British Journal of Industrial Relations

WILEY

BJIR An International Journal of Employment Relations LSE

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

Envisioning the Future of Work: From Ideas to Reforms

David A. Spencer

Economics Department, Leeds University Business School, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

Correspondence: David A. Spencer (das@lubs.leeds.ac.uk)

Received: 6 February 2025 | **Revised:** 10 December 2025 | **Accepted:** 29 December 2025

Keywords: automation | technology | well-being | work quality | working time

ABSTRACT

Two different theoretical perspectives concerning technology and the future of work are examined. One is linked to mainstream economics, whereas the other is associated with critical ('post-work') discourse. Ideas about work—its nature and impacts on well-being—matter in both perspectives. Indeed, they shape visions of a 'better' or 'ideal' future. They also influence policy responses to new technology. A critique is presented of the ways that work and its possible futures are understood. This critique is used to develop a different set of ideas about how technology might be harnessed to reduce the burden and raise the quality of work. The ability of ideas to effect reforms in and of work—ideas that have currency now and possible radical alternatives—is also assessed.

1 | Introduction

Presently, there is a feverish debate concerning the future of work. This debate starts from the position that new technology—particularly artificial intelligence (AI)—is set to transform the world of work. Large-scale job losses are predicted (Susskind 2020). Major changes in job quality are also anticipated (Fleming 2019). The coming technological transformation, it is argued, will call for new policies and will pose fundamental questions for society about how work and life are conducted and organised.

In order to cut through this feverish debate, the following article considers critically two theoretical perspectives that have gained currency. The first stems from mainstream economics and provides a sober yet hopeful assessment of how AI technology might be harnessed to raise economic growth and human well-being (Brynjolfsson and McAfee 2014; Acemoglu and Johnson 2023). The second is linked to more critical social scientific research and supports a 'post-work' position (Srnicek and Williams 2015; Mason 2015). This position is allied with a radical vision of overcoming paid work and creating a post-capitalist society.

Ideas about work are important in both perspectives and influence what each has to say about a 'better' or 'ideal' future of work. Mainstream economists, on the one hand, argue that work is meaningful and promote the idea of a future where labour and technology complement one another. Their positive view of work's meaning in life leads to a vision of a 'work-full' future. Post-work writers, on the other hand, assert that work in a capitalist economy is invariably meaningless and argue for a programme of 'full automation'. Their negative view of work leads them to back a vision of a 'world without work'.

The next section (Section 2) of the article establishes the importance of ideas in influencing visions of the future of work and allied to this, policy responses to new technology. Ideas about work matter to the extent that they influence what futures are viewed as desirable and feasible and what reforms are needed to realise them.

Section 3 identifies problems in each of the two highlighted perspectives—key weaknesses centre on the conception of work and the scope for its transformation. It is argued that these weaknesses hold back our understanding of the role that technology could and should play in the workplace.

Section 4 highlights an alternative set of ideas that could help to shape a different vision of the future. These ideas encompass

a more expansive view of the nature of work and the uses of technology (including for work time reduction and the promotion of meaningful work). They draw inspiration from a wider socialist vision based on nullifying alienation and extending free time.

Section 5 reflects on the scope for ideas to effect reforms in the real world. Although there remain progressive policy recommendations in the work of some mainstream economists (e.g., Acemoglu and Johnson 2023), these are likely to be crowded out by a relatively conservative economics and politics that favours protecting the power of capital to direct technology. Post-work ideas, by contrast, are unlikely to make any impact—indeed, they are likely to be resisted because of their critical content. This is not to deny the importance of developing different ideas—the latter remain essential in reimagining the world—but to focus on the real constraints on their promotion and practical implementation. Hope for radical change must still inspire ideational development, even if the odds of achieving such change, in the face of current realities, remain slim. The sixth and final section follows the lead of J.M. Keynes in showing how ideas can shape the world of work (and life), and how the reform of ideas remains important in realising a better future for all.

2 | Debates on the Future of Work: The Role of Ideas

Historically, the way that commentators have theorised work has influenced their visions of the progress of technology and the future of society. To the extent that Adam Smith and other classical economists saw work as a painful chore, they looked forward to a future where technology would diminish the amount of work in society (Mokyr et al. 2015). Neoclassical economists have traditionally regarded work as a 'disutility' and have associated technological progress with the expansion in opportunity for people to 'choose' less work (Skidelsky 2024). Economists—classical and neoclassical alike—have tended to see technology as a relatively benign force and something to be embraced by society to achieve more leisure time. In this way, a negative definition of work has driven a positive view of automating work and creating a leisure-filled future.

Industrial relations scholars and sociologists of work, by contrast, have drawn from Marx in linking technology to deskilling processes and the alienation of workers under capitalist employment relationships (Wood 2024). Seeing work and production differently to mainstream economists, they have viewed the costs of work as socially determined and technology as part of the politics of production. At the same time, however, they have offered hope for reform. An argument of research in industrial relations and the sociology of work is that workers need to have a greater say over how technology is designed and implemented. If the bargaining and decision-making power of workers can be enhanced, then workplaces can be transformed in ways that promote both higher quality work and shorter working hours. A view of work as a potential benefit to workers, in this instance, has driven a reform agenda aimed at democratising workplaces and re-harnessing technology for positive ends.

In the present, ideas about work have again assumed a role in influencing our understanding of technological change and economic futures; however, they have done so in ways that have entailed a re-evaluation of mainstream economic theory (particularly its conception of the value of work) as well as a revival of radical thinking about possible future worlds beyond capitalism.

The background, briefly, to the assertion of these ideas is the prediction that new technology is—or is about to—change the world in unprecedented ways. Although past predictions of the demise of work have proved inaccurate (Nolan and Wood 2003), it is claimed that 'this time will be different'. AI technology will replace many millions of jobs in the future. It will replace not just jobs with routine functions but also those with non-routine elements (Susskind 2020). According to one frequently cited study (Frey and Osborne 2017), close to half of existing jobs in the United States could be automated in the next 20 years. Another more recent report has suggested that AI could destroy up to 8 million jobs in the United Kingdom (Jung and Desikan 2024).

AI will also change the rewards from work and how work itself is conducted. On the one side, it will create greater economic inequality. It will enrich capital owners at the expense of workers, who will face either higher unemployment or greater competition for low-paid work. On the other side, it will potentially erode the degree of control exercised by workers over work—forms of digital monitoring, in particular, could lead to more oppressive workplaces. Work is likely to become more intensive and less rewarding as AI advances (Fleming 2019).

In response, mainstream economists have begun to take seriously the challenges posed by an AI-led automation. Indeed, some have directly challenged conventional economic narratives of technology advancing while society prospers (Acemoglu and Johnson 2023). In contemplating the effects of AI technology, they have also ditched the traditional economics view of work as a bad or disutility and instead have come to stress the different intrinsic benefits of work. This has led to a particular vision of the future of work and to a particular reform programme.

