

Corona and Work around the Globe

Work in Global and Historical Perspective

Edited by
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Work in Global and Historical Perspective is an interdisciplinary series that welcomes scholarship on work/labor that engages a historical perspective in and from any part of the world. The series advocates a definition of work/labor that is broad, and especially encourages contributions that explore interconnections across political and geographic frontiers, time frames, disciplinary boundaries, as well as conceptual divisions among various forms of commodified work, and between work and 'non-work.'

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Andreas Eckert and Felicitas Hentschke

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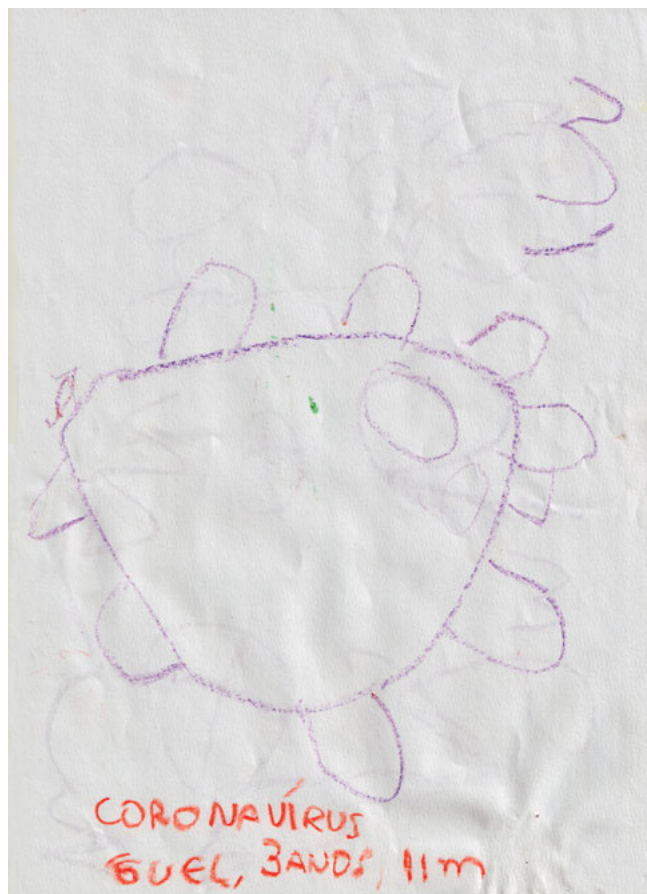
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This book is dedicated to young people across the world,
who will have to make the most of what we leave behind.



Miguel Corrêa Fontes (4) "Coronavirus", Rio de Janeiro, April, 28, 2020.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements — XI

Mahua Sarkar

Prologue — XIII

Andreas Eckert and Felicitas Hentschke

Introduction: Corona and Work around the Globe — XVII

Despair and Indifference at the Margins

Supurna Banerjee

Skill, Informality, and Work in Pandemic Times: Insights from India — 3

Alina-Sandra Cucu

‘It was Quiet’: Pandemics as Normal Life in a Romanian Town — 10

Nicole Mayer-Ahuja

‘Solidarity’ in Times of Corona? Of Migrant Ghettos, Low-Wage Heroines, and Empty Public Coffers — 19

Chitra Joshi

Fear, Flight, and the Labor Question: Looking at Two Pandemics — 28

Being ‘Relevant to the System’ is Female

Larissa Rosa Corrêa and Paulo Fontes

Maids in Brazil: Domestic and Platform Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic — 37

Bridget Kenny

Coronavirus Conjunctures: Waged Work, Wagelessness, and Futures in South Africa — 43

Bahru Zewde

Lending Style to the Unseemly: COVID-19 and Mask Design in Ethiopia — 52

Shutter Release I. Current Issues in the World, Told Visually

Maurice Weiss

Black Ward — 61

Maurice Weiss, with Felicitas Hentschke

“Why are People Dying in Our Hands?” was a Question that was Present Everywhere – An Interview — 86

The Health System in Which We Live

Marcel van der Linden

Nurses — 95

London School of Economics Department of Anthropology’s Covid and Care Research Group

Changing Care Networks in the United Kingdom — 103

Preben Kaarsholm

Scares and Possibilities: The COVID-19 Emergency, the Disruption of Globalization, and the Reinvention of the Welfare State — 111

Yoko Tanaka

State Dysfunction in a ‘Fortunate’ Japan — 120

Thwarted Youth

James Williams

Learning in Lockdown: Studying and Teaching in Wales during the Coronavirus Pandemic — 137

Mary Jo Maynes and Ann Waltner

Youth Transitions in the Time of COVID-19 and Political Uprising — 146

Babacar Fall

Women’s Empowerment Initiatives in the Sahel Challenged by COVID-19 — 155

Shutter Release II. Current Issues in the World, Told Visually

Ellen Rothenberg

‘This is Ridiculous,’ Voting as Labor During COVID-19: A Report from the United States — 163

Ellen Rothenberg, with Felicitas Hentschke

Insistence on Voting Despite the Pandemic is an Act of Resistance – An Interview — 184

Fighting for Justice in the Pandemic

Leon Fink

Police Violence and the Crisis of Work Authority in the COVID-19 Era — 191

Cristiana Schettini

'We did All the Work for You': Sex Work in Argentina in Pandemic Times — 200

On Barak

The Reserve Army of Labor in the Air: Military Support Systems for Furloughed El Al Pilots — 207

When Private and Public Spaces Become Blurred

Jürgen Kocka

Telework between Market and Family: The COVID-19 Crisis as an Accelerator of Social Change — 219

Sandrine Kott

Work in Times of COVID-19: What is New and What is Not. A Western European Perspective — 225

Daniel Eisenberg

Through a Screen, Darkly: The Micro and Macro of Daily Life in the Early Pandemic Era — 231

Contributors — 239

Picture Credits — 243

Index — 245

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Andreas Eckert and Felicitas Hentschke

Preben Kaarsholm

Scares and Possibilities: The COVID-19 Emergency, the Disruption of Globalization, and the Reinvention of the Welfare State

The COVID-19 pandemic and responses to it have exposed dramatically the inherent contradictions of globalization. The pandemic has been an unprecedented global emergency, presenting the whole world with attacks from the same strand of coronavirus, thus signaling homogenization and universality. But while it was possible to contain earlier attacks from coronaviruses such as SARS in 2002–4 through international efforts coordinated by the World Health Organization (WHO), the response to COVID-19 has been diffuse and subject to fierce political contestation. This essay will discuss this contradiction through the lens of the impact of the pandemic and responses to it in Denmark and its Scandinavian neighboring countries. I shall point out some of the unprecedented threats occasioned by the pandemic, as well as some of the possibilities for radical change and realignment, which have presented themselves suddenly and unexpectedly. My essay will address in particular how the emergency has affected work conditions and labor regimes, and what kind of prospects for the future this may entail.

The WHO, the ‘China Virus,’ and Scandinavian Health Authoritarianism

The WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic on March 11, 2020, during a period that was already undergoing some of the greatest upheavals in world hegemony since the end of World War II in 1945 and of the Cold War in 1989. China’s rise to global power has coincided with the disintegration of the US-Western Europe consensus centering on NATO; we have seen challenges to European unity presented by Brexit and the rearrangement of global political geography into – on the one hand – fortresses of peace and – on the other – vast territories of permanent conflict, proxy wars, and displacement of populations. The planet faces unprecedented levels of risk in the face of climate change, and of the difficulties in reaching international agreement on measures to counter it.³⁸ Never has the need for global governance been greater, and never has the crisis of international institutions been so severe.

The WHO was established in 1948 as an important ingredient in the system of multinational institutions established around the United Nations to consolidate postwar development and to counter the threats of epidemics in the aftermath of World War II. The COVID-19 pandemic has turned it into a battlefield for the control or undermining of multinational governance. China – where the pandemic originated – has made significant investments into the WHO as part of a more general ambition to increase its influence over multinational institutions. On the other hand, the

³⁸ Will Steffen, et al., “Trajectories of the Earth System in the Anthropocene,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* (PNAS) 11:33 (August 14, 2018); Anon., “Briefing Climate Change,” *The Economist*, September 21, 2019.

United States has pursued a longer-term strategy of disengagement from United Nations institutions (UNESCO being one example), as well as from institutional innovations aimed to promote transitional justice and the universalization of human rights such as the International Criminal Court. In the aftermath of the initial panic, the COVID-19 emergency has offered itself as a show-piece of Chinese mastery and strategical superiority and of the incapacity of the United States to recognize and contain the spread of the pandemic.

For China, this is an opportunity to demonstrate the superiority of authoritarianism, disproving the assumptions of modernization theory that growth and capitalism require liberalism and democracy, and that “all good things go together.”³⁹ On the United States side, distancing itself from the political bias of the WHO has helped justify the libertarian and denialist response applied by the United States, as well as by the United Kingdom and Brazil, to what President Donald Trump insists on calling the ‘China virus.’⁴⁰ WHO recommendations in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic in March and April 2020 also involved criticism of Danish and Scandinavian policies vis-à-vis the pandemic. The Danish counterargument was that the WHO recommendations of mass testing and containment through physical isolation were not relevant for Scandinavia at that point, because testing capacity was too low for it to be effective. Only mitigation and the slowing down of the spread of the virus would make sense and be acceptable.⁴¹

The policy responses by the three Scandinavian welfare economies have been different, and a lot has been made of the differences between the Danish-Norwegian and Swedish approaches, especially in the early days of the pandemic. This was particularly so, because the differences in policy contradicted traditional stereotypes of a centralist and authoritarian Sweden as against more easy-going Denmark and Norway. These stereotypes have a certain amount of historical foundation in different trajectories of democratization and designs for state-society interaction. In all three countries, however, social democratic and labor parties with strong links to trade unions and workers’ organizations have been prominent since the 1930s, and have been initiators and guardians of welfare state and mixed-economy frameworks.

A stereotypical view of Sweden (at least within the confines of exchanges of mutual prejudice among Scandinavians) has been as the land of political correctness, where all things good and righteous do indeed go together. It is part of this view that righteousness should be policed through the silencing of incorrectness and by far-reaching interventions by government and experts into private spheres and citizens’ behavior. Though racist and anti-immigrant discourse has a strong presence in Swedish society, it has so far been kept out of respectable parliamentary collaboration, and traces of racism are vigorously policed in the historical representations of museums and in children’s literature. Sexism and gender discrimination are not tolerated, and the gender-neutral third-person pronoun “hen” is promoted as an alternative to traditional masculine and feminine usage.

³⁹ Seymour Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1960), ch. 2; Cf. Walt Whitman Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960) and Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1958).

⁴⁰ On Trump, China, and the history of the WHO, see James Meek, “The Health Transformation Army,” *London Review of Books* 42:13, July 02, 2020, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v42/n13/james-meek/the-health-transformation-army>, accessed September 06, 2020.

