

Introduction

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As this edited collection is being finalised, French newspaper *Le Monde* reports 287 arrests being made overnight amidst the nationwide protests against a pension reform that would raise the pensionable age from 62 to 64. This reform was imposed by the French government without a parliamentary vote under the exceptional powers conferred on the executive by Article 49.3 of the Constitution (Le Monde 2023). German news agency *Deutsche Welle* reports that ‘strikes have led to hundreds of flights to and from four German airports being canceled’ (Deutsche Welle 2023), the latest in a series of walkouts called by public sector union Ver.di over working conditions and pay. Earlier this month, on 15 March, thousands of teachers, civil servants, health and transport workers in the United Kingdom also took the unprecedented step of coordinating their strike notices in order to call what, for all purposes, amounted to a nationwide strike, if not a ‘general strike’. The world of work is in turmoil.

It is increasingly clear that all the grand promises and slogans pronounced during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic – ‘build back better’, ‘investing in resilience’, ‘recovery and reconstruction’, ‘rewarding key workers’, ‘nothing will be the same’ and so on – have not been delivered upon. Instead, a cost of living crisis has reminded everyone of the inherent fragility of an economic system that remains fundamentally anchored to the idea that ‘labour’ is, essentially, a ‘commodity’ whose use needs to be ‘optimised’, and the cost of which needs to be ‘reduced’, for instance to curb inflation or to contain overall pension expenditure. We were all expecting a new chapter in human history, with labour receiving renewed recognition and, at last, a just and fair share of the fruits of progress. But that has not happened. Instead, there is a clear sense that promises have been broken and that we are regressing to ‘the old ways’. There is perhaps no stronger message of ‘regression to the old ways’ than Russia’s unprovoked military invasion of Ukraine, an ongoing tragedy unravelling on European soil.

Europe, and the world as a whole, is no stranger to crises. Only 15 years ago we were in the midst of the ‘Great Recession’, itself triggered by a financial crisis, then defined as ‘the deepest recession since the 1930s’ (European Commission 2009). The effects of that recession were only made worse – in Europe at least – by a self-inflicted ‘austerity crisis’, testing the social and political cohesion of the European continent and of the European project as a whole. In 2020, it was the Covid-19 pandemic that forced the world economy to grind to a halt, with widespread lockdowns and unprecedented disruptions to people’s daily lives and to global production and supply chains. The economic downturn that ensued was once more said to be ‘the worst recession since the Great Depression’ (UN 2021). The current crisis, complex enough to attract the neologism of ‘poly-crisis’, is once more tanking the global economy, and Europe’s GDP growth projections.

There is almost a sense that what was once defined as ‘disaster capitalism’ (Klein 2007) is becoming a hard-wired feature of the human condition in the twenty-first century. That regardless of whether it leads to so-called ‘shock therapy’, such as the approach taken during the ‘austerity years’, or to – admittedly innovative – counter-cyclical responses aimed at mitigating the effects of the crisis by cushioning the most vulnerable, as in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, we are destined to drift from one ‘disaster’ to the next, from emergency to emergency, from slump to slump, from crisis to crisis.

For an economic model and political system that fetishises, and is in many ways premised on, the concept of ‘economic growth’ (Article 3, Treaty on European Union) and associates it with ‘an open market economy with free competition’ (Article 119, Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union), it is a sobering thought to contemplate that for the past two decades the EU has seen no noteworthy GDP growth rates (and certainly only average rates that are well below the totemic 3 per cent annual growth figure). There is a sense that the system is running on empty. Or is it?

In her recent work *Capitalism on Edge*, Albena Azmanova postulates that (deeper discussions about the structural limitations of capitalism aside) part of the problem with our ailing economic system is the type of solutions that, from time to time, are envisaged to remedy its dysfunctions (Azmanova 2020). This includes a number of solutions that one could define as ‘progressive’ or ‘emancipatory’, but ultimately they lack ambition and settle for ‘expediency’, ‘common sense’ or ‘practicality’. In her words, ‘exactly because they have been common sense solutions, they are reactive crisis management undertakings that... have unwittingly institutionalised the crisis, thereby perpetuating it’. She refers to this situation as a ‘*crisis of crisis*’ whereby ‘we are unable to exit the crisis because its root causes have been institutionalised into a new normal’ (Azmanova 2020: 170).