Two prominent examples serve to demonstrate the alternative ideas and vision held by modern mainstream economists. First, Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014) have referred to a 'Second Machine Age' in which technology is set to replace workers in work. They worry about the increasing divide between rich and poor, which they link to technological progress. Rather than lifting all boats, advances in technology have left many workers with barely their heads above water. Brynjolfsson and McAfee are concerned not just with the loss of income but also with the loss of meaning that people will face if—and more likely, when—work is automated. Here they assume that work is 'beneficial' for people (Brynjolfsson and McAfee 2014, 234). They recognise the direct benefits of work, from sociality to skill use. They point to research highlighting the costs of unemployment for subjective well-being and the rise of so-called 'deaths of despair' (Case and Deaton 2020) due to job losses in particular localities in the United States (Brynjolfsson and McAfee 2014, 234–236). This research underscores their view that if advances in AI reduce the number of available jobs, they will cause distress to people in a direct way. Indeed, in the extreme, they could lead to a higher number of fatalities. The non-monetary costs of automation are

seen as significant and worthy of the attention of economists and policymakers alike.

Second, Acemoglu and Johnson (2023) offer a historical account of how technology has been shaped by power relations and how workers have often lost out in the process of technological progress. The ideas they present on the role of unequal power and its regressive influence on the nature and direction of technology are not commonly associated with mainstream economics. Nonetheless, the power of these ideas in drawing attention to the way that capital owners can direct technology in their own interests and potentially against the interests of workers has received wider recognition—indeed, it has been recognised, if only formally, by the committee overseeing the award of the economics version of the Nobel Prize.

In relation to the current epoch, Acemoglu and Johnson warn that AI is biased towards automation and the control of labour (in the latter case, via the greater monitoring of workers). This means that AI is not necessarily delivering higher productivity—rather, in many cases, it promises modest or zero improvements in productivity. AI may be 'so-so' as far as productivity gains are concerned, meaning that the standard economics assumption that technology will advance prosperity (via a 'productivity bandwagon' effect) must be rejected (Acemoglu and Johnson 2023, 19, 312).

Further, the authors reject the conventional economics idea that work is something all workers want to resist based on their (given) preference for leisure. Rather, they define work as 'meaningful' in its own right (Acemoglu and Johnson 2023, 417; see also Acemoglu 2019). Automation—as a potential outcome of AI—is something to be feared not only because it threatens to take away the income of workers but also because it risks eroding the ability of workers to find meaning in their lives. Like Brynjolfsson and McAfee, they refer to the risk of a rise in 'deaths of despair' due to higher technological unemployment (Acemoglu and Johnson 2023, 262). But they worry too about a loss of meaning—beyond becoming poorer in material terms, workers who lose their jobs will miss the purpose or meaning they derived from work. They will also become more socially isolated and less politically engaged (Acemoglu 2019). Acemoglu and Johnson thereby invoke an idea of meaningful work to articulate their deep concerns over the human costs of automation. They suggest that their fellow mainstream economists need to pay closer attention to how workers actually experience work, the social benefits of work and the effects of technology on the quality of work.

Ideas about work inform analysis of the effects of AI technology and ultimately policy recommendations to deal with these effects. Both Brynjolfsson and McAfee and Acemoglu and Johnson, in particular, are led to support the continuation of work. They want a future where people continue to work, because they believe that work is 'good' for people and for society. Brynjolfsson and McAfee support the idea of workers 'racing with' rather than 'against' machines. To do this, workers must upskill—they must acquire the education and training to use and apply technology. Workers themselves have a responsibility to create new employment opportunities by being alert to gaps in the market, but governments also have a responsibility to ensure that education and training are available and accessible to all.

Acemoglu and Johnson support policies that aim to create more 'good jobs' (i.e., jobs that offer high pay as well as psychological and social benefits to workers) (see also Acemoglu 2021). They back measures to upskill workers, but they also advocate a wider suite of reforms, including breaking up the tech giants (Acemoglu and Johnson 2023, 402). They see few costs in reducing automation and management by algorithm—rather, they see potential upsides. Hence, if workers can be retained in work and can be empowered to work with technology, their productivity, wages and quality of work can be improved. Beyond reforms, there is a need for a 'new narrative' that shows how technology can be used to advance the lives of people rather than just the wealth of tech billionaires (Acemoglu and Johnson 2023, 393–394). Unsurprisingly, this narrative must be based around the idea of workers continuing in work and gaining direct benefit from it.

One policy that both Brynjolfsson and McAfee and Acemoglu and Johnson are led to reject is a universal basic income (UBI). Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014, 234) reject a UBI because it does not provide the work that workers need to lead a full life. Instead, they focus on the goal of job creation and envisage a better future where AI technology complements human labour in work. An 'economy of workers' is what society should aim to achieve (Brynjolfsson and McAfee 2014, 237).

Acemoglu and Johnson are also critical of a UBI because it provides *income to* and not *work for* workers. They refer to 'considerable evidence suggesting that people are more satisfied and are more engaged with their community when they feel that they are contributing value to society. In studies, people not only report improved psychological well-being when they work, compared to receiving transfers, but are even willing to forgo a considerable amount of money rather give up work and accept pure transfers' (Acemoglu and Johnson 2023, 416). The authors dismiss a UBI as 'defeatist' because it assumes that work will disappear when there is scope to protect work(ers) from automation by 'redirecting technology' (Acemoglu and Johnson 2023, 417). Strengthening 'existing safety nets' and creating more 'meaningful, well-paying jobs' (Acemoglu and Johnson 2023) are to be preferred as objectives over the pursuit of a UBI.

The ideas and policies advocated by Brynjolfsson and McAfee and Acemoglu and Johnson are not inconsequential—rather, they are prominent reference points in mainstream economics and wider public discourse (e.g., with bestselling books, reviews and debates in popular media). The particular critical angle taken by Acemoglu and Johnson, with a focus on challenging economic and political power (including that wielded by the owners of tech companies), raises questions for mainstream economics over its nature and scope. It also opens up space for discussion of alternative policies, some of which (like rebalancing power in work and society) chime with those long advocated in industrial relations and the sociology of work (the question of the 'power of ideas' is discussed in Section 5).

The second perspective to be addressed is linked to the ideas of modern post-work writers (Srnicek and Williams 2015; Mason 2015). These are overtly hostile to capitalism and call for a radical re-envisioning of the economy and policymaking. For example,

rather than reject a UBI, they actively back it as a way to manage the coming tide of automation.

