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RoboTruckers: The Double Threat of AI for Low-Wage Work

Of late, much attention has been paid to the risk artificial intelligence poses to employment, particularly in low-wage industries. The question has invited well-placed concern from policymakers, as the prospect of millions of low-skilled workers finding themselves rather suddenly without employment brings with it the potential for tremendous social and economic disruption. Long-haul truck driving is perceived as a prime target for such displacement, due to the fast-developing technical capabilities of autonomous vehicles (many of which lend themselves in particular to the specific needs of truck driving), characteristics of the nature of trucking labor, and the political economy of the industry. In most of the public rhetoric about the threat of the self-driving truck, the trucker is contemplated as a *displaced* party. He is displaced both physically and economically: removed from the cab of the truck, and from his means of economic provision. The robot has replaced his imperfect, disobedient, tired, inefficient body, rendering him redundant, irrelevant, and jobless. But the reality is more complicated. The intrusion of automation into the truck cab indeed presents a threat to the trucker—but the threat is not solely or even primarily being experienced, as it is so often described, as a displacement. [This is an excerpt from a chapter from Karen's book-in-progress, *Data Driven: Truckers and the New Workplace Surveillance*.]

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