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bound to be wrong much of the time. A 1983 study by Stephen McNees and John Ries, both economists at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, showed that the most accurate forecaster in any one year had little hope of repeating his success the next. But, based on a study of 44 "blue-chip" forecasters' performances from 1977 through 1983, Bernstein and Silbert argue that an *average* of many auguries may be useful.

The group went wrong more than once. In 1978, for example, the "consensus" forecasts for both inflation and change in the gross national product (GNP) were far off the mark. But in general, the authors found, the average view was fairly accurate. During the entire seven-year period, the margin of error for estimates made in October of the next calendar year's GNP was only 1.1 percentage points. Moreover, the forecasters' accuracy improved as the target year approached.

The "blue-chip" average thus gave "a good sense of the character of the target year," the authors say. And absolute precision in such matters is irrelevant, they note. Executives do not care whether GNP will grow by 4.5 or 5.5 percent; they need only a sense of the overall prospects for their businesses. Without that sense, they might as well just start wishing on stars and knocking on wood.

The Future of Work

"The Changing Workplace" by Sar A. Levitan, in *Society* (Sept.-Oct. 1984), Box A, Rutgers—The State University, New Brunswick, N.J. 08903.

Revolutions in the American workplace are announced with numbing regularity. But according to Levitan, a George Washington University economist, Americans can look forward to "business as usual," at least for the next 10 years.

The likely impact of computers and robots, he contends, is often overstated. Even if some 250,000 robots (in Levitan's view, a high estimate) were on the job by 1995, they would replace only a fraction of the 129 million Americans who will then be working. And high technology carries a high price tag, Levitan notes. He doubts that corporations will be able to afford the heavy investments needed to "robotize" and computerize their operations quickly.

Moreover, labor costs should stay low enough to make the replacement of men and women by machines a relatively low business priority. By 1995, the number of 16- to 24-year-olds in the population will drop by seven million, to 28.5 million. But immigration, delayed retirements, and further increases in the number of working women should ensure a large labor pool and a relatively slow escalation of wages.

Still, Levitan foresees growing affluence for Americans, thanks largely to increases in the number of two-paycheck families. By 1995, women will constitute 47 percent of the work force (versus 43 percent today), and, assuming that today's birthrate of 1.8 children per couple remains stable, they will take fewer breaks to bear and raise children. At the same time, workers' educational attainments will probably continue to exceed the demands of the marketplace. Each year, nearly one million college

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graduates enter the job market. During the 1970s, one-third of these recent graduates had to accept jobs below the normal professional-managerial level. Levitan expects the mismatch to continue.

Workers whose spouses are also holding down jobs, who are relatively independent financially, highly educated, and have children are likely to ask for two things: more flexibility in their working hours and more paid leisure time. Employers will probably go along. But that is no revolution. After all, Levitan concludes, those are things that workers have always sought and won in increments.

A Left Turn By Big Labor

"Labor's Bad Bargain: The AFL-CIO Lurches Left" by Max Green, in *Policy Review* (Fall 1984), Heritage Foundation, 214 Massachusetts Ave. N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002.

Leftists have long criticized the American labor movement for its political conservatism. Now, says Green, a former labor union official, they have less room for complaint.

He contends that the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), which includes 96 labor unions representing 13.7 million workers, is veering sharply to the left.

There was some truth in the radicals' old complaints. Under the leadership of Samuel Gompers (1850–1924), who founded the American Federation of Labor in 1886, the U.S. labor movement aimed not to overthrow the capitalist system (as Marxists urged), or even to seek gains through politics, but to win better wages and working conditions for unionized workers through collective bargaining. Labor's political involvement grew during the New Deal, but it still kept partisan politics at arm's length. As an AFL-CIO official once said of George Meany (AFL-CIO president, 1955–79): "Where he agreed with the liberals he was *with* them, but he was not *part* of the liberal movement. He was the leader of the labor movement, a broad spectrum from far left liberals to far right conservatives."

By the late 1970s, Meany was beginning to change his tune. The key reason, in Green's view, was Big Labor's ebbing strength. In 1955, the AFL-CIO represented about 30 percent of the nation's nonfarm workers; 20 years later, only some 15 percent.

Meany decided that protectionist trade legislation and revised federal labor laws were needed to stem the membership decline. But Big Labor lacked the political muscle to push such measures through Congress on its own. Meany and his successor, Lane Kirkland, therefore forged a political alliance with "liberal-left" groups. Because of these new friendships, Green contends, "Labor is no longer free to speak its own mind."

To court civil-rights groups, the AFL-CIO has endorsed racial hiring quotas, which it long opposed. To curry favor with feminist organizations, it supports "comparable worth"—the principle that people with different but "comparable" jobs (e.g., a secretary and a truck driver) re-