Although there is a general impression, which is fostered by official academic and journalistic opinion, that all of this is happening because of the rise of scientific technology and development of machinery, this process of degradation of work is not really dependent upon technology at all (H. Braverman, Labour and Monopoly Capital—The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century (1974), 1998, p. 319).

Although the quote above refers to technical developments during the course of what we now consider the second and the third industrial revolution in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it also applies to the fourth industrial revolution that is unfolding now and that again fundamentally changes the way we organize work. And again, it is not clear which direction these developments will take. Therefore, this chapter starts out with two scenarios of how working might look in 2030. From the viewpoint of those delivering the work, their working and living conditions can change for the better or the worse now. For the sake of this argument, the scenarios will be called “Heaven 2030” and “Hell 2030,” although I choose not to exaggerate too much but try to stay rather realistic.

**Heaven 2030**
In the coming decade, digital automation will displace many manufacturing jobs worldwide but, at the same time, will generate many more—and not just new ones: better ones, too. By 2030, artificial intelligence will most likely

**Hell 2030**
As in 2030, workers can work from home and freely choose and manage their working hours as well as their course of work. They now operate autonomously as hyper-flexible one-person-cost units. Because they are self-

(continued)
replace *tasks*, not jobs, and robots will, for the most part, work collaboratively with humans. Workers will depart from having to do “one single task every day, all day” to more strategic roles that require more critical thinking. Robots instead will perform those standardized, repetitive, mechanized tasks—those monotonous and dehumanizing tasks that pursuant to Karl Marx lead to labor alienation. At the same time, the unlikely-to-be-automated jobs will gain in importance. These are, on the one hand, occupations that require human interaction and critical, empathetic thinking, like a social worker or a school teacher. On the other hand, these are jobs that resist standardization as a whole and, therefore, cannot be easily automated, like professional cleaning. While cleaning *tasks* can surely be automated—and incidentally lift some weight off the shoulders of a cleaner—the cleaning process itself requires strategic thinking and a comprehensive understanding of the process. Thus, jobs that for a long time have been underpaid and underestimated, as well as taken for granted, will be recognized as essential and consequently will be respected and valued in society. This will result in better wages and a higher social status.

But the automation of work just paints a part of the general picture. Overall, jobs in 2030 will be more autonomous, self-determined, flexible, and creative. Because of the stay-at-home policies worldwide during the coronavirus pandemic, companies discovered that remote working is not only possible but also a plausible alternative way of organizing work that benefits both the employer and the employee. Flexible time management leads to more efficiency that results in greater productivity. With that comes more revenue, which ultimately leads to fewer working hours for better wages for employees and greater profits for employers who can, at the same time, easily assume more social responsibility.

determined and not subject to orders concerning their work-related behavior, they do not need protective labor and employment legislation anymore. Everybody is their own boss and responsible only for themselves. Self-employment means being self-dependent, choosing your work equipment, working place, and working hours, as well as your insurance policies. Therefore, companies will successfully rid themselves of labor-law provisions and shift both responsibility and risk to workers. Unemployment benefits are hard to come by because it is widely believed that every cent spent on an unemployed person reduces the incentive to work and encourages a lifestyle of social parasitism. And finally, not depending on society to help you out is what defines your freedom. Paid sick leave? No need, because you’re free to insure yourself (or not). Moreover, if you can work from home, you might as well work from your bed. Mandatory occupational accident risk insurance? You choose your work equipment and workplace, which is why you are responsible for work-related accidents yourself.

Because of the automation of labor, millions of unskilled manual workers will lose their jobs. Today’s lower-income households will slide directly into poverty, with no reliable safety net to catch the fall. Masses of unemployed workers with no means lead to a severe loss of purchasing power and demand. This is followed by a decrease in productivity and an increase of prices, which ends in reducing the purchasing power even further, leading to a vicious cycle that will eventually be followed by a new great depression and an increase in inequality.
1 The Starting Point: Two Views on Flexibility

All developments in the world of work since the 1980s and 1990s, from both employers and employees’ perspective, are targeted toward increased flexibility. This was made possible by deregulation and widening the spaces in which both parties maneuver. Whether they both benefit from this and to what extent is a yet unanswered question. The outcome though will be the result of a struggle as both parties to the employment relationship have different perspectives on what this increased flexibility might mean for them.