⁴¹ Esben Schjørring et al., “WHO kritiserer Danmark igen og igen – men taler altid pænt om Kina,” *Altinget*, April 4, 2020, https://www.alinget.dk/artikel/who-kritiserer-danmark-igen-og-igen-men-taler-altid-paent-om-kina?SNSubscribed=true&ref=newsletter&refid=ekstra-lordag-4-4&utm_campaign=altingetdk%20Altinget.dk&utm_medium%09=e-mail&utm_source=nyhedsbrev, accessed August 28, 2020.

By contrast, Norway and Denmark have been seen through matching stereotypes as softer and less uncompromisingly righteous than Sweden. In the Danish-Norwegian setting, democracy has had a less centralized history, with grass-roots movements, civil society agendas, and folk high schools playing more prominent roles. Consequently, traditions of state paternalism are seen as less rigorous than in Sweden, and – in contrast to Sweden – xenophobic and anti-immigrant political parties have long been considered respectable enough for parliamentary collaboration in both Denmark and Norway.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the political responses to it seemed to overthrow many of these stereotypical assumptions. When the pandemic struck, all three countries were ruled by minority governments – the Social Democratic Party in Denmark, a Right Party-Left Party-Christian People's Party coalition in Norway, and a Social Democratic-Green Party coalition in Sweden. All three governments were fragile in the sense of being dependent on the support of other parties, known to be volatile. In Norway, the xenophobic Progress Party had recently seceded from the governing coalition, and in Sweden, the red-green minority government was formed against the background of a four-month period of political stalemate between September 2018 and January 2019, when no government could be agreed upon with the necessary parliamentary support. The COVID-19 emergency brought political consolidation to all three Scandinavian countries, at least for a period, and in Denmark perhaps most spectacularly so.

The image of a progressive, female Danish prime minister has been popularized internationally through the television series *Borgen*, and on March 11, 2020, the Social Democratic prime minister, Mette Frederiksen, seized the moment, and – flanked ceremonially by health experts and line ministers – announced wide-ranging interventions and restrictions in Danish public life.⁴² This was an emergency measure, based on what became the magical formula of “sundhedsfaglig ekspertise” – health science expertise and consultation – but the prime minister assumed full responsibility for it as an urgent political intervention, even if it might later turn out to have involved judgment errors. Danes who had been used to living closely with each other now had to adjust their behavior and learn to “stand together by keeping distance.” Schools and universities were closed, as were libraries and cultural and sports facilities. All public employees “not in critical functions” were sent home, and private enterprises were encouraged also to let their employees work from home as much as possible. Public transport was restricted, limitations were placed on visits to hospitals and nursing homes, and public gatherings of more than one hundred people were prohibited. Foreign travel was restricted and reinforced border controls introduced. Mette Frederiksen ended her address by stating that, “We must do everything we can to look after the Danes. To look after Denmark. To look after each other.” The objective of this was not containment along Chinese lines, and a proper ‘lockdown’ has never been on the agenda in Scandinavia. The aim was ‘mitigation’ – to keep casualty figures low and the spread of the pandemic at a rate where hospital and health capacities were not overstretched, as had been the scenario in Italy and Spain.

This early and determined declaration – with its nationalist and populist ingredients – had a powerful impact, and was a difficult act to oppose. An equally determined announcement followed on March 15, 2020, of a “three-part agreement” between the Social Democratic government, the Danish trade unions, and the employers’ organization on state provision of wage compensation for workers who were sent home, so that they would not lose their jobs. Subsequently, on March 19, the finance minister announced an agreement between all the parties in the Danish parliament to

⁴² Her speech can be found at https://www.stm.dk/_p_14916.html, accessed August 29, 2020; For the television series *Borgen*, see <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1526318/>, accessed August 29, 2020.

make available an extensive financial support package to keep the Danish economy afloat in the face of the COVID-19 emergency.⁴³ By May 2020, COVID-19 interventions were estimated to amount to around 200 billion krone, which would bring the Danish government budget deficit to nearly 300 billion Danish kroner – approximately 43 billion US dollars.⁴⁴

Norway followed a similar line of caution to that adopted by the Danish government, adding the radical measure of restricting citizens' rights to travel to their mountain cottages, even for skiing during the Easter holidays – a sacrosanct ritual of Norwegian national culture. Sweden, however, chose a different path that was much less restrictive in terms of movement and kept primary schools, public institutions, businesses, and even cafés and restaurants open. Health authoritarianism in Sweden also had a different public face. While Denmark and Norway made a point of basing interventions on political decisions, taking advice from health expertise into account, politicians in Sweden to a larger degree stood aside and let health experts make the decisions and announce publicly what would be the best approach. This brought to the fore Anders Tegnell as 'state epidemiologist,' representing Sweden's Public Health Agency, who by now has become world-famous as the spokesperson of the Swedish 'open' way of addressing COVID-19.

What was particularly striking about the Swedish way compared with the Danish and Norwegian approaches was the stated objective of letting the open society contribute to the building of herd immunity to the COVID-19 virus, combined with that of taking the economic cost of possible closures of institutions and enterprises into account.⁴⁵ There was not really a disagreement between the three countries at the time, concerning the necessity of reaching herd immunity. At the onset of the pandemic, it was the general assumption that – in the absence of a vaccine – herd immunity could only be reached with the gradual spread of infections through the population. The disagreement was over the speed and violence with which infections might be allowed to spread, and what levels of deaths and casualties could be tolerated.

The outcome was that Sweden ended up with dramatically higher death figures than Denmark and Norway, something also caused by serious neglect in the protection of nursing homes and the elderly population. As of August 30, 2020, COVID-19 deaths came to 5,891 in Sweden (in a population of 10.3 million), 624 in Denmark (in a population of 5.8 million), and 264 in Norway (in a population of 5.4 million).⁴⁶ At the same time, the expected impact on immunity and the economy have not materialized. A study carried out at the beginning of May 2020 showed that only 7.3 percent of those tested in Stockholm had developed antibodies against COVID-19, with only five percent at a

⁴³ The March 15 and March 19, 2020, announcements from the Ministry of Finance can be found at <https://fm.dk/nyheder/nyhedsarkiv/2020/marts/regeringen-og-alle-folketingets-partier-er-enige-om-omfattende-hjaelpepakke-til-dansk-oekonomi/> and <https://fm.dk/nyheder/nyhedsarkiv/2020/marts/trepartsaftale-skal-hjaelpe-loenmodtagere/>, both accessed August 29, 2020.

⁴⁴ DKK 294 billion more exactly, according to the overview presented by the Ministry of Finance on May 25, 2020 – <https://fm.dk/nyheder/nyhedsarkiv/2020/maj/statens-nettofinansierings-og-finansieringsbehov-for-2020/>, accessed August 29, 2020.

⁴⁵ Anders Tegnell kept arguing long into the pandemic that Swedish policy would lead to levels of herd immunity, which other countries would necessarily have to strive towards by different means later. See Richard Milne, "Architect of Sweden's No-Lockdown Strategy Insists It Will Pay Off: Epidemiologist Anders Tegnell Says Other Countries Could Face Big 'Second Wave'," *Financial Times*, May 8, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/a2b4c18c-a5e8-4edc-8047-ade4a82a548d>, accessed August 30, 2020.

⁴⁶ See Johns Hopkins University COVID-19 Interactive Map, where country figures are updated continuously, <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>, accessed 10 September 2020.

national level.⁴⁷ In terms of economic impact, OECD figures indicate a worse outcome for growth and employment in Sweden than in Denmark and Norway.⁴⁸

The differences between the measures of health authoritarianism had very practical impacts, leading to travel restrictions between the three countries. The bridge between Sweden and Denmark was not closed for good – in spite of the long-standing ambitions of radical nationalist and xenophobic Danes.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, movement across the bridge slowed down as border controls, immigration checks, and travel restrictions were introduced. For a long time, this was enforced asymmetrically, meaning that Danes could commute freely to their holiday homes in the south of Sweden, while Swedes could only enter Denmark if they subjected themselves to a two-week quarantine. The free flow within and amalgamation of the Copenhagen-Malmö region into a Bay Area-like unified space under the banner of European unity and globalization came under threat, and it remains to be seen how permanent the disruption will be.

Health Authoritarianism, Xenophobia, and the Reinvention of the Danish Welfare State

Such re-fragmentation has obviously also affected growth and has – together with increasingly draconian anti-immigration and refugee policies – halted the development of a prospering cross-border labor market in the Copenhagen-Malmö region. In this sense, health authoritarianism may be seen as contributing to new strands of protectionism as far as the labor market and employment are concerned. Labor market protectionism has, however, been significantly countered by European Union open-market obligations. In spite of the slow-down produced by border controls, the movement of labor across both the Danish-Swedish and the Danish-German border, and between Denmark and Poland has continued with few restrictions throughout the COVID-19 pandemic period. This in spite of occasional outbursts of scapegoating with Polish workers coming to Denmark portrayed – alongside Somali immigrants and asylum seekers – as possible carriers of infection. I shall come back to this below.

The COVID-19 emergency has exposed the vulnerability of migrant and informal laborers as members of a global reserve army. This was flashed across media screens in the images of home-

⁴⁷ Asbjørn Goul Andersen, "Sverige følger sin helt egen corona-strategi – men hvor længe?," *Videnskab.dk*, June 6, 2020, <https://videnskab.dk/kultur-samfund/sverige-foelger-sin-helt-egen-corona-strategi-men-hvor-laenge>, accessed August 30, 2020. See also "Immune Responses and Immunity to SARS-CoV-2," *European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC)*, <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/covid-19/latest-evidence/immune-responses>, accessed August 30, 2020. This shows only marginal differences in the immunity figures for Sweden, Denmark, and Norway.

⁴⁸ As for projected change in GDP during 2020, the OECD by June 2020 gives minus 6.7 percent (single-hit scenario) and 7.8 percent (double-hit scenario, i.e. with impact from a second pandemic wave) for Sweden, 5.8 percent and 7.1 percent for Denmark, and 6 percent and 7.5 percent for Norway. See "OECD Economic Outlook, June 2020: The World Economy on a Tightrope," *OECD*, 2020, <http://www.oecd.org/economic-outlook/june-2020>, accessed August 30, 2020. For unemployment forecasts, the OECD gives the following figures for the three countries for the fourth quarter of 2020 in a single- and double-hit scenario respectively: Sweden 11 percent and 13.4 percent, Denmark 7.2 percent and 8.8 percent, Norway 5.5 percent and 7 percent. See "Unemployment Rate Forecast," *OECD*, 2020, <https://data.oecd.org/unemp/unemployment-rate-forecast.htm>, accessed August 30, 2020.

⁴⁹ The symbolism of the bridge across the Øresund is explored brilliantly in the 2011 first season of the TV series *Broen*, which has won international acclaim and was a Danish-Swedish co-production. See <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1733785/>, accessed on August 30, 2020.

less migrant laborers forced to leave Indian cities at the declaration of lockdown, or being arrested in South African shack settlements for breaking restrictions on movement to queue for food and shopping.

