

THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON EMPLOYMENT
IN THE RAILROAD INDUSTRY

by

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INTRODUCTION

On May 10, 1869, the East and West was linked by rail at Promontory Summit, Utah. The success was due mainly to human muscle and endurance. Those who laid the first transcontinental railroad used tools that are crude when compared with modern machinery. Looking back, it becomes apparent that many technological advances have been made since that historic day. At the same time, the position of the railroads within the transportation industry has shifted. Many of the more significant changes have occurred in the last twenty to twenty-five years, and the result is a decreasing demand for railway labor.

PURPOSE AND METHOD

C. Glyn Williams, Assistant Professor of Economics, Indiana University, estimates, "Upwards of 80 percent of railroad employment decline in this period (1946-1963) was brought about by technological change."¹ The purpose of this paper is to review the effects of technological advancement on employment in the railroad industry, and it will endeavor to support the claim that technology has been the most important cause of employment declines. The paper is limited to a discussion of technological advances and their influence on industry-wide employment and productivity.

¹C. Glyn Williams, "Changes in the Skill Mix and Their Effect on the Railroad Industry's Wage Level," Industrial and Labor Relations Review, Vol. 20, No. 1 (October, 1966), 89.