Post-work ideas recognise the power of capital to shape technology in society. Technology is not neutral, but something that capital owners actively direct in their own interests—under present capitalist conditions, it is a tool for the exploitation of workers. There is also an emphasis on how technology must be resisted by workers and how its reuse for non-exploitative, emancipatory ends will depend on ceding greater power to workers. In the end, its use for emancipation will entail overcoming capitalism itself.

To support these ideas and arguments, particular assumptions are made about the nature of work. Specifically, work is assumed to be an activity that workers wish to avoid and that their lives would be better without. In this way, post-work discourse fits with traditional economic thinking in theorising work as a cost or disutility. But it also goes beyond this thinking by invoking ideas around alienation. The desire of workers to escape work is seen to be driven by the meaninglessness of work. This idea is conveyed starkly and emotively via the notion of 'bullshit jobs' posited by Graeber (2018).

There follows the idea that work should be reduced and ideally abolished (Srnicek and Williams 2015). Technology enters here as a potential mechanism to economise on work. If technology can be used to replace workers in work, it will enhance their freedom to live well. Some see in AI the opportunity to create a post-capitalist future where leisure replaces work as the major pastime in human life (Mason 2015). Like the mainstream economists referenced above, there is an acceptance that an AI-driven automation is going to happen—however, this possibility is presented as an opportunity rather than a threat. Indeed, an argument is made for the acceleration of automation in order to achieve a work-less future. To survive in such a future, people will need a UBI (the latter will provide the income they need to live). The transition to a fully automated future will also require a shortening in the working week. Again, this is motivated by the aim of reducing human exposure to work. Finally, it will require a more active state (one committed to public ownership) and a stronger role for workers in the running and management of firms.

The ideas posited by modern post-work writers fit with a broader critical literature that urges the rejection or refusal of work (Weeks 2011; Frayne 2015). This literature offers a particular interpretation of Marx's writings: one that emphasises his focus on work time reduction and the pursuit of a life without the compulsion to work. It also links to the Italian autonomist tradition that demands an end to work (Berardi 2009). Although still marginal in mainstream policy debates, post-work ideas have been popularised through the work of authors like Mason and Srnicek and Williams. Wider interest in the idea and goal of a UBI has also helped to raise the profile of these ideas. The vision of a post-work and post-capitalist future has appealed to many people and even some politicians as an alternative to the work economy of present-day capitalism (note also the wide attention given in the media and in public debates to Graeber's book on 'bullshit jobs'). This vision has been given added force by the idea that AI is about to sweep away jobs and that the future might bring about a world where work for wages is finally overcome.

In both the mainstream economics and post-work perspectives outlined above, ideas about work have shaped visions of the future. Mainstream economists who see work as 'beneficial' or 'meaningful' have endorsed a work-rich society, whereas post-work writers who see work as mostly meaningless have promoted a leisured, work-free future. In both, technology represents a factor limiting as well as enabling the realisation of a future vision of society. In the following section, we show how the ideas about work in the two highlighted perspectives contain clear weaknesses and, as a result, limit visionary thinking about the future.

3 | The Limits of Ideas About Work

Mainstream economists, to begin with, restrict their understanding by defining work simply and generally as a 'good thing'. Ironically, given the previous fixation in economics with work's costs (both 'pain cost' and 'opportunity cost') (Spencer 2009), there is a clear neglect of how work can limit well-being. This leads to a neglect, in turn, of how technology might combat the hardships of work, including by extending time away from work. A limited understanding of work makes for a limited vision of what technology could potentially bring to workers' lives.

In the case of Brynjolfsson and McAfee, there is a naivety over the benefits of work—Amazon warehouse workers, for example, are seen to gain 'pride' from their work (Brynjolfsson and McAfee 2014, 234). There is no specific reflection on the costs of work in Amazon warehouses or other workplaces and no wider awareness of how technology might be used to deskill and dehumanise workers (Delfanti 2021). Brynjolfsson and McAfee focus on upskilling as the key response to automation but fail to consider how technology might itself reduce the ability of workers to develop and acquire skills. This reflects their neglect of the role of power in affecting how technology is developed and deployed. To focus on work as always or mostly 'beneficial' is to miss the extent to which technology can be used by employers to reduce the quality of work directly.

Acemoglu and Johnson offer a more critical approach: one that recognises how employers can impose lower quality work on workers. Their approach highlights the silences in standard economic theory over the human consequences of technology. For example, they identify the negative impacts of AI-assisted monitoring for workers' experiences of work, including in workplaces like Amazon warehouses (Acemoglu and Johnson 2023, 320–322).

Yet, they are too quick to move from the negatives of work to its positives. They see work as something that ultimately must be 'saved' from automation—it must be protected for people to thrive. As we saw above, Acemoglu and Johnson resist a UBI because it does not provide meaningful work for people. Their focus on the benefits of work misses the capacity for work to dominate over people's lives and for it to deny them lives beyond the work realm. The danger is that work is celebrated, even while it prevents people from leading fully free lives. This is

not to dispute the fact that work can bring joy and fulfilment to people's lives but rather to suggest that there is also value in non-work time. The implications for thinking about the uses of technology are again significant—hence, one positive element of automation is that it creates the opportunity for more leisure time (this is alongside its potential to reduce toil). To ignore this opportunity, as Acemoglu and Johnson seemingly do, is to restrict understanding of the promise of technological progress.

The point is that the ideas about work being 'beneficial' or 'meaningful' influence negatively what Brynjolfsson and McAfee and Acemoglu and Johnson have to say about the future of work. They are led to condone work rather than to contemplate its reduction. They support workers remaining in work without questioning the length of time they work and their interests and needs for more time away from work. In short, both sets of authors are too preoccupied with the positive meaning of work to see how well-being might be improved by using technology to reduce working time.

In the case of Acemoglu and Johnson, there is a failure to see how technology can be redirected in ways that produce different outcomes beyond just the preservation of 'good jobs'. They lend support to policies that sustain the same full-time employment model. It is not considered at least directly how redirecting technology might entail other goals, like a shorter working week. A longed-for hope has been that technology might prolong leisure time—this hope inspired Keynes (1963), among other visionary thinkers. It is overlooked by Acemoglu and Johnson.

Acemoglu (2019, 2) writes that: 'The prospect of a society in which few work (and enjoy the prestige and challenges of work) while many stay at home does not look enticing'. The fear of work disappearing, again, drives his opposition to automation. Yet, he fails to consider how technology might benefit workers by enabling them to work fewer hours. When he and Johnson talk about the possible renewal of unions and the development of new forms of worker organisation (Acemoglu and Johnson 2023, 397–398), they fail to say how these might complement measures not just to raise pay and the meaning of work but also to reduce working hours. The vision of the future of work, in short, is constrained by a view of work that focuses mainly on its benefits and that misses the wider interests that workers have in cultivating meaningful lives beyond work.