The pandemic has brought into view how Europe, too, is affected by informalization and by the transnational disaggregation of work processes and the undermining of trade unions through individualized contract labor. This happened in the exposure of the Tönnies slaughterhouse outbreak in Gütersloh in June 2020, when COVID-19 was shown to have spread through the miserable and congested living conditions of the Polish, Bulgarian, and Romanian ‘*Kolonnen-Arbeiter*,’ who had no contractual or trade-union protection.⁵⁰ In Denmark, this was addressed in an indignant newspaper commentary by a worker employed at the Danish Crown abattoir in Horsens – the biggest slaughterhouse in Denmark with more than 1,300 employees – who argued that the ‘slave-like’ working conditions in Germany represented a threat to workers internationally. He also described how his German colleagues at the slaughterhouse in Horsens were willing to commute six hundred kilometers by car every day to be able to work under a Danish labor regime, which was regulated in a different way.⁵¹

Not long after, in early August 2020, a similar outbreak of COVID-19 occurred at a Danish Crown slaughterhouse in Ringsted, where the majority of those infected were Polish workers under Danish union contracts, but accommodated in conditions not dissimilar to their Gütersloh Tönnies colleagues.⁵² It also emerged that the Danish Crown abattoir brand was not so Danish after all, as its production processes were disaggregated in complex ways across several plants and national borders. At the same time, it turned out that Danish Crown operates its own slaughterhouses in Germany, including one in Essen producing pork for the Chinese market, which had had to be closed down temporarily in June 2020 because of Chinese worries about importing COVID-19-infected pork. Danish Crown is also involved with German partners in a major joint-venture slaughterhouse enterprise in Lower Saxony, again fully embedded in a German labor regulations framework.⁵³

The differences between the Scandinavian/Danish and the German model are therefore becoming difficult to uphold, and it seems that ‘slave-like conditions’ can also be accommodated within the Danish framework. This is a challenge for the Social Democratic Party’s project for the revival of the welfare state, for the support of which it has sought to capitalize on in its successful

50 “More Than 1,300 Coronavirus Cases in Meat Factory,” *General-Anzeiger* (English edition), June 22, 2020, https://ga.de/ga-english/news/more-than-1300-coronavirus-cases-in-meat-factory_aid-51778017, accessed August 31, 2020.

51 Frank Vestergaard, “Slagteriarbejder fra Horsens: Slavelignende forhold hos vores tyske naboer er blevet normalen. Og kan komme til Danmark” [Slaughterhouse worker from Horsens: Slave-like conditions among our German neighbors have become the norm. And may come to Denmark], *Politiken*, June 28, 2020, <https://politiken.dk/debat/art7837985/Slavelignende-forhold-hos-vores-tyske-naboer-er-blevet-normalen.-Og-kan-komme-til-Danmark>, accessed August 31, 2020; This was echoed in the Danish trade-union media, see e.g. Nicolai Søndergaard, “Slagteriarbejder: Slavelignende forhold i Tyskland presser os i Danmark,” *Fødevareforbundet NNF*, June 29, 2020, <https://www.nnf.dk/nyheder/2020/juni/slagteriarbejder-slavelignende-forhold-i-tyskland-presser-os-i-danmark/>, accessed August 31, 2020.

52 “Coronavirus Digest: Danish Abattoir Closed Over COVID-19 Cluster,” *Deutsche Welle*, August 8, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-digest-danish-abattoir-closed-over-covid-19-cluster/a-54492986>, accessed August 31, 2020.

53 “Corona Outbreak in Essen Called Off,” *Danish Crown*, June 29, 2020, <https://www.danishcrown.com/en/contact/media/news/corona-outbreak-in-essen-called-off>, accessed August 31, 2020; On the Westcrown slaughterhouse in Osnabrück, of which Danish Crown owns fifty percent, see Peter Rasmussen, “Hver tredje ansat smittet: Danish Crown ramt af corona-udbrud i Tyskland,” *Fagbladet 3F*, 18 May 2020, <https://fagbladet3f.dk/artikel/danish-crown-ramt-af-corona-udbrud-i-tyskland>, accessed August 31, 2020.

COVID-19 interventions. This revival has had a strongly traditionalist and even nostalgic ring, seen for example in the flagship political promise to introduce special early retirement public pensions for worn-out blue-collar laborers. In essence, this is a modest attempt to roll back some of the reductions in pensions and retirement support schemes, which have been introduced over the last decade of conservative-liberalist government. It is being promoted, however, in a vigorously elaborated discursive framework, which reintroduces notions of class and images of what a worker is, and which seems more concerned with bringing back the past than addressing the future.⁵⁴

At the same time, together with the boost received from its resolute public health interventions, the Social Democratic Party has gained strength by stealing some of the fire from the populist xenophobic right in Danish politics. This applies in particular to the Danish People's Party, which in recent years has competed with Social Democrats over welfare agendas – a competition that seems for the time being to have been more or less completely neutralized.⁵⁵ The prime minister has recently spoken in emotional terms of the need to safeguard fearful Danes against attacks from 'immigrant youth' on Copenhagen commuter trains. In addition, at the beginning of August 2020, Social Democratic councilors in the country's second-largest city, Aarhus, were vocal in calling for 'cultural' interventions against Somalis immigrants and asylum seekers, among whom there was recently a much-debated 'hotspot' virus outbreak. It was subsequently agreed to make information on COVID-19 precautions available in the Somali language to help address the problem.⁵⁶

The Social Democratic minister for immigration, Mattias Tesfaye, has been an unflinching upholder of strict immigration controls and repatriation of undocumented migrants and unsuccessful asylum seekers, and within the European Union, Danish Social Democrats have opposed refugee quotas for member countries and the adoption of a common European policy on refugees and immigration.

The party's position has been expressed forcefully also in more populist terms by Rasmus Stoklund, a young and aspiring MP and political scientist, who has made his career through the Dansk Metal trade union, and who is currently the Social Democratic spokesperson for immigration and integration. In 2016, Stoklund published a book explaining that – to win voters back from the Danish People's Party or the Liberals, who were then in minority government – the Social Democrats should align itself with the Danish People's Party, rather than fight its xenophobia. Social Democrats must address and take seriously the fears and insecurities that globalization has imposed on 'ordinary people.' The best way to do this would be to secure jobs for Danish workers and to restrict immigration.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ The Danish worker in this simulacrum is a white, male brewery worker in his sixties called Arne, who has worked for decades, contributed through his tax paying to the building of the welfare state, and who is regularly embraced on television by the prime minister; see the Social Democratic Party website's presentation of its campaign called 'Lille land, stor retfærdighed' ('Small Country, Big Justice'), <https://www.lille-land.dk/retfaerdighed/>, accessed August 31, 2020.

⁵⁵ In August 2017, support for the Social Democrats and the Danish People's Party amounted to respectively 25.5 percent and 19.2 percent; By August 2020, the corresponding figures were 32.4 percent and 7.3 percent; VoxMeter for Ritzau, <https://voxmeter.dk/meningsmalinger/>, accessed August 31, 2020.

⁵⁶ Christina Nordvang Jensen, "Professor om smitte i somaliske kredse i Aarhus: 'Det er social ulighed og ikke etnicitet, der er problemet'", *DR Nyheder*, August 11, 2020, <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/professor-om-smitte-i-somaliske-kredse-i-aarhus-det-er-social-ulighed-og-ikke>, accessed September 05, 2020.

⁵⁷ Rasmus Stoklund Holm-Nielsen, *Til blå Bjarne: en debatbog om Socialdemokratiet, globaliseringen og fremtiden* (Copenhagen: Skriveforlaget, 2016). 'Blå Bjarne', to whom the book is addressed, is a fictional blue-collar worker, who has shifted his support from the Left to more rightist parties, and whom Social Democratic policies must aim to win back.

Like the prime minister, Stoklund has also made a point of stating in public media that areas of Copenhagen with a majority Muslim immigrant population must not be allowed to become unsafe for Danish citizens.⁵⁸ Most recently, he has criticized a government-commissioned research report produced by Roskilde University colleagues of mine, who argued that policies to address ‘negative social control’ among young Muslim immigrants might require Arabic and other foreign language skills as well as insights into the teachings of the Qur’an: “I can promise with absolute certainty that a report like this will never be used as the foundation for Social Democratic interventions against negative social control.”⁵⁹

Pension reforms, retirement age, and immigration policy relate to each other closely. The demographic trends that form the basis for arguments in favor of raising the age of retirement are exacerbated by anti-immigration policy. The paradoxical conundrum of being faced with a combined threat of unemployment and a lack of available labor power could be addressed rationally through an alternative policy of regulated immigration, perhaps from selected partner countries, as well as through a more humane policy toward refugees and asylum seekers. At the moment, such an alternative seems as far as it could possibly be from the policy of the Social Democratic Party. The party sees its commitment to an anti-immigration policy and discourses of anti-Muslim feeling as a significant contribution to the strong position that the party has consolidated through COVID-19 health authoritarianism.

Prospects for a New Deal?

Denmark and the Social Democratic Party are thus at a crossroads. The limited extent of the negative impact on growth and employment indicated in the OECD figures quoted above appears to have been a highly successful result of the early, resolute, and comprehensive interventions by the Danish Social Democratic government, including the extensive financial injections to boost the economy and keep unemployment at bay. Suddenly, since early March 2020 and the onset of the pandemic, Keynesianism and economic policies of debt financing, public investments, and multiplier effects have become respectable and possible. This comes after a long drought of so-called neoliberalism, where state coffers have been treated like a family household budget, and state budget deficits seen as the road to national ruin. The question now is whether this will be the beginning of a great re-awakening of a New Deal era, and how the new level of extensive state interventionism into the economy will be managed. Will the interventions through loans and aid packages be used to re-establish as far as possible a pre-COVID-19 status quo, and primarily save existing enterprise structures from collapse? Or will they be used pro-actively to re-structure the economy and employment, and used to further other urgent and more long-term challenges of counteracting climate change, environmental degradation, and the growth in global inequalities and the exploitation of labor? How will work conditions and labor regimes be affected by the cor-

⁵⁸ This followed episodes around New Year’s Eve, when fireworks were thrown at passers-by in the streets of Nørrebro; See Sebastian Abrahamsen, “Socialdemokratiets nye hardliner: For mange med ikkevestlig baggrund opfører sig dårligt,” *Information*, January 15, 2020, <https://www.information.dk/indland/2020/01/socialdemokratiets-nye-hardliner-ikkevestlig-baggrund-opfoerer-daarligt>, accessed September 5, 2020.

⁵⁹ Rasmus Stoklund, “S til RUC-dekan: Du forsvarer pinlig og absurd rapport med stråmænd,” *Altinget*, September 3, 2020, <https://www.altinget.dk/forskning/artikel/s-svarer-ruc-dekan-du-opstiller-en-straamand-i-forsvar-for-pinlig-rapport>, accessed September 5, 2020.

poratist instruments of governance that have been introduced? How will job-sharing, extensions in the possibilities of working from home, and further disaggregation of production processes affect workplace cultures and labor organization?

