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Programmers wanna be

Minsk. We are late for our “labour inspection” in one of the biggest IT companies in Belarus. Trying to catch a taxi.

“To Wargaming? For the first time? I go there every day. Near a subway there is a honey hole. Just drove up and again someone goes there... Tell me, to become a programmer in 40 is probably hopeless, right? In general, are there forty-year programmers? Or are they all becoming startups in 33?” we are forcing our way through traffic jams.

“In general, I think that Belarus is a country of people who would like to become programmers. As one friend of mine says: “We are all programmers wanna be,” he laughs.

20 percent of Belarus’ GDP is the money of IT companies. The remaining universities of the USSR were gradually redesigned to produce programmers, system engineers, testers, database architects.

I’m sitting in a tank. The tank is in the lobby of a 16-floor business center. I am smiling: the tank is small, the head is ridiculously sticking out from the tank. While I am photographed, I am thinking about our “labour inspection” and what it can give us? How can we know if the dreams of those who works here come true, the dreams of all who keep “the world of tanks” afloat. While going upstairs in an elevator, we are telling a tour guide that we have a week Work Hard! Play Hard!, during which we rest and work, dive into transformations in the structure of labour, experience degrees of immaterial and material labour in various artistic and research regimes. And now we are up. It turns out that there is an entire floor of rest in Wargaming.

“Programmers wanna be,” the phrase is spinning in my head.

“Are you an indispensable employee?” I asked.

“Of course,” let it be an employee #1.

“Nope, come on, they will fire and even not think of you, if something goes the way they don’t like. But it’s nice to think that you are the one, of course,” said an employee #2.

“Have you ever thought of your own startup?”

“Yes, I have actually tried. But my business partner got rid of me after half a year of working together. He used me to mull things over and then hired a team of developers from eastern Ukraine instead of me. He's a manager, I'm a techie. He later said in an interview that the techie is not more than 10% of the project cost,” said the employee #2.

Proceeding through the massage chairs, the simulators, looking into the wood-trimmed saunas and absolutely similar kitchens on each of the floors with the same cookies at the very exact place, we searched for the voices of the proletariat of the digital age, those who can be easily replaced, the name badges of which can be thrown away and forgotten. Underwater world of computer industry.

“A bot-lawyer? Never heard of it. Who made it? Google?”

“Why Google? Only they can make something like that?”

“I do not know. Well, maybe Facebook too.”

“No, it was made by a lawyer from London. Several years ago, they completely automatized the control over the parking lots in London, from fixing contraventions to issuing receipts for fines. The lawyer began to unpack this issue. It turned out that the automatic system wrote a lot of unfair fines out. The guy programmed a small chat where you communicate with a bot, tell the details of your unsuccessful parking: where were you standing, on the lawn or not, what signs were around. If necessary, the bot asks for more details. In the end, it tells you whether you were right and whether it is worth to appeal. And if so, you just press “send” and it does it for you. The bot has already won a lot of cases. So you can solve your problem in 30 seconds, having no competences in the field of jurisprudence yourself. And there are a lot of users of this service just like you. And now the traffic police and the courts of London are filled with the cases of appeals. This system deceives the idea of big data. Automation is directed against automation.”

“Wow! Had no idea.”

“Have you ever programmed anything for a family?”

“Me? No,” he paused. “But my father, back in the days when there was no Internet, created a program for calculating a family's budget. It was a gift to his wife for the wedding.”