1. Reconstruction beyond the pandemic

In December 2020, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, and what was by then already the second of many ‘lockdowns’ to come, a group of researchers from the ETUI (including the editors of the present book) decided to explore in greater detail the manifest fragility and weakness of our societal and economic arrangements, laid bare by the pandemic, but clearly already discernible – certainly in the Institute’s work and analysis – for a decade. The working group was initially named ‘Reconstruction beyond the pandemic’, and its first task was to discuss and identify in greater detail the nature of these structural weaknesses, and then move on to set up a large group of experts, to explore possible solutions.

We were keenly aware that the virus ‘preys on weaknesses’, as Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Director General of the WHO, had warned in the early months of the pandemic. At that point, it was clear that Covid-19 had both exploited and highlighted a number of such weaknesses and structural deficiencies affecting our social and economic models, in Europe and beyond. The very inception of the disease was a vivid reminder

of the cost of the – largely unsustainable – forms of intense land and animal farming that our economies, consumption models and global supply chains seemingly depend on. Its spread, especially in the early weeks of the pandemic, had been greatly facilitated by the intensity of productive and working arrangements, and by a clear reluctance on the part of employers and governments to readily accept the idea of lockdowns in order to avoid any disruption in value and supply chains. While the pandemic had put the issues of biodiversity, climate change and just transition firmly at the heart of the political debate, it was already far from clear that the post-pandemic road to economic recovery would be green and sustainable, let alone just. Questions about whether job intensification, working conditions and existing working arrangements were obvious ‘vectors’ in the spread of the virus were quickly displaced by mandatory teleworking and ‘clapping the heroes’ rituals.

But it was also evident to the working group that this was not an ‘equal opportunities’ pandemic. Longstanding structural inequalities meant that some of the most vulnerable and marginalised communities in our societies were disproportionately affected in terms of both illness and mortality rates and also the unprecedented levels of poverty and destitution triggered by the pandemic. It is also increasingly evident that the pandemic reinforced the structural nature of the unequal distribution and accumulation of wealth. The ‘top 1 per cent’ was greatly benefitting from various responses to the pandemic, and it was clear to us that our societies would, eventually, exit the pandemic but with more and deeper inequalities than ever. It was indeed around that time that the topic of ‘equality’ gained such prominence in the Institute, and both the 2022 edition of our flagship publication, *Benchmarking Working Europe*, and our bi-annual ETUI/ETUC ‘Big Conference’ were eventually dedicated to this very topic (with a separate working group set up to steer all ‘inequality’-related activities in the Institute).

During the pandemic it was far from obvious how these growing societal rifts would eventually be addressed, let alone remedied, in a post-pandemic world. It was clear, however, that the ‘distributive’ question – which in a broad-brush way the Institute has traditionally understood as a redistribution of societal wealth from capital to labour, while of course appreciating the more complex institutional nuances of this discourse – would have to be moved higher up the national and supranational reform agendas. The ETUI’s flagship publication *Benchmarking Working Europe* entirely dedicated its 2020 edition to assessing the impact of the pandemic on the world of work, and pointed out:

it is essential to recognise the redistributive function of decent working conditions and fair wages. In recent decades, redistributive mechanisms have faltered in two important ways. Firstly, ..., by failing to identify wealth and tax it properly. Secondly, by permitting wealth created in increasingly complex and global value chains to flow upwards, rather than trickle downwards and into fair wages and decent working conditions. (p. 10)

None of the participants in our working group was particularly impressed by such grandiose slogans as ‘building back better’, ‘levelling up’, and so on. This scepticism was not motivated by cynicism or some innate distrust in the ‘ruling class’ or government.

But it was obvious that very few, if any, of the recipes put forward even by the better-intentioned parties had any structural ambition, or a profoundly redistributive or transformative potential. They were just more of the same. In Azmanova's words, they were common-sense, crisis-management solutions capable only, as it turned out, of institutionalising the crisis into the long awaited 'new normal' (Azmanova 2020).

2. Transformative ideas

In our quest for a more transformative approach to envisaging future social and economic relations, we decided to expand our working group to include a cross-disciplinary team of academic experts who share our angle of enquiry and could help to develop this approach with reference to concrete policy proposals. We were very much inspired by William Beveridge's powerful reflection that 'a revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions, not for patching', a phrase that accompanied his very first 'principle' in the 1942 'Beveridge Report', a document that eventually went on to lay the foundations of the British welfare system and inspired the functioning of many other welfare regimes. There was no ambition, however, to produce a manifesto, a blueprint for a new society, or even an encompassing reform agenda as it was felt that such tasks could be performed only on the basis of a mandate that, by definition, technical and academic experts lack.