These are among the big questions for the immediate future. The 2021 budget proposed by the Social Democratic government – designated a “corona budget” – provides an indication of what may be expected, as well as what will be possible in terms of parliamentary support. It contains a “war chest” of 9.2 billion krone – approximately 1.4 billion US dollars – that will be “kept in reserve for the re-starting of the Danish economy and to meet special challenges occasioned by COVID-19. This reserve is added to the numerous interventions introduced since the spring of 2020, and will be used to safeguard Danish jobs and employment and for health services, vaccines, and economic rehabilitation.”⁶⁰ This does not sound like a declaration of Keynesian revolution, but rather as of one of returning as far and as soon as possible to a pre-COVID-19 status quo.

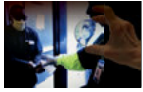
A more radical departure would require fundamental changes in both Danish national and European Union frameworks for state expenditure and deficit financing. A Danish ‘budgetlov’ agreed upon by a broad parliamentary majority in 2012 stipulates that the annual deficit in government budgets cannot exceed half a percent of GDP, and European Union regulations impose a restriction of three percent of GDP on deficits in member states’ national accounts, and do not allow public gross debt to go beyond sixty percent of GDP. To pursue further the possibilities opened up by the COVID-19 emergency interventions of economic stimulus would require a new consensus to revise such limitations in order to enable massive investments in, for example, climate change countermeasures. A Keynesian revolution proper would mean that such investments were made by governments also to provide new radical welfare and anti-inequality reforms. This would require political visions of a transnational nature, for which Danish Social Democrats, trade unionists, and the labor movement are not yet prepared, and for which parliamentary backing would be so far unthinkable.

In any case, within the perspective of Danish Social Democratic visions, welfare is prioritized over climate change intervention – red is valued above green. This may well become the most important battlefield on the Left of Danish politics and within trade unions and the labor movement in the immediate future. Endeavors to avoid unemployment and place limitations on retirement age and on reductions in public pensions will make public expenditure dependent on a continued growth in GDP. Though interest rates are negative and likely to remain so for some time, debt repayments will also contribute to the need for continued growth, and a green prospect of zero growth or even reductions in growth to halt global warming will be extremely unlikely. The best-case scenario that can be hoped for as an agreed political agenda for a Social Democratic government, basing itself on support from the Left, would therefore be one of green growth, job-sharing, and technological innovation.

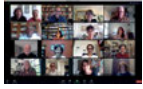
This could boost hopes of a Danish national salvation, though from a broader perspective it might contribute only marginally to global solutions. But we are still waiting for the Social Democratic government to point out what exactly will be the way forward to accomplish something like this.

⁶⁰ Government of Denmark press briefing, “Finansministeren præsenterer forslag til finanslov 2021,” <https://www.regeringen.dk/nyheder/2020/forslag-til-finanslov-for-2021/>, accessed September 05, 2020.

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Eisenberg, Daniel, ‘Authors on Zoom I.,’ Front-end Sheet



Corrêa Fontes, Miguel, ‘Coronavirus,’ p. V



Tankha, Ishan, ‘The Long Trek Home,’ 2020, p. 30



Tankha, Ishan, ‘On the Track,’ 2020, p. 33



Mooketsi, Rehilwe, ‘Man Rushing to Work,’ p. 48



Bahru Zewde, Tsion, (Miss.T.Cal), ‘Djibouti National Emblem,’ p. 57



Bahru Zewde, Tsion, (Miss.T.Cal), ‘Royal Furniture Masks,’ p. 57



Bahru Zewde, Tsion, (Miss.T.Cal), ‘Spiderman Mask,’ p. 57



Bahru Zewde, Tsion, (Miss.T.Cal), ‘Champion Liverpool FC,’ p. 57



Bahru Zewde, Tsion (Miss.T.Cal), ‘Bandana I.,’ p. 57



Bahru Zewde, Tsion, (Miss.T.Cal), ‘Bandana II.,’ p. 57



Bahru Zewde, Tsion, (Miss.T.Cal), ‘Bandana and Hijab,’ p. 57



Bahru Zewde, Tsion, (Miss.T.Cal), ‘The Lion of Judah,’ p. 57



Weiss, Maurice, ‘Black Ward’ 1, p. 60, 91



Weiss, Maurice, ‘Black Ward’ 2, p. 61



Weiss, Maurice, ‘Black Ward’ 3, p. 62–63



Weiss, Maurice, ‘Black Ward’ 4, p. 64–65



Weiss, Maurice, ‘Black Ward’ 5, p. 66



Weiss, Maurice, ‘Black Ward’ 6, p. 67



Weiss, Maurice, ‘Black Ward’ 7, p. 68



Weiss, Maurice, ‘Black Ward’ 8, p. 69



Weiss, Maurice, ‘Black Ward’ 9, p. 70



Weiss, Maurice, ‘Black Ward’ 10, p. 71



Weiss, Maurice, ‘Black Ward’ 11, p. 72



Weiss, Maurice, ‘Black Ward’ 12, p. 73



Weiss, Maurice, ‘Black Ward’ 13, p. 74



Weiss, Maurice, ‘Black Ward’ 14, p. 75



Weiss, Maurice, ‘Black Ward’ 15, p. 76–77



Weiss, Maurice, ‘Black Ward’ 16, p. 78–79



Weiss, Maurice, 'Black Ward' 17, p. 80



Weiss, Maurice, 'Black Ward' 18, p. 81



Weiss, Maurice, 'Black Ward' 19, p. 82–83, 91



Weiss, Maurice, 'Black Ward' 20, p. 84–85



'A Right to Care.' Original illustration by Maggie Li, 2020, p. 110



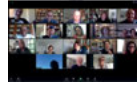
Handler-Spitz, Rivi 'The Class of 2020 Has Had to Put Their Plans on Ice,' p. 150



Maturen, Stephen, "I Can't Breathe' Protest Held After Man Dies In Police Custody In Minneapolis", Getty Images News, Bild 1215368206, p. 152



Rothenberg, Ellen, "'This is Ridiculous.' Voting as Labor During COVID-19." 2020, p. 164–183



Eisenberg, Daniel, 'Authors on Zoom II.,' Back-end Sheet

Index

10 Downing Street 138
19th century 240
20th century 240

Aadhar 29f.
Aarhus 117
Abe, Shinzo 121
Abenomask 130
Accommodation 13, 20f., 48, 125
Activist XXI, 5, 40, 50, 103, 152–154, 184, 186, 199, 237
Addis Ababa 53, 55, 57, 242
Adelman, Jeremy XI
Adolescent, adolescents 18, 138, 146, 155, 158–159
Adulthood 49, 146–147, 150
Africa XIV, XXI, 43–47, 49, 51f., 54, 58, 87, 91, 97, 99, 149, 205, 240
African National Congress (ANC) 44
Agricultural production 157
Agriculture 32, 45, 130, 157, 192, 219
Ahmed, Abiy 52f.
Ahmedabad 28
Airline XX, 53, 207, 208, 214
Al Jazeera 56
Albania 137
alcohol 44, 52
Alexander, Eileen 103
Alto Leblon 37
Amazon 191, 193
ambulance 191
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) 186, 195
American Federation of Labor 195
American Nurses Association 99–100
Amnesty 102
Anomaly 122, 212
Antibodies 114, 122
Antibody test 122, 141
Anti-democratic XVIII
Anwar 9
Arabic 109, 118
Arbeitsgesellschaft 220
Argentina XX, 200–205, 241
Artisan 200, 219, 227
Artist XV, XVIII, XXI, 86, 150, 184, 186, 241
Asia XXI, 87, 97, 121–122, 220, 232f.
Asociación de Mujeres Meretrices de Argentina (AMMAR) 202–206
Association Nationale des Infirmières Diplômées 100
Association of retail companies 24
Asylum seeker 106, 108, 115, 117, 118
Atlanta 153, 196
Austerity XX, 17, 43, 103f., 106f., 109
Austria 86, 140, 222

Authoritarianism 111f., 114f., 118
Autonomy 41, 101, 192, 194–196, 228–230
Aviation XX, 207f., 211f., 214f.

Bachelor 210
Bailout 207, 214f.
Bakery 12, 24
Banerjee, Supurna XIX, 3f., 239
Bangalore 28
Banker, bankers 47, 96
Bankruptcy, bankruptcies 43, 207
Barak, On XX, 239
Bataclan 90
Bear, Laura 103f.
Bedford-Fenwick, Ethel 98
Belarus 137
Belgium 140, 222
Benefits 5, 7, 12, 14, 16, 108, 130, 132f., 157, 197, 211, 214, 222, 233f., 236
Benelux 222
Berger, Tobias XI
Berkeley 10, 148, 151, 198, 213
Berlin XI, XVII, 17, 86f., 90, 239–242
Berlin Center for Global Engagement (BCGE) XI, XVII
Berlin University Alliance Berlin XI, XVII
Berlin Wall 90
Berufsorganisation der Krankenpflegerinnen 100
Bhogal, Jaskiran K. 103
Bihar 3, 5
Black Lives Matter (BLM) XX, 57, 152, 185, 194
Black ward XXI, 61, 86
Black, Indigenous, People Of Color (BIPOC) 233
Blue collar work 6, 23, 26, 224
Boeing 787 208f.
Bolsonaro, Jair 37f., 54
Bombay 28f.
Border closure 32, 155, 158
Border control 32, 113, 115
Border, borders 11, 20, 32, 53, 90, 113, 115f., 141, 144, 155, 158f., 205, 207, 231
Borgen 113
Bornheim 20
Boston 195
Bowers, Rebecca E. 103
Braamfontein 48
Brandenburg 86–87
Brazil XVIII, XIX, 37–42, 52, 54, 89, 112, 240f.
Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) 39
Brexit 111, 138, 144
British Medical Journal 52, 54
Broadcast 184, 187
Budhiraja, Kriti 148

