


Give Us Fully Automated Luxury Communism

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The most ardent advocate for FALC, Aaron Bastani, a London-based media executive and writer, has written a new book on the topic. In it, he advances a curious, passionate argument, with a dire assessment of the present and a messianic vision for the future. Bastani believes that we are already living through a potentially epochal transformation of the economy, as epochal as the establishment of agriculture and the introduction of engines and electricity. Artificial intelligence, machine learning, and advanced computing might be about to eliminate the need for human labor in no small part, Bastani claims.

That could mean the continued ruination of the planet, as oligarchs throw thought conferences on yachts and the masses struggle to make rent. Or it could mean the healing of the planet and the thriving of all its inhabitants. What it might take is converting the world to solar and other renewable forms of energy, mining asteroids for raw materials, implementing Communist political systems, and guaranteeing everyone basic services. Enter utopia—a healthy world and an economy of abundance, free and accessible to all.

Bastani is certain about the viability of all of this, yet has a topsy-turvy understanding of recent history and the contemporary economy. He fails to give capitalism much credit for moving billions of lives out of poverty, for instance, and fails to recognize the preeminence of race and racism in explaining the success of President Donald Trump or Europe's far right. He has a long argument with Francis Fukuyama, underpants-gnomes away the political difficulty of what he describes, and seems awfully sure about the potential of space mining. But the vision is compelling and the terminology is useful.

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Not that the vision is a new one. John Maynard Keynes's famous essay "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren" imagines a world with far less work and far more leisure; Shulamith Firestone wrote about "cybernetic communism." Yet the most complete picture of FALC or FALGSC might come not from radical leftists or academic economists, but from *Star Trek*. In that imagined universe, replicators produce physical goods and artificial intelligence takes care of services. There is no need for money, no need for work, and no problems with resource competition. People do what they want.

Living on the USS Enterprise, visiting far-flung planets, going on adventures with your friends while wearing a modular outfit and a cute pin: Now that's Fully Automated Luxury Communism. (Where does the "Gay Space" part come from? Who knows, though here's one answer: "Gay and space were added because of the tolerance the communist movement has on sexuality and space because space is fucking cool.")

Maybe FALC is best understood not so much as a diagnosis of the present or a prediction of the future but as a kind of guide star. Many of the world's richest countries already guarantee citizens their basic needs. Saving the planet by promoting a complete conversion to renewable fuels is possible and necessary. More progressive, redistributive forms of politics are becoming more popular, arguments for full-fat communism aside. And advanced, mind-bending technologies are already here.

Perhaps the most radical part of the FALC ideology is an emphasis on eliminating labor for the good of humans, rather than fearing the obsolescence of human work. Humans in rich societies could and arguably should work far less than they do, and might thrive far more if they did, FALC argues. There is no need for the world to look like *Star Trek* for that to become reality.

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