There was, however, a clear aspiration to ensure that all proposals were both transformative in their approach (that is, capable of both reforming the particular areas to which they applied and assisting with dismantling pre-existing structures determining the very unequal and fragile system we live in), and novel and original in character (that is, either untested or only partly tested). In addition, it was agreed that, transformative as they may be, these ideas should not be contingent on a revolutionary reconfiguration of the current relationship between capital and labour (in that respect, neither were Beveridge's proposals). At the same time, it was acknowledged, and in some respects even hoped, that they may well lead to a radical (and in that sense revolutionary) rebalancing of that relationship, and of power structures within societies in general.

In the meantime, the pandemic was having profound transformative effects on some of the key institutional arrangements underpinning our societies, putting them under strain. Our labour markets were being profoundly reshaped by it, both quantitatively – with unprecedented levels of expected job losses and swathes of inactive, though not necessarily unemployed, workers on subsistence wages or incomes – and qualitatively, with the emergence of teleworking as a new prevalent form of work, in which digital technology plays an ever-growing role. The growing influence of algorithmic management systems in both the physical and the digital workplace was already redefining key aspects of work relations, and the very concept of work, with potentially long-lasting effects. It was clear that labour protection systems, and the labour movement, had to come up with innovative responses to these newly emerging societal risks. But, beyond that, welfare states would also be expected to come up with innovative solutions capable of addressing old and new challenges and guaranteeing a decent income for all, and

societies would need to identify new ways of mutualising these risks fairly rather than letting them fall disproportionately on individual workers.

The pandemic has also forced societies to reassess the role of the state in regulating markets, the economy and society at large. The resilience of our economic and societal structures and of our chronically underfunded public services has also been shaken to the core. Decades of neoliberal and austerity-driven reforms had depleted our health systems and overstretched our industrial base and productive infrastructure. While unprecedented levels of public spending eventually managed to upgrade some of the essential services and vital infrastructure, it soon became clear that even substantial cash injections could not magic up the millions of nurses, doctors and care personnel required to tackle the pandemic. Even producing essential vaccines, let alone allocating them fairly and equitably between nations and regions of the world, emerged as a vexed question, raising uncomfortable truths about the efficiency and fairness of global supply chains, free trade, strategic autonomy, and nationalist or protectionist reactions. The European Union has been a key actor in this process and, amidst one of the most ambitious public spending and investment programmes since the Second World War, it is clear that the era of the ‘small state’ should be over. But what will a ‘big state’ look like, how will it be financed and how will it strike a balance between the new emerging notions of public and general interest and individual freedoms or personal choice? These questions remain unanswered.

The pandemic also cast a new light on how public opinion is formed and shaped, how decision-making processes allow for genuine participation and produce legitimate outcomes (including through industrial democracy), and the level of control to which private individuals can be subjected, either by the state or by corporate actors. The prospect of rebuilding societies and economies after the Covid-19 crisis offered a unique opportunity to transform the global economic system comprehensively and to make it resilient to future shocks, while ensuring environmental sustainability, intergenerational fairness, a dignified existence and a just share of the fruits of progress for all. This was indeed the time to cast a new social-ecological contract for the future, ensuring a just share of progress for all.

3. A just share of progress for all

The world of work looks very different from that envisioned in the original Beveridge report – with much higher employment, weaker trade unions and more technology transforming how work is done. Open trade, new technology, and much greater inclusion and incorporation of women in the labour market have resulted in high productivity and high employment. But workers’ power has been on a downward slope since the 1970s, resulting in more precarious work and a sharper divide among workers, as well as between workers and capital.

Over time, there has been an enormous increase in the importance of financial markets, which has created incentives to extract value via stock markets and myriad other financial instruments. This financialisation has come at the cost of workers and

resulted – along with other changes – in an ever-declining labour share; in other words, the benefits of growing productivity are being shared less and less with the workers creating them (Weil 2014; Dünhaupt 2017; Godechot et al. 2022). This means that workers are increasingly missing out on the benefits of productivity growth, and thus that growth would need to increase by much more in order to improve the living standards of workers and the majority of the population compared with a situation in which a greater share of productivity goes to labour (see also Theodoropoulou 2019 for fair wage growth in Europe). Other factors in this declining labour share are declining worker power, as evidenced through weakening trade unions.