- Buenos Aires 200, 202, 205, 241
 Bulgaria 17, 21, 116, 208
 Burkina Faso XX, 53, 156, 158
 Business 3, 23, 28f., 33, 53, 55f., 108f., 114, 126,
 128–133, 141, 155–157, 207, 221f., 234–236, 240f.
 Camp 29f.
 Campinas 41
 Camus, Albert 231
 Cannell, Fenella 103
 Cape Town 46
 Capital 5, 10, 16, 19f., 31f., 53, 57, 96, 124, 202, 211, 236f.
 Capitalism 5–8, 10f., 26, 45, 104, 112, 211, 215, 223,
 237, 239f.
 Care emergency 99
 Care work XVIII, 8, 43f.
 Career XV, XX, 117, 143, 146f., 149, 214, 224, 227, 240
 Caregiver 226
 Carpenter, carpenters 8, 30, 157
 Cartoneros 200, 204
 Cashier, cashiers 19
 Casual worker 5
 Catholic 40, 201, 204, 239
 Chad XX, 155–158
 Chandler, Brianna 152
 Chelsea 109
 Chicago 38, 184–186, 194–196, 231, 235, 239, 241
 Childcare 8, 103, 106, 138–140, 142–144, 224
 Childhood 39, 235
 Children XX, 10, 23, 30f., 39, 103, 105–107, 109, 112,
 127, 130,
 China 87, 91, 97, 99, 112, 121, 123, 149, 207f.
 China virus 111
 Chinese medicine 99
 Chinese Nurses' Association 99
 Church, churches 44, 50
 Cigarettes 44
 Citizen, citizens XVII, 20, 25, 30, 104f., 109, 112, 114,
 118, 122, 130, 184, 186f., 211, 215, 225
 Citizenship 20, 32, 40, 185
 Civil 40, 104, 113, 184, 186, 195, 196–198, 212, 223, 236f.
 Civil aviation XX, 207f.
 Civil Service Law 196
 Civil society 104, 113, 184, 223
 Class, classes XIII, XIV, XVIII, XIX, 21, 29, 31, 37,
 39f., 43, 45–50, 54, 56, 98f., 103–105, 117, 143,
 148–150, 157, 184, 191f., 195, 197, 202, 204, 208,
 211, 215, 220, 228, 232, 234, 237, 239f.
 Class-struggle 37
 Clean Slate 193–196
 Cleaner, cleaners 19, 47, 49, 105
 Cleaning personal XIX, 8, 12f., 18, 47, 49
 Cleanliness 121
 Clergy, clergies 96
 Climate change 111, 118f., 155, 207, 214
 Clinic, clinics 86–89, 98, 105, 109, 125, 159
 Cold War 111
 College, Colleges 6, 40, 140, 147, 153f., 232, 237, 240
 Communist Manifesto 112, 208
 Company, companies XIV, 10, 12, 15f., 19–21, 22–26,
 40–42, 44, 50, 55f., 95, 120, 124f., 131, 157, 192f.,
 202, 207f., 209–213, 221–224, 227–230
 Comparison XVIII, XX, 97
 Compensation 6, 21, 113, 211, 236
 Computer XIV, 139, 220, 229, 232f., 237f.
 Confederación de Trabajadores de la Economía Popular
 (CTEP) 204f.
 Confédération française démocratique du travail (CFDT)
 228
 Confédération générale du travail (CGT) 202, 229
 Congress IV, 38, 40, 44, 96, 195, 201, 234
 Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT) 42
 Constitución 204f.
 Constitution 40
 Construction work, worker 6, 7, 13
 Contagion 3, 124, 127, 200, 207, 212
 Contamination 18, 54
 Contract XV, 4–7, 12, 13–16, 19–23, 33, 43, 116, 153,
 193, 195, 208f., 213, 221, 227
 Contractor 7, 33, 213
 Contractual worker 5, 116, 192, 220
 Copenhagen 115, 117f.
 Corona conditions XVII, XXI, 26, 184, 187
 Corona effect XVIII, 50, 86, 156, 158
 Coronavirus crisis XI, XVIII–XXI, 16, 20, 25, 184, 212,
 221, 224
 Coronavirus XI–XXI, 11, 16f., 19–26, 37f., 43–51, 54,
 86–90, 95, 103, 108, 111, 116, 120–127, 130f., 137,
 139–145, 147, 151, 158, 184, 186f., 193, 212–215,
 221, 222, 224, 228, 232, 234
 Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (CRAM) 45f.
 Corrêa, Larissa Rosa XIX, 239
 Côte d'Ivoire XXX, 156, 158
 Covid and Care Research Group XX, 103f., 106, 108, 240
 COVID-19 XIII–XIV, XVII–XXI, 3f., 7–11, 16f., 19, 22,
 26, 29, 37–39, 41–47, 49, 52–58, 86f., 89, 95,
 102–106, 108, 110–129, 131, 133, 137–143, 146,
 151, 153–159, 163, 184f., 191–195, 197, 199f., 207f.,
 211–215, 219, 221–223, 229, 232–237
 Craiova 10–18
 Crisis XI, XIV, XVII–XXI, 4–6, 9–11, 15–17, 19f., 23–29,
 31, 38, 40f., 44, 52, 88, 90, 104, 111, 127f., 131–33,
 143, 146, 149, 156, 159, 184f., 187, 191, 195, 197,
 199, 207–209, 211–215, 219, 221–227, 233–236
 Cuba 97
 Cucu, Alina-Sandra 239
 Curfew 158
 Czechia 137
 Da Silva, Benedita 40

- Daily life 86, 133, 184, 231, 233, 235, 237
 Dakar 54, 239
 Damascus 208
 Danish 21, 112–119
 Daughter, daughters 3, 8f., 40, 49f., 97, 154, 156
 Death XIII f., 37f., 44, 52, 55, 58, 89f., 102, 108, 114,
 120–122, 128, 138f., 142, 146, 152f., 158, 194, 196,
 232, 235, 237
 Death count 194
 Death figure 114
 Delaware 193
 Delhi 5, 28–30, 33, 148, 220, 240
 Delivery app 38, 41
 Delivery driver, delivery drivers 19, 191
 Delivery market 41f.
 Delivery worker 37, 42
 Democracy 101, 112f., 194, 211f.
 Democratization 40, 112
 Denisa 11–14, 16–18
 Denmark XX, 21, 111–116, 118f., 140, 222
 Depression, depressed XX, 4, 13–14, 146, 150f.
 Despair XIX, 30, 34, 139, 154, 236
 Destitution 3f., 7
 Deutsche Polizei 198
 Dictatorship 40
 DIE ZEIT 19–22, 24, 223
 Dignity 34, 37, 40, 203
 Diploma, diplomas 13, 237
 Disabled 39, 105f.
 Discrimination 103, 112, 156f., 191, 197f.
 Disease 20, 22, 29, 37f., 50, 88, 115, 122–126, 151, 155,
 158, 212, 231
 Disinfectant 6, 89, 232
 Disinfection XVII
 Disruption XIV, 103, 111, 115, 137, 143, 145, 147, 153,
 209
 Djibouti 54, 56f.
 Dog 12–14, 37, 234
 Domestic violence 4, 105f., 139
 Domestic work 30, 156, 220
 Domestic worker XIX, 3, 8f., 37, 39–42, 104
 Durgapur 9
 Düsseldorf 98
 Dysfunctional XX
 Dysfunctionality 184

 Earnings 3f., 6, 8, 28, 45, 159, 220
 Eastern Cape 46
 Eastern Europe XVIII, 10, 17, 20, 221, 239
 Eckert, Andreas XI, 239
 Economic 4–7, 9–12, 14–16, 19–26, 31–33, 38–41, 43,
 46, 52, 53f., 58, 101, 103, 104–108, 110, 112, 114f.,
 118–120, 124, 128, 130–132, 137, 142, 144, 147, 153,
 155–159, 185f., 192, 196, 198, 200f., 204, 207, 209,
 211, 214, 215, 222, 233–235, 237, 240, 241
 Economic life 54, 104f., 204, 219
 Economic Policy Institute 236
 Education XI, XVII, 6, 12, 31, 40, 98–101, 105, 107, 124,
 129, 137–140, 142–149, 153, 155f., 185, 196f., 224,
 229, 235, 239
 Egypt 52
 Eisenberg, Daniel XX, 239
 El Al IX, 207–215
 Elderly 12, 39, 105f., 109, 114, 123, 139
 Election XXI, 138, 184–185, 192, 238
 Electricians 157
 Elitism 211
 Emergency Family Income 205
 Employee, employees XVIII, 10, 15, 16f., 23–25, 32, 39,
 47, 101, 105, 113, 116, 126, 129, 133, 192f., 195, 207,
 221–225, 227–230, 233, 237
 Employer, employers XIX, 6, 10, 13, 15, 17, 20, 23–26,
 31–33, 37, 39, 47, 105, 113, 132, 191–194, 197, 221f.,
 224, 228–230
 Employment XV, 4–8, 11, 14–16, 21–23, 26, 31–33, 38–
 41, 43, 45, 47, 53, 105f., 115, 118f., 129f., 132–133,
 138, 148–150, 154, 159, 191–194, 198, 201, 209,
 211, 219, 220f., 227, 230, 233f., 237, 240
 Empowerment XXX, 40, 154–157, 159, 195
 England 98, 109, 139–144
 Enlightenment 90
 Enterprise, enterprise 16, 108, 113–116, 118, 130–132,
 221
 Entrepreneur, entrepreneurship 24, 41f., 55f., 157f., 228
 Epicenter 137, 232
 Epidemiologist 114, 231, 236
 Ernst-von-Bergmann hospital XXI, 86f.
 Erwerbsarbeit 219
 Eskom 44
 Esprit de corps 214
 Ethiopia 52f., 55–57, 242
 Ethiopian Airlines 53
 Ethnicity 20, 104
 Europe, European XVIII, XXI, 10f., 15–17, 20, 22, 44, 54,
 90, 97f., 111, 115–117, 119, 122, 137, 140, 158, 184,
 193, 197f., 214, 220f., 225, 227–230, 232, 239–241
 European Union 15, 115, 117, 119, 221
 Everyday life 19, 24, 49, 86, 103, 148, 231, 234
 Exceptionalism 121
 Exodus 29
 Exploitation XIII, 42, 118, 156, 201–203

 Face mask 52, 55, 87, 141
 Facetime 233
 Factor X 122
 Factory, factories 4, 8, 10, 16, 21, 28–32, 42, 108, 116,
 219f., 227f.
 Failure XVIII, 10–11, 22, 102, 109, 201, 206
 Fall, Babacar XX, 239