Post-work perspectives face different problems. These relate to an overemphasis on the costs of work. It is claimed that there is a 'crisis of work' and that people's lives would be better if they worked less (Srnicek and Williams 2015, 103–105). Rather than add to well-being, work subtracts from it and makes people less than human. Graeber's notion of 'bullshit jobs' has once more given added weight and potency to this claim.

A counter to the above is that not all work is meaningless—rather, it often has positive attributes. There are many instances where workers find their jobs meaningful and the work they do rewarding (Findlay and Thompson 2017; Taylor 2017; Green et al. 2024; Zhou et al. 2025). This is not to succumb to the 'glorification' of work as Srnicek and Williams (2015, 126) imply but to recognise that the quality of work can and does vary in relation to its actual content and organisation.

The notion of 'bullshit jobs', specifically, fails to do justice to the complex impacts of work on workers' lives. It also inadvertently misses the extent to which the quality of work is impaired by the way that jobs are designed and organised. Bullshit exists *within* jobs (Thompson 2020, 306). It does not reflect whole categories of jobs in the way that Graeber implies.

A deeply negative view of work leads post-work writers to support its 'abolition'. Srnicek and Williams (2015, 126) see the ending of work as 'the only true post-capitalist position'. This is the exact opposite conclusion of some modern mainstream economists, as highlighted above, but it follows from the idea that work lacks meaning and must be reduced. There are two missing aspects here. First, there is no clear idea about how work might be improved upon through the use of technology—the degree to which technology might be used to create more meaningful work is missed in particular. Second, there is a limitation of vision—the fact that technology might be used both to make work shorter in duration and more rewarding in itself is not considered. The goal of combining less and better work is not inconsistent with radical thinking—rather, it can be seen as a key part of a socialist tradition that dates back to Marx.

When Marx advocated for the reuse of technology under socialism, he did not just want to see the reduction of drudgery—instead, he also wanted to see meaning returned to work itself and free time extended. His goal was to create a society where technology would operate to increase 'the realm of freedom' (i.e., free time) and to transform the 'realm of necessity' into a place for joyful work (Marx 1992, 959). This meant workers taking control of technology and redirecting it towards ends that they saw as valuable—it did not entail the termination of work, but rather its transformation into an activity that was life-enriching in the same way as meaningful activities pursued outside of work. Similar ideas were reiterated by some other socialist writers, notably W. Morris (1993). He argued for a future where technology would help to turn work into art and leisure into play. Marx along with Morris could make these arguments because they held to a broad understanding of work (as it is and could be) and because they contemplated changes in the governance of work: in effect, they pursued the idea that workers should self-govern production and that technology should be directed towards the fulfilment of human needs, inclusive of more creative work.

A lesson here for post-work discourse is that seeing work as meaningless and focusing only on the goal of 'full automation' creates an obstacle to fully grasping what technology might and should deliver for working people and wider society. Indeed, on the basis of the above, it obscures and obliterates some key aspects of socialist thought, which originate in Marx and that were developed by others like W. Morris (Bellamy Foster 2017; Spencer 2022).

4 | Looking Forward Differently—Rethinking Ideas About Work and Technology

The question is what different ideas should replace those that have been reviewed and criticised in the previous section? Below, an effort will be made to answer this question. It will be argued that different ideas extend beyond just the conception of work

and include other issues like the goals of automation. They also lead to a wider vision of how work should be organised and how technology should be used.

An obvious place to start is the idea of work itself. Seeing work purely as a means to income misses its substantive role as an activity in its own right—work shapes people beyond the income it brings. Work, however, is more than simply a bad (a disutility) or a good (a utility) in the way that mainstream economists (old and new) have defined it (Spencer 2009). Rather, it is something that can affect the ability of people to be and do things in their lives. On the one hand, it can dehumanise by depriving people of the opportunity to act and create autonomously—at its worse, it can reduce the intelligence as well as health of those performing it. On the other hand, it can offer a way for people to develop valuable skills and to be recognised for their efforts—at its best, it can be a central life-activity and a major source of well-being.

The above shows the folly of generalising about the meaning of work. General conceptions of work as 'beneficial' or 'meaningful' miss the deprivations of work, including the sense of powerlessness that many workers face in work. Some modern mainstream economists conversion to the idea that work can bring benefits to workers' lives does not advance the economic analysis of work and its impacts on well-being in any fundamental sense—rather, ironically, it leaves it open to criticism for neglecting the costs of work and the case for economising on work.

Broad conceptions of work as meaningless can be questioned too. As alluded to above, the modern idea of 'bullshit jobs' popularised by Graeber creates more heat than light as regards to the nature of work and its effects on workers' well-being. Not only does it lack strong evidential support (many workers report their jobs as meaningful), but it also assumes that workers' subjective reports can be taken as reliable evidence of the quality of jobs they perform (Spencer 2022). In reality, such subjective reports are prone to different biases (e.g., due to workers' norms and expectations) and remain inferior to more direct assessments of the actual characteristics of jobs (Brown et al. 2012). Evidence from different survey data shows how the quality of jobs varies markedly across national economies and how the observed differences in the quality of jobs impact directly on the well-being of workers (Green et al. 2024; Zhou et al. 2025). Such evidence questions the merit of categorising whole jobs as 'bullshit' and undermines the idea of 'abolishing' work because of its assumed negative impacts on workers' well-being.

This brings us to the quality of work itself. There are two particularly important dimensions to consider here. One is simply pay—how well or not workers are paid for work. This determines the well-being of workers directly by influencing their ability to meet the costs of living—any understanding of the impacts of work on workers' well-being must include consideration of the level of pay. On a wider measure of 'remuneration', one could also include access to other financial benefits (e.g., pensions and holiday and sickness pay)—these vary by job and lead to clear differences in the quality of work. The other dimension relates broadly to the intrinsic aspects of work, from the degree of autonomy exercised by workers over work to the creative content of work itself. These aspects have a direct influence on workers' well-being—a worker who performs work autonomously and with the ability to act creatively will likely achieve higher well-being than one who is strictly controlled and who faces the same repetitive tasks day in, day out. The intrinsic aspects can outweigh the extrinsic aspects such that workers can suffer low well-being even in jobs that are relatively well paid. Conversely, in some jobs, workers can suffer a double disadvantage of low pay and low intrinsic rewards from work.

