

**Press release – 16 May 2020**

## **3,000 researchers from 650 universities worldwide unite to point a way out of the Covid-19 crisis**

**In an op-ed published on May 16 in 37 newspapers in 32 countries, more than 3,000 researchers from universities<sup>1</sup> around the globe issued an urgent call to heed the lessons of the COVID-19 crisis and rewrite the rules of our economic systems in order to create a more democratic and sustainable society. Their call, made in the midst of an unprecedented health, climate, and political crisis, paves a positive path forward, following three core principles: democratize (firms), decommodify (work), and remediate (policies) in order to respect planetary boundaries and make life sustainable for all.**

For Isabelle Ferreras (FNRS-UCLouvain-Harvard LWP), Julie Battilana (Harvard University) and Dominique Méda (Paris Dauphine-PSL), the three professors who drafted the op-ed, such strong support from the international academic community is exceptional: *“The initiative has brought together more than 3,000 researchers from 650 universities around the world, working across a range of disciplines from economics, political science, philosophy, and sociology to mathematics, climatology, or physics. These academics think that our current societal model is not sustainable, and their research highlights why. They share a commitment to helping identify solutions that can be used to lay the foundations of a more democratic and sustainable economy and society.”*

### **The diagnosis**

The three researchers started with a single question: What does this crisis teach us? Their call begins with a simple observation: *“Working humans are so much more than ‘resources.’ Caring for the sick; delivering food, medication, and other essentials; clearing away our waste; stocking the shelves and running the registers in our grocery stores – the people who have kept life going through the COVID-19 pandemic, especially women and minorities, are living proof that work cannot be reduced to a mere commodity. Human health and the care of the most vulnerable cannot be governed by market forces alone.”*

<sup>1</sup> These include: Elizabeth Anderson (University of Michigan), Philippe Askénazy (CNRS-Paris School of Economics), Aurélien Barrau (CNRS et Université Grenoble-Alpes), Neil Brenner (Harvard University), Craig Calhoun (Arizona State University), Ha-Joon Chang (University of Cambridge), Erica Chenoweth (Harvard University), Joshua Cohen (Apple University, Berkeley, Boston Review), Christophe Dejours (CNAM), Olivier De Schutter (UCLouvain, UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights), Nancy Fraser (The New School for Social Research, NYC), Archon Fung (Harvard University), Javati Ghosh (Jawaharlal Nehru University), Stephen Gliessman (UC Santa Cruz), Stefan Gosepath (Freie Universität Berlin), Hans R. Herren (Millennium Institute), Axel Honneth (Columbia University), Eva Illouz (EHESS, Paris), Tim Jackson (University of Surrey), Sanford Jacoby (UCLA), Rahel Jäggi (Humboldt University), Pierre-Benoit Joly (INRA - National Institute of Agronomical Research, France), Michele Lamont (Harvard University), Lawrence Lessig (Harvard University), David Marsden (London School of Economics), Charles Mills (City University of New York), Chantal Mouffe (University of Westminster), Jan-Werner Müller (Princeton University), Susan Neiman (Einstein Forum), Thomas Piketty (EHESS-Paris School of Economics), Michel Pimbert (Coventry University, Executive Director of Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience), Raj Patel (University of Texas), Katharina Pistor (Columbia University), Dani Rodrik (Harvard University), Hartmunt Rosa (Max-Weber-Kolleg, Erfurt), Benjamin Sachs (Harvard University), Saskia Sassen (Columbia University), Debra Satz (Stanford University), Pablo Servigne PhD (in-Terre-dependent researcher), William Sewell (University of Chicago), Tommie Shelby (Harvard University), Susan Silbey (MIT), Margaret Somers (University of Michigan), George Steinmetz (University of Michigan), Laurent Thévenot (EHESS), Nadia Urbinati (Columbia University), Jean-Pascal van Ypersele de Strihou (UCLouvain), Judy Wajcman (London School of Economics), Léa Ypi (London School of Economics), Lisa Wedeen (The University of Chicago), Gabriel Zucman (UC Berkeley), and many others. The full list can be found at: [democratizingwork.org](https://democratizingwork.org).