- Family, families XIV, XIX, 7f., 11–14, 16f., 19, 23, 29f., 37, 39, 44, 50, 86f., 90, 95, 98f., 104–108, 118, 127, 130, 139, 141–144, 146–149, 156, 184, 194, 196, 205, 219, 221–224, 229
- Farm, farms XIV, 4, 149, 157, 192f., 200, 207
- Fashion XIX, 55f., 103, 149, 159
- Fatality 37
- Favelas XIX
- Female XIII, 29, 40, 99, 105, 113, 128, 157f., 186, 209, 225f., 229, 241
- Female Labor 186, 226
- Feminist, feminism XXI, 17, 40, 103–105, 185, 201–204, 206, 226, 241
- Finance 5, 43, 91, 113f., 131f.
- Financial Times 52
- Fink, Leon XX, 192, 239
- Finland 140, 222
- Firm, firms 4f., 15f., 49, 192, 221, 236
- Flat 17, 21, 23, 25
- Fliedner, Theodor 98
- Flight 16, 28–31, 33, 53, 207, 210, 212, 215
- Floyd, George 57, 151–154, 191, 194, 198, 235f.
- Flu 54, 87, 102, 225
- Fluidity 4–6, 9
- Fontes, Paulo XIX, 37f., 40, 42, 240
- Food XIV, 3, 7f., 14, 19, 20, 23, 28–30, 40, 43, 45–47, 50, 105–107, 109, 116, 128f., 131, 148, 151, 155, 157, 185, 191f., 195, 204f., 232
- Food distribution 46, 50, 109
- Formal sector 5–6
- France 37, 87, 155, 226–230, 241
- Frazier, Darnella 151
- Frederiksen, Mette 113
- Freedom XVIII, 18, 26, 41, 193f., 222, 228f.
- Freelancer 130f.
- Full-time 12, 15, 23, 146
- Furlough 45, 144, 207, 209, 211, 213–215
- Future XV, XVIII, 10, 16f., 24, 42–45, 47–51, 99, 111, 117, 119, 127, 143, 145, 147, 149, 151, 152–154, 159, 195, 200, 223, 225, 234, 238
- G7 nations 121
- Gabel, Joan 153
- Gainful employment 53, 219
- Galo, Paulo 42
- Garment industry 55, 227, 230
- Gastroenterology 99
- Gauteng 45
- Gay 202
- Gender XIV, XIX, 38, 48, 9, 103–105, 112, 144, 155–157, 159, 184, 201, 204–206, 211, 223, 224, 229, 239–241
- Generation XVIII, XX, 26, 38, 49, 105f., 146–149, 151, 153f., 185, 204, 234
- Generational marker XX, 146
- Geneva 95, 97, 101, 240
- Georgia XXI, 153f., 184f., 193
- German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) XI
- Germany XIX, 17, 19–26, 86f., 89f., 98f., 101, 116, 132, 155, 197, 219–223, 227, 229, 241
- Gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt 19
- Ghetto, Ghettos 19, 235
- Girl, girls XX, 12, 39, 151–159, 205
- Global XI, XIII, XVII, XX, 10f., 15, 17, 26, 28, 41, 49, 52–55, 86, 90, 95, 97, 99, 101, 111, 115, 117–119, 128, 137, 153, 157f., 184, 186, 203, 207f., 211, 214, 220, 239f.
- Globe XI, XIX, XXI, 186, 195, 208
- Gold miners 91
- Golden Swan 56
- Göttingen 19–23, 26, 240f.
- Government XVII–XX, 4–8, 16, 19, 21f., 24–26, 29–32, 37, 40f., 45–48, 52f., 57, 87, 103–105, 107–110, 112–114, 117–120, 122, 124–128, 130–133, 138–142, 144–145, 153, 158, 191–193, 196–197, 201, 204f., 207, 214f., 223, 226, 230, 234–237
- Graduate XIII, 12, 144, 147, 149–151, 153f.
- Grassroot 108, 153, 194
- Greece 137
- Green Party 113
- Grey ward 88
- Growth 5–8, 39, 41, 98, 100f., 112, 115, 118f., 155, 157, 215, 221
- Guatemala 96
- Guatemalan 192f.
- Guinea 96, 98
- Gujarat 31
- Gütersloh 21, 116
- H1N1 233
- Halloween mask 54
- Handler-Spitz, Rivi 150, 244
- Harassment 95, 127, 203, 226
- Hartz IV 26
- Harvard Law School 193, 196
- Health XVIII–XX, 4, 11, 14, 16, 18, 20, 26, 29, 32, 38, 41, 44–47, 52–54, 58, 87f., 93, 95–103, 105–109, 111–115, 117–123, 125–128, 130, 133, 137–140, 142, 145, 150f., 155–159, 185, 191–194, 203, 206f., 212, 213, 215, 221, 226, 231, 233, 234–236
- Health risk 45, 47, 87
- Health system XIX, 93
- Hentschke, Felicitas XI, 240
- Hessia 20
- Hierarchy 6, 11, 97, 99, 102
- Higher-paid worker 103
- Hijab 57, 243
- Histadrut 210
- Home XIII, XIX, 6, 8, 10–12, 14, 19, 21–23, 25f., 28–30, 38f., 43, 47–50, 53, 86–88, 90, 98, 102f., 105–107, 113–115, 119–121, 125, 128–131, 138–141,

- 143, 148f., 151, 184, 191, 193, 204, 212, 221, 224, 226f., 229, 232, 235, 237
- Homeoffice 220, 222f.
- Homework 139, 220, 227
- Hope 10, 11, 21, 32, 44, 87, 91, 95, 98, 149
- Hospital XIV, XXI, 19, 22, 24–26, 44, 46, 87–90, 97f., 100–102, 105, 113, 123–129, 133, 138f., 150, 159, 185, 232–234
- Hospital ward 233
- Hotspot 46, 90, 117
- Household XIV, 4, 9, 32, 39, 45f., 50, 54, 103–197, 118, 130f., 141f., 144, 146, 156, 219, 223, 229, 236f.
- Human rights XVII, 112, 185f., 202
- Human trafficking 201, 204
- Humanitarian 4, 158
- Humanity 58, 120
- Hundessa, Hachalu 57
- Hunger 28–30, 34, 43, 35f., 50, 157, 192
- Hygiene 98, 121, 126
- Hygienic 98
- Ideology 225, 234
- Iduna Zentrum 19, 26
- Illness 22, 50, 98, 123, 210, 231
- Illusion 10
- Immigrant 103, 112f., 115, 117f., 192, 205
- Immunity 114f., 122, 198
- Income XVIII, 3, 13, 15–17, 38f., 41, 45–48, 96f., 100, 105f., 142, 147, 155–159, 200f., 209, 223, 226f., 235–237
- Independent 5, 105, 125, 138f., 146, 210, 227
- India XVIII, 3–9, 28f., 31–33, 52, 95, 97, 102, 116, 148, 239f.
- Indifference XIX, 1, 235
- Individualism 234
- Industrial XVIII, 10, 19, 23, 29, 32, 39, 42, 192, 194f., 202, 207f., 211, 219f., 225–227
- Industrialization 39, 194, 226f.
- Industry XIII, 4, 15, 17, 21, 31, 33, 44, 55, 129f., 186, 191–194, 207, 213–215, 219, 227, 230, 239
- Informal sector XIX, 4–6, 9, 47,
- Informal work 3, 5f., 8, 10, 28, 32, 110, 204f.
- Informality 3, 5f., 39
- Informalization 116, 213, 220
- Insecurity XX, 8, 148, 155
- International Committee of the Red Cross 95
- International Council of Nurses 97, 102
- International Labor Organization (ILO) XVII, 5, 227
- Internet XIV, XX, 49f., 57, 105, 107, 139, 142, 148, 229
- Internship XX, 149
- Ireland 137–139, 141f., 144, 222, 241
- Isolation, isolated 5, 11f., 18, 37–40, 42, 88, 104, 106, 108, 112, 139, 143, 185–187, 201, 204, 224, 227, 229f., 234
- Israel XX, 207–215
- Israel Defense Forces 210
- Italy, Italian 11–13, 16, 25, 37, 52, 87, 89, 95, 113, 120, 137
- James, Deborah XX, 103f., 106f., 109f., 240
- Japan XVIII, XX, 53, 120–133, 231, 241
- Japan Medical Association 123, 127
- Job XV, XVII, XIX–XX, 3–18, 21–24, 26, 29f., 33f., 37, 41, 45, 47, 49f., 55, 86, 88, 90, 106, 109, 113, 117, 119, 131–133, 146, 149f., 155f., 159, 192–196, 209–213, 215, 225, 227f.
- Job security 5, 215
- Jobless, joblessness 7, 29f., 34
- Johannesburg 43–46, 48–50
- Johnson, Boris 138
- Joshi, Chitra XIX, 29, 240
- Jozí 43
- Justice XX, 17, 112, 117, 152f., 188, 194, 198f., 202
- Kaarsholm, Preben XX, 111, 240
- Kaiserswerth 98
- Kanpur 28–31
- Käte Hamburger Center XI
- Kenny, Bridget XIX, 43, 240
- Kensington 46, 109
- Kerala 5f.
- Kerandi, Jael 153f.
- Keynesianism 118
- Khat 53
- Khosa, Collins 44
- Kindergarten 23
- King, Martin Luther, Jr. 195
- Kinship 10, 104f.
- Koch, Insa 103f., 106f., 110
- Kocka, Jürgen XX, 240
- Kolkata XIX, 3, 5–8, 239
- Korea 121
- Kott, Sandrine XX, 225, 240
- Kurzarbeit 23
- Kyoto 127
- Labor XVII, 4–6, 15, 28, 29f., 32f., 139, 150, 157, 211, 220, 225, 227, 239f.
- Labor aristocracy 208, 211
- Labor bureau 33
- Labor law XVIII, 22, 31f., 42, 193
- Labor legislation 32, 39, 41
- Labor market XVIII, 15f., 22, 29, 39, 115, 146, 150, 208, 213
- Labor power 118, 203
- Labor regime, labor regimes 32, 111, 118
- Labor rights XVIII, 33, 40f., 201, 206
- Labour Party 139
- Lady, ladies 13, 14, 98f., 185
- Larmer, Miles XI

- Laschet, Armin 21
 Latin America 52, 104, 239
 Laws, Megan 103
 Legal 14, 16, 20f., 32, 39f., 42, 44, 50, 109, 155, 159,
 201, 214, 221, 223, 230
 Leicester 108
 Lenhard, Johannes F. 103
 Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) 130
 Libya 122
 Life XIV, XVII, XX, 3, 9–11, 13–15, 17–19, 24, 32, 40, 44,
 47–50, 54, 86, 98, 103–105, 113, 129, 133, 137, 140,
 147–149, 153f., 193, 203, 207, 213, 219, 221, 224,
 229, 231, 233–237, 239, 241
 Life course 147, 241
 Lifecycle XI, 154, 239
 Linden, Marcel van der XIX, 95, 241
 Lion of Judah 56f., 243
 Literacy 105, 107f., 156
 Livelihood XIV, XVIII, 4f., 7, 11, 32, 47, 98, 120,
 128–130, 132f., 155f.
 Liverpool FC 56f., 243
 Lobby 215
 Lockdown XIII, XVII, XIX, 3f., 6–11, 14–21, 23f., 26,
 28–30, 32f., 43–48, 50, 52, 86f., 90, 95, 103–109,
 113f., 116, 120, 128, 130, 137, 139–145, 148, 155,
 158f., 184f., 200, 221, 225f., 229f., 235, 237
 Lockdown generation XVIII
 Lohiya, Anishka Gheewala 103
 London School of Economics XX
 London's Charing Cross Hospital 102
 Long, Nicholas J. 103
 Low-paid XIX, 7f., 49, 103, 156, 233, 237
 Low-productivity 5, 7–9
 Lugo 13
 Luxembourg 221f.
 Lysol solution 99

 Macron, Emmanuel 87
 Madagascar 52
 Madhya Pradesh 31
 Maharashtra 5
 Maid, maids 37, 39, 41
 Maintenance work 8, 210
 Male 39, 106, 117, 203, 226f.
 Mali XX, 56, 156, 158
 Malmoe 115
 Malnutrition 155
 Maltese Order 98
 Mamata 8
 Man, men XVIII, 17, 37, 41, 95, 97, 152, 227, 229, 243f.
 Management 16, 38, 89, 125, 138, 193, 194, 207, 209f.,
 222, 224, 228f., 236
 Manager 10, 17, 55, 193, 221f., 228–230
 Manchester United 56
 Manpower 124, 213, 214