Building on this discussion, the idea of well-being at work can be seen to mean something more than feeling good or bad about work or feeling positive or negative about the meaning of work. As implied above, workers' subjective reports (including their reports of job satisfaction and the meaningfulness of work) can vary independently of the objective conditions they face at work—for example, a worker may report relatively high job satisfaction and/or classify the job she is doing as meaningful simply because she is comparing her present situation with one of unemployment. This could then disguise the fact that the job she does is low quality as defined by its actual characteristics. Another worker may express dissatisfaction with her job and see it as lacking in meaning because her high expectations are not met—this could then conceal the fact that her job is objectively good in the sense that it pays well and has high intrinsic rewards (think of some high-paid corporate lawyers reporting their jobs as 'bullshit' in the account of Graeber 2018). Beyond how workers feel about the jobs they do, it is important to establish how and to what extent jobs meet the needs of workers (Brown et al. 2012; Green et al. 2024). Here the idea of needs can be extended to include not just the need for income but also the need for creative action, personal interaction, recognition and social contribution (Gheaus and Herzog 2016).

On a wider understanding of well-being generated by work, one can invoke the ideas of Marx and others like W. Morris on work as an activity that can offer people a potential way to achieve self-fulfilment. Again, this is not about workers' subjective feelings (their experiences of utility or disutility obtained from work) or their reports of meaningfulness in work communicated via social surveys—rather, it is about the meaning that workers derive from being and doing things in work that they value. The closest way of understanding well-being at work that fits with this idea would be the 'capabilities' approach developed by Amartya Sen (for applications of this approach to worker well-being, see Green 2006 and Stephens 2023).

Finally, and most importantly for the arguments in this article, there is the relationship of technology to work. Two key points can be made here. First, it is important to recognise the politics of technology. Technology is not some free-floating mechanism or process—instead, it is influenced by different and often conflicting interests (Wilkinson 1983). Employers' needs for higher profits, in particular, can mean that workers' well-being is sacrificed through the adoption of new technology. In practice, it is often down to workers to organise and press for technology that better meets their interests (Cooley 1987).

Acemoglu and Johnson highlight the influence of power over and on technology. They recognise the malign influence of big tech on the direction of technology and argue for reforms aimed at democratising the governance of technology. The arguments and criticisms they make are a welcome departure from the apolitical

view of technology traditionally found in mainstream economics and provide a bridge to more critical discourse, including that linked to post-work ideas. Yet, there remain contradictions in their approach. Their core theory derives from neoclassical economics (e.g., they invoke 'marginal productivity theory' in understanding firms' choices over technology) (Acemoglu and Restrepo 2019). This theory is still antithetical to ideas of exploitation—indeed, it perpetuates the myth of equal exchange between capital and labour. The point is that while Acemoglu and Johnson work within the parameters of formal economic theory, their ability to highlight the importance of power and its effects on the nature and outcomes of technological progress will be severely limited. In this sense, in progressing understanding of power, it is better to develop ideas within a heterodox or political economy framework and to ditch the jargon, technical terms and models of mainstream neoclassical economics.

The second point to make concerns the uses and ends of technology. A key focus in modern economics debates has been on its potential role in automating work—this has led to concern that workers' lives will be made worse by the erosion of work and that technology must be used to protect work rather than reduce it. This concern, however, has eclipsed the opportunity to use technology in ways that reduce work's burden, principally by reducing working time. Workers' needs for more free time must be appreciated in understanding what can be achieved with technology.

Post-work writers have seized on the potential to use technology to negate work; however, they miss the scope for using technology to enhance the opportunity for meaningful work. The issue here is that technology ought to improve the quality of workers' lives both within and without work. It goes without saying that for technology to raise both the quality of work and the duration of leisure time, it must be governed in more democratic ways. This means more than enhancing the voice of workers via stronger unions and more participatory forms of management—rather, it also means taking seriously the move to forms of ownership that cede direct control and power to workers over work and technology.

Where does this leave modern debates on technology and the future of work? The simple answer is that it leaves them with different and new ideas to adopt. From the above discussion, there is a clear need to rethink how work is defined—seeing beyond polarised and one-sided ideas about work (as either mostly meaningful or mostly meaningless) is vital. Work must be seen in relation to what it brings to workers' lives and for what it could bring to their lives if it was organised differently. It is also important to recognise how technology is affected by the politics of the workplace and to rethink the goals of automation (Wilkinson 1983). Power has a crucial bearing on the nature and outcomes of technology. Technological innovation, in addition, is important as a way to enhance the prospects for meaningful work as well as meaningful leisure. It is not about using technology to preserve work or eliminate it—rather, it is about using technology to transform work so that it provides ample leisure time while also being rewarding in itself. It means returning to the original ideas of Marx and Morris around lightening work—that is, reducing the time it occupies in human life while at the same time improving its intrinsic qualities. A vision of technology creating lighter work for all must inspire modern critical thinking about the future of work (Spencer 2022).

On this last point, we know from research that work can be meaningful (Zhou et al. 2025). We know too that reducing working time can bring different benefits, not least for workers' well-being (Coote et al. 2020). We also know that there are longstanding arguments in favour of workplace democracy—these arguments extend to using technology for the creation of meaningful work and shorter working hours (Cooley 1987). The point here is that these different strands of research and their underlying ideas can be brought together and used to advance debate on the future of work. In particular, they can be used to show how technology must be utilised under cooperative conditions to secure a future where workers have the ability to flourish at work and beyond it. Again, while this alternative vision of the future can draw strength and support from some existing literature, it also requires us to push beyond the boundaries of both modern mainstream economics and post-work perspectives.

5 | The Power of Ideas

Another question presents itself, namely, what is the scope for ideas to cut through and potentially bring about change in the world? Here we can reflect on the scope for ideas as they exist now to gain support and effect. There are two sets of ideas to consider, building on the critique developed in the previous sections.

In the first place, there are the ideas promoted by some notable mainstream economists (including now Nobel Prize-winning ones). Their ideas favour the goal of maintaining work in the face of strong forces of automation. This goal has stemmed from an idea of work as a benefit to workers and something they would miss if it disappeared. In particular, it has inspired a policy agenda based on creating more 'good jobs' (Acemoglu and Johnson 2023). This policy agenda is one that has received wider support—for example, in the United Kingdom, it has gained backing via the Taylor review (2017).

Economists have a head start in policy and political debates. Policymakers and politicians are more likely to listen to economists by dint of their expertise as well as their (alleged) 'superiority' in the social sciences (Hirschman and Berman 2014; Fourcade et al. 2015). Economists also have a track-record of influencing policy (Campbell 2002, 30)—for example, the economic writings of Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek helped to shape the practices, policies and reforms commonly associated with neoliberalism (Blyth 2002; Mirowski and Plehwe 2009).