## The proposals

The authors and signatories agree that fundamental, structural changes are required to emerge from the crisis on a sustainable course. They offer concrete possibilities to enact these three principles:

1. Democratize businesses: workers should be considered citizens in the workplace. The authors and signatories argue that raising the wage floor and narrowing the wage gap is absolutely necessary, but will not be enough. Workers have proved once again during this crisis that they are the labor investors, which constitute the core constituency of companies. Yet they have no rights to govern them. Workers should have the right to be represented in the decision-making process of firms (e.g. choice of the CEO, profit distribution, etc.). It is unjust, unsustainable, and also dangerous for society to leave the company's strategy in the hands of shareholders alone.
2. Decommodify work: labor should not be treated as a mere commodity that is bought and sold. Societies should guarantee decent and useful employment to all who seek it – the right to work, which will allow everyone to live in dignity, should be enacted potentially through job guarantee programs. The right to work will also allow society as a whole to better respond to the social and environmental needs we face.
3. Remediate: the real and pressing limits of our planet should be respected. States must condition their support to businesses on their acceptance of profound changes to their business models. In addition to respecting strict environmental and social standards, companies must create real internal democracy. It is only by allowing workers' voices to be heard alongside the ones of the shareholders that the needs of the collective – in particular environmental and social needs – will prevail over the interests of shareholders alone.

## A scientific approach

*"Our responsibility, as scientists and scholars, is to help society choose its future by providing useful knowledge, based on rigorous studies of different ways to organize,"* state Isabelle Ferreras, Julie Battilana and Dominique Méda. *"Through their research, academics can help society to learn from past mistakes and, by studying ongoing initiatives, help design alternatives that break with the status quo, and set our societies on the path of an economic future that is both sustainable and democratic."*

## Women driving change

It should be noted that this op-ed was initiated by women. This makes it all the more exceptional in the world of academic research. *"It undoubtedly also reflects on the essential role that women are playing in helping managing this crisis"*, note the initiators of the project.

## And tomorrow?

The 3,000 signatories of this op-ed are convinced that societies must make a tremendous change in course and put workers (nurses, cashiers, garbage collectors, agricultural workers, teachers, and beyond) back where they belong: at the heart of our values and decisions. Only

such a profound shift will create the kind of virtuous cycle we need to fight against our current health, climate, economic and political crisis. “As scholars and scientists, say the initiators, we see ourselves as allies of all agents of change -, union or business, elected officials, civic associations, or citizens - who want to see the world go into that direction.”

## **Contacts**

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## **List of scholars who have signed (updated daily)**

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Fte5UbA-tDDBq5sBsFNYdr-13S\\_n63Us/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Fte5UbA-tDDBq5sBsFNYdr-13S_n63Us/view)

## **List of medias and platforms that will publish this op-ed on 16 May 2020**

CONFIRMED NATIONAL PUBLICATIONS AS OF MAY 15 (39)

### *America*

Argentina - Ambito  
Brazil - La Folha de Sao Paulo  
Chile - Radio y Diario Universidad de Chile  
Perú - El Comercio  
United States - Boston Globe  
Uruguay - La Diaria

### *Asia*

China - Made In China Journal  
Hong Kong - South China Morning Post  
India - The Wire

### *Europe*

Belgium - De Morgen

Belgium - Le Soir  
Czech Republic - Czechia - A2Iarm  
Denmark - Politiken  
Estonia - Delfi  
Finland - Helsingin Sanomat  
France - Le Monde  
Germany - Die Zeit  
Iceland - Stundin  
Italy - Il Manifesto  
Netherlands - De Groene Amsterdammer  
Norway - Klassekampen  
Poland - Gazeta Wyborcza  
Poland - Krytyka Polityczna  
Portugal - Diário de Notícias  
Spain - Publico  
Spain - El Diario  
Spain - La Vanguardia  
Switzerland FR - Le Temps  
Turkey - Cumhuriyet  
United Kindgom - The Guardian

*Oceania*

Australia - The Guardian

*MENA region*

Israel - Davar  
Iran - Meidaan  
Lebanon - Assafir Al Arabi  
Morocco - Média24  
Morocco - Lakome2  
Tunisia - La Presse  
Tunisia - Assahafa  
Tunisia - Barr al Aman Research Media

CONFIRMED PLATFORMS (2)

Crooked Timber  
Disonancia (Peru)