

Technology, Employment and the Path to End Discrimination – a Polemic

The Benn Legacy Conference

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Expressions of power

‘science and technology are just the latest expression of power and that those who control them have become the new bosses’ (Benn, 1971: 23).



Tony Benn, Newcastle, October 1977

Our civilizational obsession with 'growth'



Growth

- The term has variant meanings, however, wielded in the political discursive sphere it often refers to the increase in the production of goods and services in an economy over time.
- Growth is typically measured by the rise in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Itself driven by structural factors such as technological advancement, capital accumulation and labour force expansion.
- Thus characterised, growth is deemed essential for improving living standards to consequentially reduce poverty.

Why growth?

Economic Stability and Prosperity

Economic growth leads to higher income levels, improved living standards and job creation. It enables governments to generate more revenue, which can be invested in infrastructure and social needs.

Social Development

It promotes equity, reduces poverty and can be utilised to build a more inclusive society.

Innovation and Progress

Innovation is coupled to growth by encouraging investment in research and development. Optimistically leading to technological advancement, possible improved productivity, and new industrial creation.



Performance vs performativity?

Theorists such as Mitchell (1998, 2002, 2005, 2007), MacKenzie (2003) and Callon (2007), have argued the discursive constructivist idea of 'the economy' is an invention of the mid-20th century.

This having arisen as economists and government statisticians began to systematically measure an abstracted national economy, which was envisioned as 'the totality of monetarized exchanges within a defined space' (Glass, & Rose-Redwood, 2014: 20).



Power, searching for growth – a case study



- Gamma AI allows users to create presentations in seconds. It automates slide design, saving time and boosting productivity.
- Users can generate not only presentations but also documents and websites, all without needing design or coding skills.
- Gamma supports interactive galleries, videos, implanted multi-media and stunning data visualizations, making content engaging.
- The platform enables real-time collaboration and advanced analytics to track engagement.

Gamma AI output (summarised)

The Political Economy of AI Growth: A Critical Examination

This presentation critically examines the political discourse around 'going for growth' in relation to Artificial Intelligence technologies. Drawing on Tony Benn's prescient critique of technology and power, we interrogate how the pursuit of AI-driven economic growth reinforces existing socioeconomic structures rather than disrupting them.

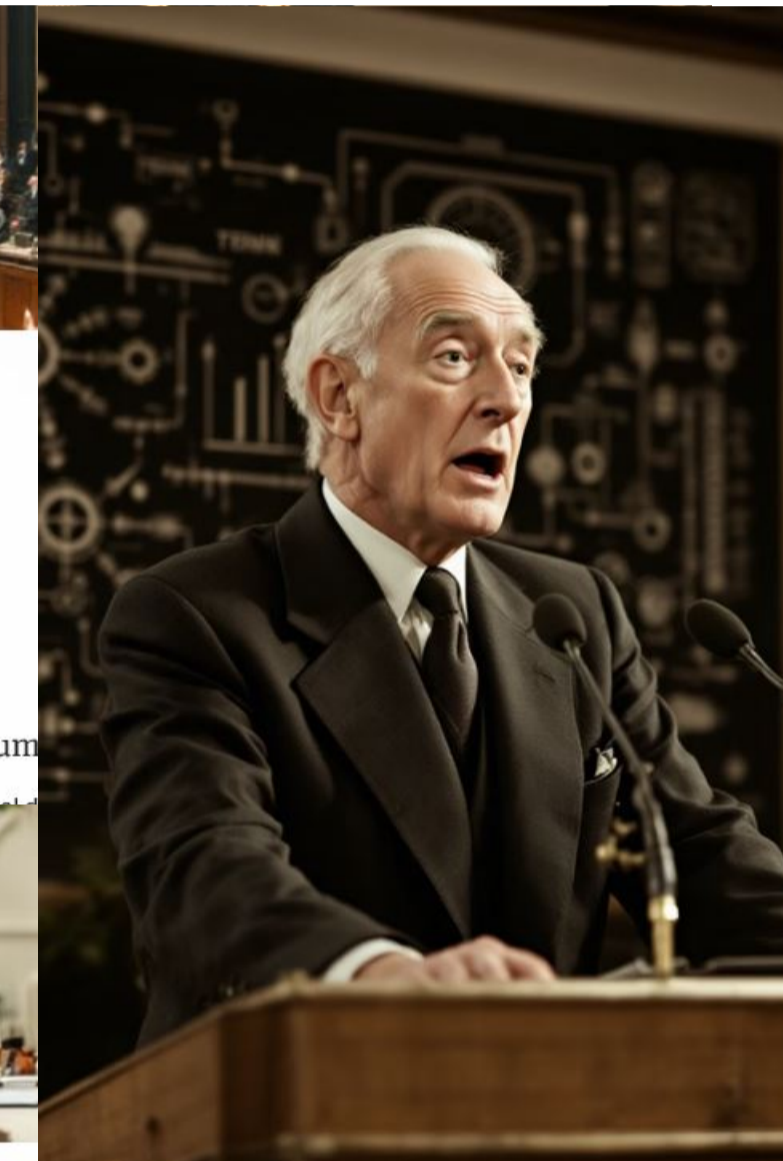
Through an analytical lens informed by political economy scholarship, we problematise the cross-spectrum consensus on technological determinism and