As a higher share of growth goes to capital, wealth inequality increases as well. Not surprisingly then, the attention of economists and sociologists working on inequality has been moving from inequality in wages and earnings to inequality of wealth. While European societies have compressed wage distributions, increasingly the divide is again between those whose income comes from wages, and those whose income comes from capital. On this measure Europe does not look quite so good (Piketty 2014; Pfeffer and Waitkus 2021). This calls into question how we fund our welfare states, and what outcomes are desirable.

The standard type of employment – full-time and on an open-ended contract – is declining, with much greater flexibility being imposed on employees. While headcount employment is high, a larger group of people can now be in poverty even while working. This interacts with structural inequalities by ethnicity, gender and age. Work itself has also changed, with new technologies and ever-growing automation. While initially affecting more low-skill or routine jobs, new advances in algorithms and AI systems affect a growing number of aspects and dimensions of work performance and workplace regulation. These hold enormous opportunities for making work less strenuous and increasing productivity, but also bring great risks. Crucially, our whole system of labour law and workers' protection may not be ready to deal with the increasing and invasive use of computer systems in evaluating work and, crucially, workers (Aloisi and Stefano 2022). A central aspect of this discourse is that, by definition, certain outcomes of the use of this technology cannot be predicted, and their indeterminacy makes them exceedingly difficult to regulate. But lessons can be learned from how innovations came about in the past and how the preventive and precautionary principles helped with minimising and mitigating certain risks, or sharing them equitably between workers, capital and society at large.

One of the greatest paradoxes of our time is that just as it is becoming clear that these emerging problems can be addressed only by means of collective solutions, trade unions, arguably the most important collective actors for social change, appear to be at a historical low in terms of both numbers and – to a certain, but lesser extent – influence on political and industrial relations. We now know that the deliberate strategy of weakening trade unions, initiated in most industrialised countries in the 1970s, has delivered substantial gains to corporations, while reducing over time trade unions' power to represent and organise workers, obtain better wage outcomes and provide a counterweight to the rise of global corporations. These trends have been accompanied by declining union density and falling collective bargaining coverage and by a parallel

rise in inequality indicators, also mirroring workers' declining power vis-à-vis their firms (Tomaskovic-Devey et al. 2020). At this moment in time, even organisations that, historically, have had little sympathy for left-leaning, or even progressive ideas, such as the OECD (OECD 2019) or the European Commission are arguing in favour of a reversal of what is ostensibly an unsustainable state of affairs, for instance encouraging more, and more centralised, collective bargaining. But these good intentions often clash with the realities of certain national labour movements whose capabilities for mobilisation and action have been depleted by decades of deliberate decentralisation strategies, union hostility and industrial transformation.

Most pressing of all is the climate catastrophe in the making, and all too imminent if the current emission-fuelled growth continues. This requires a switch of industry to low-carbon alternatives, which will massively affect the world of work in Europe. While new jobs will be created, this process also entails huge disruption. Many of the jobs affected are skilled manual jobs with relatively good conditions, while labour demand is growing in jobs with worse conditions (Eurofound 2022). A crucial goal must therefore be to ensure a fair transition, in which the costs of this industrial transformation are not all borne by a small group of workers. Beyond that, however, deeper societal change is also needed to ensure fairness and solidarity in this global crisis, and the long-term social and environmental sustainability of our communities (IPCC report; green transitioning). It is, in particular, clear that – in a world subject to environmental limits, where endless economic growth is not a realistic possibility – a radical redistribution of resources is necessary to ensure that all citizens receive a just share of progress (Hickel 2020). This includes ensuring that workers receive their fair share of the profits of economic activity – which currently accrue to the '1 per cent' in a highly disproportionate manner – while guaranteeing decent working conditions, reducing working hours, investing in expanding socially and environmentally beneficial sectors (such as care and education), and shrinking sectors with high ecological footprints and making a low contribution to societal wellbeing.

This short sketch highlights increasing polarisation, not only between capital and labour, but also between workers with good positions and high wages and those making a living in precarious and insecure jobs, as well as between workers and people who cannot work. The result is a growing feeling of unease, as well as societal cleavages. This results in more extreme politics and diminished social cohesion.