 Manual labor 40, 49, 220f., 223
 Manufacturing 32, 129, 221, 236
 Mardini, Robert 95
 Margin XIX, 1, 32, 108, 201, 225
 Marginal employment 22
 Market XIII, XVIII, 3f., 7, 9, 15f., 26, 29, 31, 39, 41f., 44,
 48, 56, 100, 104f., 110, 115f., 130, 146, 150, 159,
 200, 202, 207–211, 213f., 219–221, 223, 234–236
 Marx, Karl 208
 Marxian 215
 Masculine 40, 112
 Mask rage 54
 Mask, masks XIII–XX, 8, 47, 52–58, 87–89, 102, 120,
 130, 141, 159, 232f., 235
 Massachusetts 195
 Maturen, Stephen 152, 244
 Mayer-Ahuja, Nicole XIX, 19, 21f., 25, 241
 Maynes, Mary Jo XX, 146, 149f., 152, 154, 241
 Mbembe, Achille 46
 Meal 3, 55, 88, 256
 Meatpacking 191f.
 Mechanics 157
 Medical care 20, 88, 120, 127
 Medical doctor, medical doctors 96f., 99
 Mediterranean 97, 230
 Mental health 99, 105–107, 139, 150
 Merkel, Angela 25
 Mexico 102
 Michigan 235
 Middle-class 46, 49, 98, 103, 105, 192, 195, 204
 Midwife, midwives 95, 97, 99
 Migrant XIV, XIX, XX, 4–6, 10, 16f., 19–21, 23, 25,
 27–29, 32–34, 39f., 103, 107, 112f., 115–118, 192,
 205, 225
 Migration XVIII, 4f., 11, 20f., 28f., 33, 39, 101, 115, 117f.,
 192, 205, 239f., 242
 Milano 87
 Military XX, 25, 38, 40, 99, 197f., 207–215, 236
 Mill, mills 29, 31
 Miner, miners 91, 197
 Minister of Finance 43
 Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) 121, 123,
 126
 Ministry of Labor and Employment 6
 Minneapolis XX, 146, 151–154, 191, 235, 244
 Minnesota 146–154, 194, 235, 241
 Miss.T.Cal 52, 55f., 58, 243
 Mobility 32, 41–43, 52, 219, 241
 Money 3, 9, 12, 13f., 17f., 23, 45, 47, 105, 128, 130
 Mooketsi, Rehilwe 48, 243
 Morganton 192f.
 Mortality 103, 121f., 133, 138, 156
 Mortality rate 121f., 156
 Mossad 212
 Municipality, municipalities 125, 127

- Musée du Quai Branly 54
 Muslim 20, 109, 118
 Muzzafarpur 3
- National Health Service (NHS) 103, 109, 138, 141
 National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) 45–47
 National Institute of Infectious Diseases (NIID) 125
 National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) 192
 National Sample Survey 5
 NATO 111
 Needleman, Jack 97
 Neighborhood XVIII, XX, 3, 5, 7, 9, 29, 37, 46, 48, 56, 87, 104, 108, 148, 194, 204f.
 Neoliberal XX, 17, 19, 27, 38, 41, 49, 110, 118, 202, 213, 225, 234f.
 Neoliberalism XX, 118
 Neoliberalization 17, 213
 Neo-nazi 198
 Netherlands 140, 222
 Network XX, 7, 10, 37, 39, 42, 46, 50, 56f., 103–109, 126, 157, 200, 203, 208f., 211, 213–215, 239
 New Deal 118
 New York XIII, 49, 86, 99, 122, 147, 155, 184f., 194, 196f., 232, 240
 New York Times 11, 144, 151f., 193, 197, 234
 New Zealand 98, 121
 Niger XX, 155–159
 Nightingale, Florence 95, 98
 Non-regular worker 126, 129f., 132f.
 Nordic 222
 Normality 219
 North Carolina 192f.
 North Rhine-Westphalia 21, 26
 Norway XX, 96, 112–115
 Norwegian 112–114
 Nosokomos 100
 Nurse, nurses XIX, 13, 19, 24f., 46, 86, 91, 95–102, 105, 109, 127f., 143, 191, 197, 225f.
 Nursery, nurseries 105, 109
- Occupation 4, 8, 26, 29, 123, 191f., 198, 200, 209, 222
 OECD 96, 100, 115, 118, 157
 Omi, Shigeru 122
 Online learning 49, 139, 147f.
 Orellano, Georgina 204, 206
 Orissa 5
 Oromia 57
 Osaka 120, 129, 131
 Ostkreuz 86, 241
 Outsourcing 5, 56, 213
- 155f., 158f., 184–187, 189, 192, 194, 200f., 203–209, 213f., 219, 221f., 225, 231–237
 Pandemic condition XX, 192
 Parent, parents XX, 11, 23, 26, 103, 105–107, 109, 138f., 140f., 143, 145, 147, 191, 227
 Paris 54, 87, 90, 208
 Parliamentarism XIX
 Parliament 32, 40, 109, 138, 140, 144
 Participation 41, 153, 156, 159, 204, 212
 Part-time 3, 8, 12–14, 18, 220, 223
 Paternalism 39, 113
 Pay, payment 3, 8f., 13–16, 19f., 23–25, 31, 40–42, 48, 50, 103–106, 114, 117, 119, 127f., 130–133, 138, 143, 148, 191, 195, 205, 209, 233, 236f.
 Pearson, Alice 103
 Pension, pensions 26, 103, 117, 119
 Performance 54, 144f., 184, 186, 207
 Peri-anesthesia 99
 Personal protective equipment (PPE) 46f., 185, 187
 Personal trainer 10
 Pest 225
 Pestilence 29, 231
 Philippines 102
 Photograph, photography XVIII, 48f., 86, 90f., 186f., 240f.
 Physician 19, 25, 87, 89, 97, 123, 125
 Pig Belt 21
 Pilot, pilots XX, 207–215
 Plague 28–31, 34, 193, 231
 Poland 21, 115
 Police XX, 6, 9, 17, 20, 29f., 43f., 53, 96, 112, 140, 151–154, 191–200, 202, 204f., 235, 244
 Poll worker 30, 144, 185, 187, 207
 Polymerase chain reaction 122
 Population 3–5, 10f., 16–18, 21, 23, 26, 28, 38, 42, 52f., 58, 95–97, 101f., 111, 114, 118, 120–122, 130, 147, 155–158, 205, 225–227, 234, 239
 Populism 90
 Populist XVIII, 17, 113, 117
 Post-abolition 39
 Postcolonial 46
 Post-industrial 219
 Post-lockdown 4, 6
 Potsdam XXI, 86f.
 Poultry worker XX, 192f., 198
 Poverty XVIII, 103, 106, 131, 155–157, 159, 192
 Precariat 5
 Precariatization 41
 Pre-COVID 103, 118f., 219
 Precarity 4–6, 9, 30
 Primary elections XXI, 184f.
 Prince Charles 95
 Private XX, 12, 15, 17, 20, 23, 25, 31, 48f., 112f., 125, 131, 144, 156, 191, 217, 221, 223, 225, 233
 Privatization 213–215, 234f.

- Privilege, privileges 6, 23, 38, 49, 186, 208, 210f., 223, 229, 234
 Profession, profession XV, 39, 89, 96, 98f., 143, 145, 149, 209f., 213f.
 Professional XIX–XX, 25, 53, 95, 99, 139, 149, 151, 229, 233
 Professional care 25
 Professionalization 198
 Profit, profits XIV, 26, 127, 157, 211, 214, 235f.
 Proletarianization 98
 Prostitute, prostitute 200–203, 205f.
 Prostitution 201–204
 Protectionism 115
 Psychiatric 99
 Public XII, XIV, XVII, XIXf., 4, 12, 15f., 19–21, 23–27, 31f., 34, 40, 44, 47, 49, 52–55, 58, 86, 91, 100, 102, 104f., 107–109, 113f., 117–120, 123, 125, 127–129, 131–133, 137f., 141, 143–145, 148, 154f., 184–187, 191–198, 200f., 204f., 207, 212f., 215, 217, 221f., 225, 232f., 235f.
 Public health 4, 26, 53, 58, 102, 109, 117, 123, 126f., 155, 192, 207, 212, 233, 235f.
 Public Services International (PSI) 53
 Public transport XIX, 12, 113, 120
 Pupil, pupils 107, 137–145
 Pyrenees 87

 Quarantine 18f., 21, 29, 53, 86, 115, 127, 130, 205f., 235

 Race XIV, XIX–XX, 38, 50, 103, 184, 191, 197, 211, 234, 240
 Racism XXI, 50, 112, 152f., 184, 191, 197
 Radicalization 155
 Rajindar 3, 6, 9
 Raju 7f.
 Rakuten 124
 Ramadan 19
 Ramaphosa, Cyril 43
 Re:work XI, XVII, 86, 90f., 186, 228, 239–242
 Recife 37
 Red House 204f.
 Reform, reforms 21f., 26, 32, 40f., 118f., 126, 193–195, 198, 207, 209
 Refugee, refugees 90, 106, 106, 108, 115, 117f.
 Registro Nacional de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras de la Economía Popular 200
 Remote examination 148
 Remote work 149, 213, 227, 229f.
 Rent 12, 128, 130f.
 Remuneration 23, 41
 Remunerative 4–6
 Reserve army 115, 207–209, 211–215
 Resilience 115, 159, 237
 Resistance 22, 42, 184–187, 203, 225, 231, 234
 Restriction, restrictions XVII, 9f., 14, 28, 53, 87, 113, 115f., 141, 150, 200
 Retirement 12, 14, 25f., 117–119, 143, 203
 Retirement home 25f.
 Rheda-Wiedenbrueck 21
 Rich 12, 17, 38, 96f., 100f., 193, 237
 Ringsted 116
 Rio de Janeiro V, 239f.
 Roma 20
 Romania XIX, 10f., 13–18, 20f., 116, 137
 Romanian Labour Code 15
 Roskilde 118, 240
 Rothenberg, Ellen XI, XXI, 184, 241
 Rouseff, Dilma 40
 Routine XVII, 17f., 87, 99, 108, 153, 213, 226
 Rufaidah bint Sa'ad 97
 Rural 20, 28–30, 32f., 39, 157, 192, 227

 Saccawu 47
 Safety 4, 18, 32, 49, 51, 139, 141, 155, 191–194, 196, 221, 231, 234, 236
 Sahel XX, 155–159
 Saint Paul XX, 155–159
 Salary 12, 15, 23, 98, 128, 130, 132, 209–211, 226
 Salespeople 96
 Samanani, Farhan 103
 San Francisco 231
 Sanders, Bernie 236
 Santana de Souza, Mirtes 37
 São Paulo 37, 40–42
 Sarika 8
 Sarjul 8
 Sarkar, Mahua XI, XIX, 241
 SARS 111, 233
 SARS-CoV-2 10, 14, 115, 138
 Savings 3, 7, 9, 209
 Scandinavia, Scandinavian 111–113, 116, 221
 Schettini, Cristiana XX, 241
 School 10–12, 22f., 37, 43f., 49, 53, 86, 96, 99, 105, 107, 109, 127–130, 137–145, 147, 149, 151, 143, 155f., 191, 196, 206, 219, 226, 229, 237
 School closing 53, 137
 School of the Art Institute (SAIC) 184, 239, 241
 Schooling 3, 23, 103, 107, 138–140, 142, 144, 147
 Schoolwork 142
 Schröder, Gerhard 22
 Scotland 104, 138f., 141f., 144
 Seasonal worker 17, 20, 237
 Seattle 231
 Security XIX–XX, 4–6, 8f., 22, 25, 31, 45f., 54, 131, 148, 155, 157f., 192, 198, 200, 211f., 214f., 236
 Self-employed XVII, 5f., 9, 24, 129, 220, 227
 Self-employment 5f., 23, 201, 230
 Selassie, Haile 56f.
 Senegal 56, 99, 239