The Growth Imperative in British Politics

Political Evolution — 1
The phrase 'going for growth' has transcended its origins in political discourse to become embedded in vernacular language, deployed across the ideological spectrum from left to right in British politics.

2 — **Cross-Spectrum**



Tony Benn's Critique of Technological Power

Technology as Power Expression

Tony Benn famously asserted that "science and technology are just the latest expression of power and that those who control them have become the new bosses" (1971: 23), highlighting the inherently political nature of technological advancement.

Democratic Deficit

Benn's critique identified a profound democratic deficit in technological governance, where those affected by technological change had minimal input into its development, deployment, and regulation.

Formative Structure

His later work (2003) expanded this critique to examine how technology embeds and extends existing power structures rather than transforming them, creating a 'formative structure' that reinforces socioeconomic hierarchies.

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The Structured Reality of Technological Advancement



Clustered Innovation

Technological advancement tends to cluster in established silos of economic and industrial capital, creating concentrated zones of innovation rather than dispersed opportunity, as demonstrated by studies from Garnsey & Heffernan (2005).



Entrenched Power

These innovation clusters frequently reinforce existing social and economic hierarchies rather than disrupting them, concentrating technological capabilities within already-powerful institutions and regions.



Latent Social Effects

The clustering phenomenon has profound implications for social structure, often widening rather than narrowing disparities between technological 'haves' and 'have-nots' across different regions and demographics.

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Towards a Democratic Political Economy of AI

Recognize Technology as Political

Acknowledging that technological development is inherently political rather than neutral or inevitable is the first step toward meaningful democratic engagement with AI governance.

Broaden Participation

Expanding participation in AI governance beyond technical experts and corporate interests to include diverse stakeholders, particularly those most likely to be affected by AI implementation.

Distribute Benefits

Developing policy frameworks that ensure the economic benefits of AI-driven growth are widely distributed rather than concentrated in existing centres of power and privilege.

Reimagine Growth

Moving beyond simplistic growth narratives to consider how AI might contribute to broader conceptions of social welfare, sustainability, and democratic flourishing.

