Fame and fortune await the inventor _ along with angry mobs, burnings, exile. A brief history

BERNARD CONDON AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) -- For every clever man who invents a labor-saving machine, it seems a crowd of angry men rises up to destroy it.

The most famous of the machine haters were the Luddites, the skilled weavers of England who, in 1811, began smashing power looms that were threatening to take their jobs. Their name became a byword for technophobes ever after, but they were neither the first nor the most violent.

Consider the fate of the poor Pole who, in 1579, came up with a mechanical device for weaving ribbon. Legend has it that city officials in his native Danzig were so convinced it would steal work from hand weavers, they broke the machine to bits, then drowned him.

A century and a half later, in 1733, the Englishman James Kay built a machine that allowed workers to weave textiles faster by means of a "flying shuttle" containing yarn. His reward? Exile to Paris, courtesy of angry workers who thought his machine was a job killer.

In 1770, James Hargreaves invented a "spinning jenny" to speed the process of twisting threads together to make yarn. Workers broke into his house and destroyed his machine.

It helps to have a dictator on your side. In 1801, the Frenchman Joseph Marie Jacquard invented a device that allowed weavers to create patterns in fabric with different colored yarns without the help of a second set of hands. Napoleon had to dispatch gendarmes to protect him from angry workers, according to Joel Mokyr, a historian at Northwestern University.

In 1830, English farm workers threatened by automatic threshers figured they could get landowners who owned the machines to do the smashing for them. They sent letters threatening violence unless the landowners raised their wages and destroyed the threshers themselves.

It didn't work. The ensuing Captain Swing Riots spread terror across the countryside as workers burned piles of hay and broke machines.

In the United States, protest has often taken forms other than violence.

When American Silas Putnam invented a machine to help forge nails for horseshoes, blacksmiths spread rumors that they were of inferior quality and kept making their own by hand. But Putnam did fine in the end. His invention was in 1859, and the

Civil War started two years later. Demand for horseshoes soared, as it did for Putnam's nails.

In the 1930s, silent films were being replaced by "talkies," and musicians who played in movie theaters across the country were losing work. So their union launched a smear campaign. It took out ads calling the music "canned" and urged people to insist on the live variety.

"It's not clear anyone took it seriously," says Amy Bix, a historian at Iowa State University.

In the 1930s, a Mississippi newspaper angry over a mechanized cotton picker, suggested readers drown it. "It should be driven right out of the cotton fields and sunk into the Mississippi River, together with its plans and specifications," the editors opined.

One time there was violence was in 1975 at The Washington Post. Striking pressmen smashed six presses, beat a foreman and lit a fire.

If workers have generally turned docile toward technology, perhaps it is because they know how much it has improved their lives.

"The daily life in 1800 was not that different than in the time of Julius Caesar - in clothes, in diet, in life expectancy," says Mokyr of Northwestern. But now "nearly every aspect of life has changed. People are taller, richer and better fed."

And a little less angry.

AP researcher Judith Ausuebel contributed to this story. You can reach Bernard Condon on Twitter at http://twitter.com/BernardFCondon [1] .

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