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Another depressing clock

The Times

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We're not big on clock-watchers. And we can't say we're keen on those who create clocks to monitor yet another depressing trend in the country. The latest one is the National Unemployment Clock.

The first clock, designed to highlight how close to extinction the human race is, was launched in 1947. Called the Doomsday Clock, atomic scientists believed that it would be a great teaching tool for folks. Set at seven minutes to midnight, the clock didn't give the human race high odds on avoiding a cataclysmic nuclear war. Since then the clock has moved a bit, and now it's actually set at five minutes to midnight. Just another thing to keep you awake at night--as if you needed one.

Now the Telecommunications Workers Union has created the Unemployment Clock. It's designed to show how many jobs are getting shipped overseas and how many jobs are being lost, minute by minute.

The union's motivation seems like a decent one: Educate people as to how shipping work overseas has a very local and devastating impact on Canadians. The truck carrying the clock across Canada dropped in to Chilliwack this week and later headed to Burnaby where it visited Telus headquarters. TWU is the union that represents Telus workers.

The clock sat there displaying large numbers that read 1,640,457 (and ticking steadily upwards). That's a lot of jobs. According to TWU, about 1.72 full-time jobs are lost every minute.

The problem with these sorts of campaigns, similar to the Doomsday Clock and the Federal Debt Clock, is that we question if such visual devices get people engaged or simply fill them with the sense that the problem is so large that there is nothing anyone can do. It also turns individual human beings into just more mind-numbing statistics.

Perhaps somebody will look for more information and get involved. But we think the clock will more likely remind onlookers that there's just one more reason to go home, crack open a cold beer, find something on TV and try to forget about all the bad news.

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