In debates on technology and the future of work, the ideas of several high-profile mainstream economists face both opportunities and obstacles when seeking to influence policy. First, to the extent that these ideas focus on goals such as upskilling, they will face a receptive audience. They may even influence policy directly by creating greater urgency over the need to develop and implement a new skills strategy. White et al. (2023) show how a few mainstream economists have influenced ideas around skills formation and how their ideas—disseminated and promoted by different economic consultants—have helped to embed a particular pro-skills policy agenda. This agenda is evident in

the United Kingdom via initiatives for apprenticeships and new qualifications. If mainstream economists like Acemoglu and Johnson retain a focus on upskilling, their ideas are likely to retain the power to influence policy. This power will be augmented as their published work becomes more highly cited, and they take advantage of their existing prominence and high status within the economics profession.

Second, however, their scope to influence policy will be limited the more they criticise and challenge existing bases of power. Acemoglu and Johnson, to their credit, address directly the power of the big tech companies. They show using historical analysis and critical reflection on the present how these companies have little concern for the goal of shared prosperity—rather, they operate mainly to boost the incomes of their already-rich owners and shareholders. To the extent that the tech companies invest in 'so-so' technology, they may not even advance productivity. Here Acemoglu and Johnson challenge their fellow mainstream economists to think differently about technology and to recognise the scope for technological progress to deepen existing divides in society. Reforms follow around the democratisation of technology with reference to building 'countervailing power' and putting the needs of people at the centre of technological development and implementation (Acemoglu and Johnson 2023, 396). Acemoglu and Johnson, at the same time, are careful to support a reformed capitalism and to eschew radical strategies like a UBI. Their ideas do not support any kind of socialist ideology or politics. Indeed, they reject socialism.

The point remains, however, that while their ideas call into question the motives and actions of the powerful, they will face obstacles in achieving an impact in the policy realm. They are likely to suffer the same fate as heterodox economists who, having been frozen out of economics debates for decades, have found their ideas on work, power and technology ignored by mainstream economists and policymakers alike. A similar fate has befallen those in industrial relations and the sociology of work, who have been outflanked by more influential and powerful mainstream economists. That some prominent mainstream economists could now find their ideas overlooked (or even suppressed) would be ironic indeed.

The second set of ideas to consider are those linked to post-work perspectives. These have power in themselves. They support building a different future. They link to established heterodox thinking in economics and are explicitly opposed to capitalism. They promise not more work but more freedom to live. They offer a powerful vision of radical change in society. Indeed, they urge the move to a post-capitalist state.

The issue with these perspectives is they are *too* radical (at least from a mainstream policy vantage point) and are likely to remain unpalatable to most policymakers. To be sure, writers like Graeber have gained significant publicity for post-work ideas. His bestselling book has been frequently quoted in the media and has become a rallying point for activists. Graeber—before his untimely death—fitted the mould of an 'ideational entrepreneur' (Hauptmeier and Heery 2014, 2485), promoting in creative and innovative ways a radical agenda. His ideas created the basis for a movement *for* change. Mason's (2015) book on post-capitalism similarly popularised ideas around remaking the future and built momentum in support of a techno-utopia. Like Graeber, he became a proselytiser of transformative change.

Yet, the translation of post-work ideas into actual policy has met with opposition. On the one side, where these ideas have gained a hearing in political circles (e.g., under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party in the United Kingdom), their influence has proved short-lived. They have lost out to a more mainstream policy approach based on supporting work and growth under the existing capitalist economy. On the other side, post-work ideas have been criticised by some on the Left. Critics have argued that these ideas distract from more pressing concerns facing working people—these include problems of low pay and insecure work (Thompson 2020). These problems rather than visions of never-to-be-realised post-capitalist futures should be the concern of Left parties. Others—berating the policies and politics of Corbyn's Labour Party—have supported a renewal of social democracy against the idea and ideology of post-capitalism (Pitts and Dinerstein 2017).

There remain deeper obstacles to post-work ideas having an effect in the realm of policymaking and politics, however. Any radical call for 'abolishing' work is unlikely to curry favour with politicians and businesses intent on growing the economy. Observe how certain mainstream elements in the media have directly resisted Graeber's 'bullshit jobs' thesis (Economist 2021). Observe too how the Labour Party in the United Kingdom has rejected the policies of Corbyn and instead embraced a more centrist (pro-work and pro-growth) policy position (notably Mason has now shifted his support to Keir Starmer's Labour government and positioned himself against the radical politics of Corbyn). This resistance and rejection reflect a wider hostility to ideas that challenge the economic and political status quo (Carstensen and Schmidt 2015).

Crucially, Morgan and Hauptmeier (2021) highlight the way that ideas must be organised socially if they are to have an effect and how the production and dissemination of ideas rely on the support of agents and institutions in society. 'For ideas to be considered important and policy relevant', the authors (775) state, 'they have to be authorised by organisations that are perceived to be the legitimate arbiters, creators, and purveyors of ideas'. In the case of post-work ideas, given their political bent and radical implications, they lack such authorisation and remain perceived by most policymakers and politicians as beyond the pale. In contrast, the ideas of mainstream economists based on the reproduction of work under capitalism have traction precisely because they are economically and politically conservative.

The lack of impact of post-work ideas has persisted despite events such as the Covid-19 pandemic, which opened up, if only temporarily and unevenly, some new spaces for the questioning of established norms, including around what is 'essential' work and the appropriate balance between work and life. It has also outlasted periodic economic crises (e.g., the 2008 global financial crisis) that have put the fragility of the existing economic system into critical focus. The issue is that post-work ideas lack the power to effect reforms in the world, not because they are wholly wrong, but because they aim to upend the economy and life as we know it.

This leaves us with the alternative ideas outlined in the previous section. These have the power to invoke and/or provoke different ways of thinking about work and its future. They also have the power to inspire alternative visions of the uses of technology: ones that aim at transforming work and creating a better future where more meaningful work is enjoyed alongside more free time. They revive the insights of Marx and others like W. Morris, while going beyond current post-work ideas. Yet, they also lack the power to effect change. This again does not reflect their falseness but rather their opposition to unequal power. As others have argued (Hauptmeier and Heery 2014; Carstensen and Schmidt 2015; Morgan and Hauptmeier 2021), power 'in' ideas is no guarantee of power 'through' ideas. This is because those with power have the ability to block what appear, from their perspective, as dangerous ideas. Tech billionaires can pay lobbyists to press their case for reforms that favour their own interests. Governments can ignore the demands of unions and progressive think-tanks for change and instead win elections by endorsing neoliberal or latterly populist policies. In this sense, the task of promoting different ideas appears futile and a waste of time and effort.

This would be the wrong conclusion to draw, however. Although the barriers to alternative ideas effecting change in the world are formidable, they should not deter their development. Indeed, they provide a reason to keep them alive and promote them. The point of critical enquiry in social scientific research is, after all, to challenge prevailing ideas and to present alternatives to them.