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Necessary reflections

Polemical Reflection #1

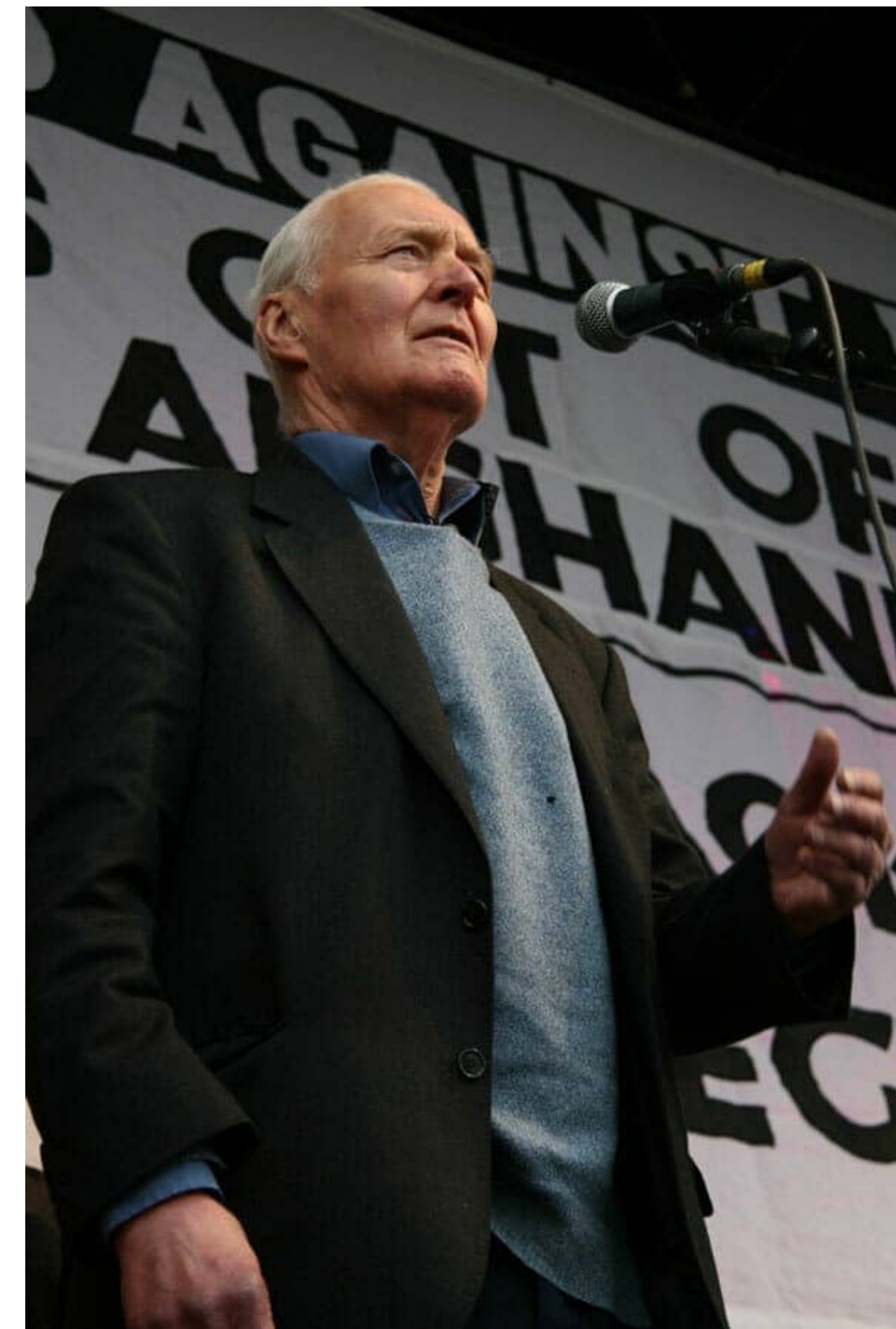
The changes brought about by digital technology were inconceivable and unchartable 30 years ago. This same sense of unchartedness applies to AI and the coming AI revolution that society is on the cusp of.

Polemical Reflection #2

A Frankenstein model of minimal state intervention, typifying a modern neoliberal state relationship. Thereby lacking the essential checks and balances that would have regulated advanced technological relationships during Benn's era.

Polemical Reflection #3

Benn firmly believed that technological advancement was essential for modernising Britain and enhancing the lives of citizens. However, he stressed the importance of differentiating between the expansion of scientific knowledge for practical applications and knowledge pursued solely for its own sake.



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Thank you for your time!

Any Questions...?

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