The challenges are legion. While in no way exhaustive, this book brings together eminent scholars and thinkers to consider solutions and ways of thinking about these issues. The results require both some full-on societal changes and more stepwise modifications. While some of these ideas may not be ready to be implemented immediately, this book seeks to provide a perspective – or even a range of perspectives – on how to approach the various challenges, and what a just and fair society would look like, with no particular limits. It seeks to learn from the past and to set out alternative visions of a future in which equality and human wellbeing are achievable within planetary boundaries, citizens (and workers) participate meaningfully in decision-making, and social divisions and conflicts are in decline.

4. Contents of the book

The book is loosely organised in three main blocks. The first block collects four chapters that look at what has happened already and how to correctly diagnose ongoing trends and learn from them for the future. In chapter 1, Danny Dorling takes a closer look at the Covid-19 pandemic, arguing that it will cast a long shadow on Europe, especially in terms of its impact on the performance of public services and the public sector at large. While, he argues, it would be wrong to see this event as ‘unique’ – it is likely that similar events have happened before, for instance in 1963, but were not recognised as such, and they could certainly occur again in the future – it would be equally mistaken to deal with it and with its effects in terms of an ‘emergency’ approach. The ‘never ending pandemic’ should be addressed by means of structural solutions and a new era of social investment. And in fact, some of the responses to the crisis contain at least a glimpse of what could be a better and more just society.

In chapter 2, Béla Galgóczi discusses the equality implications of the green transition, identifying how different and cumulative inequalities are created or exacerbated in the transition to net-zero. He argues that the current focus of the ‘just transition’ policy tools on one aspect of inequality at a time can have negative side effects, as it often fails to capture the full complexity of the social implications of climate action. There is a need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to understanding and reducing the multiple dimensions of inequality, while reducing the human footprint on the natural environment.

In chapter 3, Hamid Ekbia discusses the process of technological innovation in the long term through seven lessons from the past. These show the importance of not believing that new technologies are inevitable or that humans are ‘mere fools’ in the face of new technology, but not that new technologies are ‘mere tools’ either. He highlights the need to fight against entrenched interests and old habits of thought, on a planetary scale, in order to make the best use of the new opportunities for equality and justice. This requires strategic cooperation among communities, nations and regions, rather than competition.

Finally, in chapter 4, Colm O’Cinneide points out the inconsistency between states’ relatively long-standing, notional commitment to democratic egalitarian ideals and the reality of persistent, multiple inequalities that are still deeply embedded in our societies. This gap creates serious challenges for democratic institutions premised on the idea that everyone has an equal chance to participate in democratic processes, as well as for the proper functioning of legal systems. He argues that, while they are no silver bullets – and subject to important limitations – legal human rights guarantees have been and can continue to be applied to hold democratic societies to account regarding how they live up to their equality commitments.

The second block of chapters identifies some concrete, and actionable, policy solutions with clear transformative potential. Importantly, these chapters should not be read as a joint blueprint because each author and chapter offers a self-contained set of ideas and suggestions for reform. For instance, chapter 7 advocates a universal basic income,

while chapter 8 puts forward the merits of a job guarantee, two transformative ideas that could in some ways be regarded as in opposition.

In chapter 5, Olivier De Schutter, Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson challenge the dominant framing whereby poverty reduction is at odds with living within planetary boundaries. They put forward a mutually beneficial combined approach built on an inclusive economy, in which better climate outcomes are incentivised and rewarded directly, while inequality in wealth and income is reduced and better distributed, without the need for ever more growth.

In chapter 6, Nicola Countouris and Valerio De Stefano offer a reappraisal of the idea of ‘personal work’ and a critical assessment of the concept of subordination, which shapes the traditional contract of employment and subordinate work. They suggest that the notion of personal work may be more useful in attempts to develop a newly conceptualised concept of human labour, one capable of incorporating certain dimensions of (unpaid) gendered labour, ‘heteromated’ labour (‘heteromation’ is the extraction of economic value from low-cost or free labour in computer-mediated networks), and other forms of socially (and ecologically) valuable labour that hitherto have been excluded from the realm of formal, protected and paid employment.

In chapter 7, Guy Standing argues that the increasing frequency and growing randomness of crises requires new recipes, as the old ways of targeting support and benefits will leave too many unprotected. While in the past the focus has often been on employment as the key factor protecting people against insecurity – particularly natural to trade unions – this leaves the door open for other types of insecurity to be smuggled in even among those in work. The solution is to build-in ex ante protection through a universal basic income, rather than ex post compensation. His chapter is enriched by an original perspective or what he defines as a new ‘eco-fiscal policy’, designed to dismantle rentier capitalism and to satisfy the vital need to confront the ecological crisis seriously.