Without different ideas, we cannot see a way to a different future, though realising this future will still depend on working for a changed economics and politics. If we are to chart a way to a different and better future of work, in short, we not only need the ideational resources to imagine it, but also the economic and political resources to realise it.

On this last point, there are glimmers of hope in the intellectual and political realms. The prominent and high-profile approach of Acemoglu and Johnson to debate on technology and the future of work opens the way for a broader critical discussion on ways to reform workplaces and society. There are limits to the scope of this discussion, not least due to issues of concept (Acemoglu and Johnson remain, at heart, mainstream economists and carry with them theoretical baggage from neoclassical economics), but these limits should not deter progress in building alliances for change in academia. At least, heterodox economists and other critically minded researchers now have something to engage with and do not just face the barren and inhospitable terrain of mainstream economics.

Politically, although unions remain in decline, certain groups of workers have begun to organise and pursue their interests collectively, most notably in the gig-economy (Però and Downey 2022). This development offers an opportunity to promote new ideas. The recent success of campaigns for a 4-day working week (leading to some business-led trials) shows too how the political imagination around the possibilities for reforming work can be widened (Spencer 2022). To reiterate, there remain clear barriers to making radical ideas effective. These barriers are not just political—more 'so-so' investments in technology (i.e., ones that yield low productivity gains), for example, may intensify conflict over income and widen inequality. That is, they may scupper attempts to persuade policymakers to focus on the scope for using technology to reduce working hours and improve the quality of work. The barriers, however, are simply a reminder that change needs to be fought for, and the fight for change must still begin with the development of ideas that can inspire and make possible a radically different future.

6 | Conclusion

Keynes (1936, 384) wrote famously about the role of ideas in influencing politics and wider public opinion. He focused, in particular, on the role of ideas promoted by 'economists and political philosophers' who he felt had the greatest influence. His original argument was over-optimistic. He ignored how ideas could be limited and thwarted by the power of vested interests. Moreover, he failed to fully appreciate how ideas might be ignored despite their insight and how other ideas could prosper, not because they are necessarily 'right', but because they are supported by those with the power to influence the economy and politics.

That said, Keynes's own ideas won support in the post-war period and helped to shape a policy consensus based on the pursuit of full employment and redistribution. This consensus enabled the fruits of technological progress to be shared between capital and labour; however, it has subsequently been undermined and negated by a neoliberal model of capitalism that has led to rising inequality as well as greater social division. The ideas and ideology associated with this model have taken effect, while the pay, working conditions and quality of work of many workers have stagnated or even retreated. Keynes's ideas may yet prove valuable in reviving reforms aimed at addressing the problems of work and the economy. His more long-term perspective on capitalism set out in his famous 1930 essay (Keynes 1963)—one highlighting the need for a shorter working week—may also prove instructive and effective, not least in demonstrating how technology ought to progress. Ideas about alternative futures remain especially important in times, like now, when work and life appear bleak—that is, they remind us of the possibilities that could be achieved, if we changed direction in society.

Specific attention has been given to the importance of ideas in the context of modern debates about technology and the future of work. It has been argued that particular ideas about work have created problems in envisioning work in more technologically advanced futures. Ideas about work's intrinsic value have distracted from the need to confront and ease the burden of work via the use of technology. Modern mainstream economists promoting the idea of work as meaningful have overlooked the fact that technology has a vital role to play in removing or ameliorating work that reduces well-being and in shortening working time. Rival post-work perspectives that stress the need to eliminate work have been shown to be problematic too. They fail to see how work might be enhanced in qualitative terms and how technology might add to the scope for meaningful work alongside more leisure time.

The challenge of Keynes around developing ideas that can potentially change the world for the better has been taken up. The reform of ideas—particularly about what work means, how

it relates to well-being and how it might be transformed through the use of technology—is important in seeing a way to a different future of work. A vision of the future where technology works to improve the lives of workers inside and outside of work has been outlined. This vision entails using technology to reduce drudgery, raise the quality of work and increase leisure time. It fits with an older socialist tradition—one stemming from Marx but also present in the writings of others, notably W. Morris—and is offered as an alternative to modern post-work ideology.

On the scope for effecting change in society via the reform of ideas, the conclusion here is at once pessimistic and optimistic. It is recognised, on the one hand, that ideas—where they go against the economic and political grain—face a mountain to climb in terms of gaining effect. Proposing a radically different set of ideas on work and technology is not likely to produce change in the real world any time soon. On the other hand, however, it can be argued that developing, marshalling and disseminating these ideas remains important, not least in the academic realm. With the right institutional conditions, they might yet gain momentum and influence. Neoliberal ideas spent years in the wilderness before having an effect (Mirowski and Plehwe 2009). Once effective, these ideas transformed society. A lesson here is that efforts to develop and promote ideas which promise a very different future of work with technological progress may be fruitful even though the current economic and political climate remains hostile. Indeed, their development and promotion may be seen as essential come a time in the future when they are needed and demanded more openly and widely.

One final reflection can be added. This relates to the role of industrial relations scholars (and by extension, the readership of this Journal). These scholars hold a relatively unique position. They can get behind the ideas of mainstream economists like Acemoglu and Johnson where they support unions and collective bargaining—indeed, they can augment them by showing how power matters more profoundly than most mainstream economists are willing to admit and how reforms aimed at reducing working time are required to fully harness technology. They can also see the limits of post-work ideas and the need to go beyond them in understanding how technology might be used to reform work (including its qualitative aspects). Their contribution might then prove important in forging new ideas about work and technology and in building the intellectual as well as political capital required to make actual reforms possible (Thomas and Turnbull 2025). At the very least, they can help with the effort, alongside other progressive work researchers, in showing how radical change is not just necessary but also long overdue.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank two reviewers for their helpful comments on previous versions of the article. I would also like to thank the editor, Pete Turnbull, for his valuable feedback and guidance. Remaining errors are mine alone.

Funding

The author has nothing to report.

Ethics Statement

The author has nothing to report.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The author has nothing to report.

References

Acemoglu, D. 2019. It's Good Jobs, Stupid. Economics for Inclusive Prosperity. https://econfip.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Its-Good-Jobs-Stupid.pdf.

Acemoglu, D. 2021. AI's Future Doesn't Have to be Dystopian. *Boston Review*, May 20. https://www.bostonreview.net/forum/ais-future-doesnt-have-to-be-dystopian/.

Acemoglu, D., and S. Johnson. 2023. *Power and Progress: Our Thousand-Year Struggle Over Technology and Prosperity*. Basic Books.

Acemoglu, D., and P. Restrepo. 2019. "Automation and New Tasks: How Technology Displaces and Reinstates Labor." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33, no. 2: 3–30.

Bellamy Foster, J. 2017. "The Meaning of Work in a Sustainable Society." *Monthly Review* 69: 1–14.

