

Information Technologies and the Restructuring of Production

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I would like to begin by being a bit of a heretic. I am sure that you all expect your first speaker to laud the information technology revolution and the radical break-throughs that it heralds. And I promise that I will do some of this over the next 20 minutes. But for these changes to take on real meaning, it is essential that you appreciate just how much had already transpired to transform production before the information technology revolution really got underway.

Globalization, for example, is often associated with the information technology revolution. In the mid-1970s, Robert Gilpin, then, a Professor of International Relations at Princeton wrote concerning OPEC's ability to wage an oil boycott in 1973, that "without sophisticated data-processing capabilities, the Arab oil producers could not have kept track of Western oil tankers, refinery output, and all the other information needed to enforce the embargo." "Moreover", he continued, "given the complexity of the oil industry and the potential for cheating by Cartel members, it is doubtful if ...OPEC would remain intact without the benefit of electronic data processing." Responding to these claims, Joe Weizenbaum, a Professor of Computer Science at MIT pointed out that "oil tankers spend weeks at sea. An old-fashioned clerk with a quill pen could keep track of them on the back of a few large envelopes. And", he added "there have been effective