

For the Union Makes Us Strong: Selected Reading for Labour Day

Article by Green European Journal

April 27, 2022

May 1 is celebrated around the world to recognise workers and the victories of the workers' movement throughout history. The date of May 1 has roots in popular spring festivals but was chosen in the 19th century as a chance to organise global demonstrations for an 8-hour day. Thus from its outset, May 1 was not just a folkloric occasion to celebrate the value of work but a demand to change it.

The world of work continues to mutate, changing with new forms of managerial control, organisation, and technology. The fears expressed in recent years that automation and ever more intelligent robots would render most forms of work obsolete have proven unfounded. Today, many people are working longer hours, more insecurely, and under greater levels of stress than ever before. Work does not seem to be going anywhere.

The pandemic marked a major turning point, shaking up the world of work in ways that are yet to be fully understood. Covid-19 reinforced inequalities, with new divides opening up between sectors, demographic groups, and regions. It also disrupted our practices of work, both showing that the public sector can intervene and regulate to improve working conditions as well as highlighting new possibilities to organise work differently.

This selection of articles focuses on that potential, first with Françoise Gollain's article on André Gorz, a ground-breaking green thinker who inspires us to think critically about the place of work in our lives. His ideas continue to inform the post-work thinking that drives the working-time reduction and basic income movements today. We also hear from a trade unionist, a youth activist, a feminist, and a sociologist on different aspects of our relationship to work today and how we can change it for the better. Sara Farris calls for a new perspective in our understanding of the crucial but often invisible care work that keeps our societies moving. Pierre Bérastégui explores the possibilities – as well as the unforeseen consequences – of working from home. William Hayward asks whether the generation of young people whose education and early careers were stunted by the pandemic can ever fully recover. Finally, Marguerite van den Berg argues that resistance to exploitative work practices can allow workers to assert their power, and can also lead to a fairer, greener, and more sustainable way of living for society as a whole.

Articles in this focus

05.17.2018

Questioning the Centrality of Work with André Gorz

By Françoise Gollain

Françoise Gollain draws on the work of André Gorz, a key thinker of political ecology, to

reflect on the meaning of 'work' and its centrality in society.

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05.14.2021

[From Profit-taking to Life-making: Quality Care for People and Planet](#)

By [Sara Farris](#)

Sociologist Sara Farris explains how the lens of social reproduction offers a way to understand the structural under-valuing of the work that keeps society on its feet.

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08.18.2021

[Working From Home: Can the Benefits Outweigh the Risks?](#)

By [Pierre Bérastégui](#)

Working from home can make workers more productive and enhance their wellbeing, but only if several important conditions are met.

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08.30.2021

[Will Covid-19 Leave a Permanent Scar on Young People's Futures?](#)

By [William Hayward](#)

A year and a half after the onset of the pandemic, young people are reflecting on the impact it has had on their lives.

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01.26.2022

[Why We Need to Be Able to Say No at Work](#)

By [Kristof Calvo, Marguerite van den Berg](#)

We live in a society that values and rewards paid work above all other activities – it's time for a rethink.

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Published April 27, 2022

Article in English

Published in the *Green European Journal*

Downloaded from <https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/for-the-union-makes-us-strong-selected-reading-for-labour-day/>

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