Rania Antonopoulos proposes a different solution to the problems of precarity and insecurity in chapter 8. While traditional labour market policies start from the idea that there are structurally sufficient meaningful jobs, they cannot satisfactorily address problems on the demand side of the labour market. As labour can be meaningful and provide protection against insecurity, there should be a right to and guarantee of a job to everyone who wants one. This is not merely idle speculation – experiments and schemes have been conducted incorporating such a job guarantee.

The last block of chapters takes a closer look at the role of trade unions and workplace democracy, showing how these can be revitalised and how they can drive transformative growth within Europe. Keith Ewing, in chapter 9, explores a new dimension of the concept of ‘equal pay for work of equal value’, demanding a generalisation of this principle beyond its current use. Coupling this new generalised deployment of the concept on a cross-sectoral basis with a greater use of collective bargaining processes and the introduction of a novel principle of ‘fair differentials where work is agreed to be of a different value’, could eventually lead to making good on the unfulfilled promise

of the 1944 ILO Declaration of Philadelphia, namely that ‘a just share of the fruits of progress’ should be ensured to all workers.

In chapter 10, Philippe Askenazy and Claude Didry make the case for a wider definition of just transition, incorporating the environmental work done through civil society and grassroots activity also within the workplace. They argue that the whole of society must be involved rather than leaving it to special industrial interests focused too narrowly on carbon emissions. They give an in-depth analysis of a shift happening among workers and argue that unions can go beyond the representation of workers to representing ‘citizen-workers’ and their broader interests, including those beyond working time or pay.

Reingard Zimmer, in the final chapter 11 of the book, discusses the role of trade unions and workplace democracy more generally in empowering workers and thus reducing the appeal of authoritarianism and the far right. She looks to the German case for elements of direct democracy that can be strengthened within companies, arguing that the experience of participation and solidarity at the workplace can help to build a countervailing power to prevent authoritarianism and right-wing populism. Importantly, she also explores how transnational solidarity and mobilisation can assist in this important domain.

Of course, the contributions to this book concern topics and ideas that fall within the authors’ particular expertise, providing specific solutions to some of the challenges discussed above. This means that many crucial issues are mentioned only briefly, or not at all in the pages of this book. This by no means suggests that we or the contributors to this book do not consider them to be equally important. For example, most of the chapters have a strong focus on the situation in Europe or the EU Member States, even though many of the proposed solutions could be implemented beyond the European context. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that any vision of just, equal and sustainable societies should take a global perspective, and recognise the responsibility of the Global North for persistent and growing inequalities within the Global South, with regard to both historical and current patterns of exploitation and extractivism.

Another very significant topic we do not address in depth in this volume is migration, although it affects both the world of work and society at large to a great extent. Furthermore, it is likely to increase in the context of a changing climate and rising frequency of extreme weather events that displace millions of people. In addition, while several chapters highlight groups who are particularly vulnerable, marginalised or underrepresented – for example, because of their gender, race or ethnicity, disability or age – the book does not focus in detail on these particular factors of disadvantage and inequality. But transformative ideas will be necessary to address the systemic causes of disadvantage that affect these groups, and to ensure that they can enjoy a just share of progress and participate in decision-making processes in their community. For example, recognising care appropriately as a fundamental cornerstone of our societies has long been advocated as a necessary step towards ensuring gender equality (for example, Elson 2017), alongside putting care and wellbeing at the centre of our understanding of progress and prosperity. There are also many emerging ideas related to the eco-welfare

state that are not addressed in this volume, such as universal basic services – distinct from universal basic income, as discussed in Guy Standing’s chapter – and which form part of alternative visions of a post-growth economy.

While it is clear therefore that this book is not exhaustive, we hope that the ideas presented in the following chapters will stimulate the trade union movement, governments, policymakers, civil society and other relevant actors in crafting innovative solutions to the myriad contemporary societal challenges. For the trade union movement, the present moment offers an opportunity to give fresh impetus to the voice of workers in defining our collective future, by departing from conventional and tired narratives, recalibrating goals and strategies to ensure a just share for all in a world subject to ecological limits and finite resources, and forging new labour–nature alliances.

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