- Serendipity 88
 Service contract 21
 Service worker XIX, 45–47
 Sew, sewing 159, 233
 Sex work 201, 205
 Sex worker, sex workers XX, 104, 200
 Sexism 112
 Shame 14
 Shop, shops XVII, 4, 23f., 29, 46, 55f., 141
 Shopkeeper, shopkeepers 10, 16
 Shortage, shortages XIX, 25, 28, 48, 89, 97, 101, 133, 185, 214
 Short-time work money 23
 Shutdown 4, 43, 49, 52, 57, 208f.
 Simpson, Nikita 103
 Simultaneity XVII, XX, 184, 187
 Single-parent 105f.
 Skill, skills XIX, 3–9, 11, 13, 20, 56, 105, 107, 118, 139, 143, 156, 200, 210f., 226
 Skilled 4, 6–9, 26, 30, 186, 195, 207, 220, 223, 226, 229f.
 Slaughterhouse 20f., 116
 Slavery 39
 Social Change 221, 223
 Social Darwinism 234
 Social democratic 112f., 116f., 197, 223
 Social Democratic Party 113, 116f., 130, 197
 Social distance 193
 Social distancing 141, 158, 186, 230
 Social media 55–57, 90, 95, 124, 139, 153, 187, 209, 236
 Social movement 200, 205, 241
 Social Science Research Council 147
 Socialist 17
 SoftBank 124
 Soignant 226
 Soldier, soldiers 29, 99, 196, 209–212, 225
 Solidarity XIX, 19–21, 23–27, 45f., 102, 186, 210, 228
 Somali 97, 115, 117
 Somalia 97
 South Africa 43–47, 49, 51f., 91, 116
 Southeastern Europe 20
 Spain 16, 52, 89, 95, 113
 Spanish flu 102, 225
 Spargel 17, 20
 Spider-Man 56
 Specialization 8f., 99, 101
 Spiegel 86f., 89
 Spreader, spreaders 26, 146
 State, states XIII f., XVII–XVIII, XX f., 4–7, 9, 11, 15–17, 20–22, 26, 28f., 31f., 39, 43, 46–48, 50, 52f., 56f., 86–89, 85–96, 99, 101, 103f., 106–129, 131, 133, 143, 144, 147, 148, 150, 151, 153–155, 158f., 163, 184–186, 191–198, 200–202, 205f., 208f., 212–215, 221f., 225, 230, 233–236
 State-driven XX, 104, 109
 Steel workers 91
 Stock, Jonathan 86f.
 Stoklund, Rasmus 117f.
 Street vendor 3, 10, 55, 200, 204
 Student, students XIII f., 20, 48–50, 86, 107, 144f., 147–149, 151, 153f., 184f., 187, 194, 232, 240
 Suffrage 186
 Summer Olympics 120
 Supermarket 10, 19f., 22, 24, 40, 46f., 87, 138, 225
 Surat 28
 Suresh 8, 31
 Surveillance 37, 194, 230, 236f.
 Sweden XX, 112–115, 137, 147, 222
 Swedish 112, 114f.
 Switzerland 96, 229
 Taddesse, Lia 53
 Tamanna 3, 6f.
 Tanaka, Yoko XX, 120, 132, 241
 Taxi drivers 10
 Taxonomy 6
 Teacher XX, 47, 86, 96, 137–145, 186, 191, 194, 196
 Technician, technicians 124, 128, 191
 Teenager, teenagers 39, 152
 Telework 130, 219–225, 227–230
 Temer, Michel 40
 Tesfaye, Mattias 117
 Thailand 231
 Thatcher, Margaret 19
 The Hindu 95
 THE LANCET 138
 Thomas, Zee 152, 154
 Three Cs-closed spaces, crowds, and close-contact 129
 Thunberg, Greta 153
 Toilet paper 87, 232
 Tokyo 120, 122–124, 127–129, 131
 Tönnies, Clemens 21
 Trade union, trade unions 24, 26, 31–32, 47, 101, 104, 112f., 116f., 119, 186, 195, 197, 199f., 202–204, 209, 225, 228–230
 Traders 38, 46, 47
 Train, trains 3, 13, 117, 213
 Transgender 205f.
 Transvestite 205
 Travel 37, 50, 90, 102, 113–115, 130f., 141, 158, 208, 232
 Trump, Donald 38, 54, 112, 191, 232, 236
 Truth 13, 95, 231, 237
 Turkey 208
 Twain, Mark 212
 Twin Cities 146, 149, 153
 Twitter 44, 95, 131, 154, 201
 Uberization 41f.
 Uganda 122
 Undergraduate 147, 149, 151, 153

- Unemployed XIX, 17, 20, 29, 38, 45f., 109, 131, 202, 204, 208
- Unemployment 5–8, 15f., 22f., 26, 38, 41, 43, 45, 47, 115, 118f., 129, 132, 138, 150, 154, 209, 230, 233
- Unemployment Insurance Fund 47, 209
- UNESCO 112
- Union, unions 15, 24, 26, 31, 40, 101, 112f., 116, 119, 140, 143, 194–199, 202, 209, 220, 223, 228, 230
- Unionism 101, 195, 196
- Unionization 101, 202
- United Kingdom XX, 16, 52, 98, 103–105, 107–110, 112, 127, 137–145, 226
- United Nations' Educational, Social and Cultural Organization 147
- United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) 157
- United Nations Population Fund 156–158
- United States of America XXI, 22, 52, 99, 147, 185f., 192–195, 234, 236
- University XI, XIII–XV, XVII, XIX, 10, 12, 19, 28f., 41, 43, 48–50, 55, 104, 112, 114, 118, 124, 127f., 144–151, 153f., 191f., 198, 210, 212f., 219f., 239–242
- Unskilled 6–9, 26, 227
- Urban 4f., 10, 28f., 32f., 39–42, 48, 129, 195, 200, 202, 204f., 219, 232, 242
- Uttar Pradesh 31
- Vaccine, vaccines 11, 114, 119, 238
- Vallance, Patrick 138
- VAT 16
- Vendor, vendors 3, 7, 10, 12, 13, 55, 200, 204
- Venetian mask 54
- Ventilator, ventilators 89, 212, 234, 236
- Veterinary 10, 13f.
- Vicol, Olivia 103
- Victim, victims XIV, 54, 90, 159, 191, 194, 201
- Vieira, Jordan 103
- Village, villages 3, 6f., 16, 28f., 32, 87, 148
- Violence 4, 29, 44, 48, 50, 102, 105f., 114, 139, 152, 185f., 191, 193–195, 197–199, 201–204, 235
- Virginia 192f., 235
- Virus XI, XIII, XVII–XXI, 4, 11, 16–26, 28, 37f., 43–55, 58, 86–90, 95, 103, 108f., 111f., 114, 116f., 120–127, 130f., 133, 137–147, 151, 158, 184–187, 191, 193, 212–215, 221f., 224, 226, 228, 232–234, 238
- Visual XI, 28, 86, 91, 187, 239
- Visual essay 184f.
- Visibility 34, 38, 204–206
- Vocational training 155–159
- Volunteer, volunteers XX, 50, 86, 88, 103, 149
- Vote, votes XXI, 154, 185f., 198
- Voting XXI, 163, 184–187
- Vulnerability XVII, 11, 45, 109, 115, 137, 155–157, 159, 201, 204f.
- Wage, wages XX, 3–9, 12, 14–16, 20–28, 31, 41, 46–51, 100, 113, 126, 132, 148, 192f., 195, 197, 220, 226f., 236
- Waged work 43, 45, 49, 51
- Wagelessness 43, 45–47, 49, 51
- Wales 137–139, 141–145
- Walias 56
- Waltner, Ann XX, 152, 154, 241
- Warehouse 191, 193
- Washington 196, 234, 237
- Washington, D.C. 95, 153
- Watt, Connor 103
- Wealth 89, 98, 101, 103, 107, 144, 201, 209, 234f.
- Weberian 214
- Weiss, Maurice XI, XXI, 86, 241
- Welfare XVII–XX, 25, 45, 103f., 106–108, 111f., 115–117, 119, 121, 123, 125f., 131, 191–193, 205, 212, 225, 234f., 240
- Welfare association 25
- Welfare facilities 103
- Welfare payment 103
- Welfare politics XVIII
- West Africa 99, 149, 156
- West Bengal 5, 239
- West London Clinical Commissioning Group 109
- Western Europe XVIII, 16, 111, 137, 221, 227, 229
- White ward 88
- White-collar 23, 26
- Whittle, Catherine 103
- Williams, James 242
- Williamson, Gavin 138, 145
- Windsor Castle 138
- Wisconsin XXI, 149, 184f., 197
- Woman, women XIII, XVIII, XX, 8, 11, 14, 16f., 19, 22f., 26, 29–31, 37, 39–42, 45, 49f., 55f., 95, 97–99, 103, 106f., 128–130, 143f., 152, 154–159, 184–186, 194, 201–206, 220, 223–227, 229f.
- Work authority 197–199
- Workplace, workplaces XVIII–XX, 3, 14, 105, 137, 157, 194, 226
- Worker, workers XIII, XVII–XX, 3–10, 13, 15–18, 20–23, 26, 28–34, 37–47, 49, 91, 95f., 98, 101–106, 108f., 112f., 115–117, 120, 123, 126, 127–130, 132f., 138f., 143f., 151, 185–187, 191–198, 200–212, 220–230, 233f., 236f., 239
- Workforce 4, 23, 26, 28, 33, 95, 105, 144, 146, 150, 191f., 209f., 234
- Working days 226
- Working hour, working hours 15, 31, 56, 100, 105
- Working methods XX
- Working-class XVIII, 37, 48–50, 98, 148, 237, 239, 240
- World Bank 156f.
- World Health Organization (WHO) 53, 95, 109, 111
- World War I 99, 225f.
- World War II 100, 197

- Wuerth, Milena 103
Wuhan 52, 184, 207f., 231f.

Xenophobic 113, 115, 117

Yokohama 120
Yousafzai, Malala 153
Youth XX, 42, 52, 57, 117, 135, 146f., 149–153, 185, 242
Youtube 24

Zewde, Bahru XIX, 52, 54, 242
Zewde, Tsion 52
Zidaru-Barbulescu, Teodor 103
Zinc sulphate solution 99
Zoom XIII f., 227, 233, 237

