

(185) The 1972 platform of the Democratic Party called for: A guaranteed job for all Americans, huge
expansion of public spending projects to rebuild cities, create mass transportation networks, address
pollution, and build housing for the poor, tax reform, reforms to break up monopolies, examination of
corporate influence, income equality, trade union rights, universal comprehensive health insurance,
equal spending for schools, community policing, reduced military spending, the overhaul of campaign
financing, and simplifying voter registration.

(194) The Lewis Powell Memorandum called for a huge increase in the cash commitment of business, its
trade associations, and the wealthy to changing the culture and making the media, universities, and
schools much more sympathetic to business and free enterprise.

(200) The strategy had emerged: An effective sales job by business and its allies on the glories and
primacy of “free enterprise” and the evils of big government should be complemented by ongoing
efforts to shrink the democratic infrastructure-generating the necessary amount of “apathy and
noninvolvement”—such that people would be less likely to interfere with governance.

(206) The people who dominate the political economy at present are determined to use their
considerable resources and influence to prevent the development and expansion of democratic
infrastructure.

(207) The present rulers have spent the past forty years trying to convince everyone that becoming part
of an aroused and engaged and organized citizenry is unnecessary and a waste of time.
Chapter 5 – Overcoming the Democratic Disconnect

(page 211) Depoliticization may well be the greatest victory of the counterrevolution launched in the 1970s by the web of corporate-funded think tanks, policy networks, political action committees, and media that has come to dominate the discourse.

(213) Thomas Jefferson: A little patience, and we shall see the reign of witches pass over, their spells dissolve, and the people, recovering their true sight, restore their government to its true principles.

(214) There must be “a standard of general feeling” in order to generate both the political will and the political reforms necessary to bend the arc of history.

(216) Isolated and seemingly separate protests across the British Isles in the last years of the eighteenth and the first years of the nineteenth century began to forge a consciousness of the need for democracy.

(219) John Bates: Here were [radical] associations all over the county, but there was a great lack of cohesion. One wanted the ballot, another manhood suffrage and so on. A period of economic and social upheaval spawned a plethora of radical responses that slowly coalesced into a cohesive demand for democracy.

(222) Economic change in general-and patterns of economic instability in particular-bend the arc of history toward moments of initial upheaval and eventual political and social change.

(225) Meaningful progress toward the betterment of society could not be achieved without facing the fact that corporations, not citizens, were in charge.

(226) Louis Brandeis: We must make our choice. We may have democracy, or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can’t have both.

(233) We need a democratic infrastructure that can translate our existing and evolving demands for an economy that translates technological advancement into societal progress.

(234) Elites in media and politics may assume, or at the very least pretend to assume, that the great masses of Americans are sufficiently entertained to remain docile.

(240) The number of Americans who are actively involved in the work of addressing the economic and social and political challenges of this movement is astronomical. The critical mass is real. The energy is real. But it is not yet, to borrow an organizing concept from Jefferson, hooped together.
(241) If history is any indicator, we know that the defining and uniting issue will be economic. And we know that the crisis of a jobless future will bring millions of Americans who are not currently engaged into a fight.

(243) Transformation is the key. The political process must change—not merely with candidates and parties, but with structural responses.

(243) What might a People’s Charter for these times include?
Chapter 6 – Agenda for a Digital Age

(245) Change is never the issue. Change is inevitable. The only real question is whether we will manage change in our own interest and in the interest of society—or whether we will simply let it happen to us.

(246) If there is to be any chance at all that the twenty-first century will belong to the whole of humanity, then the defining economic issues of the age must become the defining political issues of the age.

(247) Americans must build out the democratic infrastructure, not only to repair the damage that has been done to it in recent years, but to take it to places that the boldest visionaries of the past could barely imagine. We argue that the extension of democracy to economic planning is imperative.

(247) It is impossible to imagine a decent or desirable society without a strong democratic infrastructure.

(248) Existing US capitalism is a dubious fit for the present technological revolution, and it is a bad fit for democracy.

(248) Most writers assume capitalism is the basis for democracy and freedom, and that whatever happens in the future, the necessity of preserving current capitalism all but trumps other concerns.

(249) When we cannot have a wide-ranging debate about economics, then concentrated economic power translates into general cultural power. This is the nature of the present weltanschauung.

(250) [Guaranteed basic income] was regarded skeptically by those who saw it as no solution at all, but merely a way for the wealthy to bribe the bulk of the population so they could keep their system and their privileges.

(250) A more humane approach is to simply remove certain functions from the market altogether as the society grow wealthier.

(255) Full democratic infrastructure provides economic and social security a free flow of information, and absolute protection against discrimination and corruption so that every citizen—not just those who are wealthy—has the freedom to engage fully in the politics and governance of the nation.

(256) Nothing thwarts political and economic democracy like a constitution so imprecise that it allows right-wing judicial activists to make buying election easy and voting hard.
(256) Thomas Jefferson: The real friends of the Constitution in it federal form, if they wish it to be immortal, should be attentive, by amendments, to make it keep pace with the advance of the age in science and experience.

(259) To get to democracy, there has to be a democratization of communications that ensures that all Americans are sufficiently informed to fully engage as citizens.

(261) How about this: every American adult gets a two-hundred-dollar voucher she can use to donate government money to any nonprofit news media of her choice.

(263) The information we need to utilize and maintain a democratic infrastructure will be ours if we make the struggle for the information part of an agenda that recognizes the necessity of political and economic democracy. And if we hoop ourselves together to advance that agenda, we can get it.

(270) Today there is plenty of economic planning. The problem is that it is done by and for elites with almost no public awareness or participation.

(273) When the jarring reality of a jobless economy finally and fully hits, every economic and political charlatan in the land, every spin doctor and every paid-off pundit, will have a proposal.

(274) Gar Alperovitz: The current goal is not simply worker ownership, but worker ownership linked to a community-building strategy.

(276) What is terrifying is that the essential economic issues of the time are not the essential political issues of the time.

(276) Imagine if the people were ready to demand a new constitution, a new politics, a new economy. Imagine if the people were ready, finally, to demand democracy—and all of the freedom, fairness, and human potential that extends from the moment when the profiteers and the pretenders are pushed aside and we, the people, forge our future.