Berardi, F. 2009. *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*. Translated by F. Cadel and G. Mecchia, and J. Smith. Semiotexte.

Blyth, M. 2002. *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge University Press.

Brown, A., A. Charlwood, and D. A. Spencer. 2012. "Not all That it Might Seem: Why Job Satisfaction is Worth Studying Despite it Being a Poor Summary Measure of Job Quality." *Work, Employment and Society* 26, no. 6: 1007–1018.

Brynjolfsson, E., and A. McAfee. 2014. *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies*. Norton.

Campbell, J. 2002. "Ideas, Politics and Public Policy." *Annual Review of Sociology* 28: 21–38.

Carstensen, M., and V. Schmidt. 2015. "Power Through, Over and in Ideas: Conceptualizing Ideational Power in Discursive Institutionalism." *Journal of European Public Policy* 23: 318–337.

Case, A., and A. Deaton. 2020. *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism*. Princeton University Press.

Cooley, M. 1987. *Architect or Bee? The Human Price of Technology*. Hogarth Press.

Coote, A., A. Harper, and A. Stirling. 2020. *The Case for a Four-Day Week*. Polity.

Delfanti, A. 2021. "Machinic Dispossession and Augmented Despotism: Digital Work in an Amazon Warehouse." *New Media & Society* 23, no. 1: 39–55.

Economist. 2021. "Why the Bullshit-Jobs Thesis May be, Well, Bullshit." Published June 5. The Economist Group, The Economist Newspaper Ltd. https://www.economist.com/business/2021/06/05/why-the-bullshit-jobs-thesis-may-be-well-bullshit.

Findlay, P., and P. Thompson. 2017. "Contemporary Work: Its Meanings and Demands." *Journal of Industrial Relations* 59: 122–138.

Fleming, P. 2019. "Robots and Organization Studies: Why Robots Might Not Want to Steal Your Job." *Organization Studies* 40: 23–38.

Fourcade, M., E. Ollion, and Y. Algan. 2015. "The Superiority of Economists." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 29: 89–114.

Frayne, D. 2015. *The Refusal of Work: The Theory and Practice of Resistance to Work*. Zed Books.

Frey, C., and M. Osborne. 2017. "The Future of Employment: How Susceptible Are Jobs to Computerisation?" *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 114: 254–280.

Gheaus, A., and L. Herzog. 2016. "The Goods of Work (Other Than Money!)." *Journal of Social Philosophy* 47: 70–89.

Graeber, D. 2018. *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*. Allen Lane.

Green, F. 2006. *Demanding Work: The Paradox of Job Quality in the Affluent Society*. Princeton University Press.

Green, F., S. Lee, M. Zou, and Y. Zhou. 2024. "Work and Life: The Relative Importance of Job Quality for General Well-Being, and Implications for Social Surveys." *Socio-Economic Review* 22, no. 2: 835–857.

Hauptmeier, M., and E. Heery. 2014. "Ideas at Work." *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 25: 2473–2488.

Hirschman, D., and E. Berman. 2014. "Do Economists Make Policies? On the Political Effects of Economics." *Socio-Economic Review* 12: 779–811.

Jung, C., and B. S. Desikan. 2024. *Transformed by AI: How Generative Artificial Intelligence Could Affect Work in the UK—And How to Manage It*. Institute for Public Policy Research Report. https://ippr-org.files.svdcdn.com/production/Downloads/Transformed_by_AI_March24_2024-03-27-121003_kxis.pdf?dm=1728042262.

Keynes, J. M. 1936. *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*. Macmillan.

Keynes, J. M. 1963. "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren." In *Essays in Persuasion*. Norton. [1930].

Marx, K. 1992. *Capital: Volume 3*. Penguin.

Mason, P. 2015. *Postcapitalism: A Guide to Our Future*. Allen Lane.

Mirowski, P. and D. Plehwe, eds. 2009. *The Road from Mont Pèlerin. The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective*. Harvard University Press.

Mokyr, J., C. Vickers, and N. Ziebarth. 2015. "The History of Technological Anxiety and the Future of Economic Growth: Is This Time Different?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 29: 31–50.

Morgan, G., and M. Hauptmeier. 2021. "The Social Organization of Ideas in Employment Relations." *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 74: 773–797.

Morris, W. 1993. "Useful Work Versus Useless Toil (1885)." In *News From Nowhere and Other Writings*, edited by C. Wilmer, 285–306. Penguin.

Nolan, P., and S. Wood. 2003. "Mapping the Future of Work." *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 41: 165–174.

Però, D., and J. Downey. 2022. "Advancing Workers' Rights in the Gig Economy Through Discursive Power: The Communicative Strategies of Indie Unions." *Work, Employment and Society* 38, no. 1: 140–160.

Pitts, F. H., and A. Dinerstein. 2017. "Corbynism's Conveyor Belt of Ideas: Postcapitalism and the Politics of Social Reproduction." *Capital & Class* 41, no. 3: 423–434.

Skidelsky, R. 2024. *The Machine Age: An Idea, a History, a Warning*. Allen Lane.

Spencer, D. A. 2009. *The Political Economy of Work*. Routledge.

Spencer, D. A. 2022. *Making Light Work: An End to Toil in the Twenty-First Century*. Polity.

Srnicek, N., and A. Williams. 2015. *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*. Verso.

Stephens, T. 2023. "The Quality of Work (QoW): Towards a Capability Theory." *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 24: 309–335.

Susskind, D. 2020. *A World Without Work: Technology, Automation and How We Should Respond*. Allen Lane.

Taylor, M. 2017. *Good Work: The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices*. Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Thomas, H., and P. Turnbull. 2025. "The Value of Industrial Relations Research(ers): Activism Inside and Outside the UK Academy." *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society* 64, no. 2: 151–167.

Thompson, P. 2020. "Capitalism, Technology and Work: Interrogating the Tipping Point Thesis." *Political Quarterly* 91: 299–309.

Weeks, K. 2011. *The Problem With Work*. Duke University Press.

White, L., S. Saleem, E. Dhuey, and M. Perlman. 2023. "A Critical Analysis of International Organizations' and Global Management Consulting Firms' Consensus Around Twenty-First Century Skills." *Review of International Political Economy* 30: 1334–1359.

Wilkinson, B. 1983. *The Shopfloor Politics of New Technology*. Heinemann.

Wood, S., ed. 2024. *The Degradation of Work? Skill, De-Skilling and the Labour Process*. Routledge.

Zhou, Y., R. Davies, A. Felstead, D. Gallie, F. Green, and G. Henseke. 2025. *What Makes Work Meaningful? Findings From the Skills and Employment Survey 2024*. Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data, Cardiff University.