For workers, flexibility means increased autonomy, i.e., to decide where, when, how much, and what work to do as well as how to organize it. This is not actually a new aim but one that is as old as the critical debates about capitalism and its effect on the individual. This is well mirrored in one of the best-known quotes of Karl Marx in *The German Ideology* (1845/1846): “For as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have in mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic. This fixation of social activity, this consolidation of what we ourselves produce into an objective power above us, growing out of our control, thwarting our expectations, bringing to naught our calculations, is one of the chief factors in historical development up till now.” In this view, technical progress is organized in an empowering way, making it possible for all individuals to lead an autonomous life and enjoy a maximum amount of freedom. The vision, therefore, is to spread the benefits of a change in the way work is organized as widely and as evenly as possible.

This is not that different from the vision J. M. Keynes (1930) lays out in his famous essay “Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren” on what working and living might look in 2030 due to technological change: “I draw the conclusion that, assuming no important wars and no important increase in population, the economic problem may be solved, or be at least within sight of solution, within a hundred years. This means that the economic problem is not—if we look into the future—the permanent problem of the human race. Why, you may ask, is this so startling? It is startling because—if, instead of looking into the future, we look into the past—we find that the economic problem, the struggle for subsistence, always has been hitherto the primary, most pressing problem of the human race—not only of the human race, but of the whole of the biological kingdom from the beginnings of life in its most primitive forms. Thus we have been expressly evolved by nature—with all our impulses and deepest instincts—for the purpose of solving the economic problem. If the economic problem is solved, mankind will be deprived of its
traditional purpose. Will this be a benefit? If one believes at all in the real values of life, the prospect at least opens up the possibility of benefit.”

But increased autonomy for all is not an inevitable consequence of technological progress though, as employers often—more or less explicit—have another view on flexibility. For them, this is less about increased employee autonomy but about adjusting working hours, as well as the course of work, or even the number of workers to business needs and to avoid unproductive times. The aim is to “cut the slack” and to lower the costs of labor. The fruits of technological change that help to organize work more efficiently, therefore, shall not be distributed that evenly but mostly left with the employer. Following this approach, increased flexibility may also mean less security for workers, more competition between them, and a race to the bottom concerning wages and working conditions.

2 Is Everything Really that New?

If we look at the possible future of work and the two scenarios above, one often finds oneself asking what is actually new and what are just old issues over again—of course, painted in bright colors and worded in a fancy new language. In a situation like this, it very much helps to read some of the classics like Harry Braverman and his seminal book *Labour and Monopoly Capital* (1974) about the effects the first two industrial revolutions had on who controls the labor process. Building on Marx, Braverman, in his harsh critique, especially on the Taylorist mode of production, argues that the use of monopoly power over knowledge to control each step of the labor process and its mode of execution led to power shifts within the workplace. And this had negative effects on the quality of work, especially on the autonomy of the employees, the degradation of work in the twentieth century as Braverman calls it in the subtitle of the book. But, and here comes the positive twist, this is not the automatic effect of the technological development but of what people made of it. Braverman condenses this idea in a speech that is included in an annex to the 25th-anniversary edition of the book and the quote at the beginning of this chapter is taken from this. Pointedly, it argues that neither heaven nor hell is the automatic result of technological changes but that the direction the future of work will take will be the result of decisions people make at different levels, whether in the workplaces, in parliaments and administration in the different national states, on the EU level and globally. And not everything has to be invented from scratch. We can build on what generations before us have developed to deal with the challenges that the first waves of industrialization presented us with.

3 Enter Labour Law and Collective Bargaining

One of the answers found then was the regulation of work and the development of collective bargaining based on the finding that individual contracts only will not lead to satisfactory results for the many and will only benefit the few. Therefore, to use
the language in the title of this chapter, the approach was to look at the possible hell and try to divert it as much toward heaven as possible. This is very much the approach labor law has: It deals with what is called the “labor problem”—the inherent imperfections and vulnerabilities in employment relationships, i.e., the potential that work can be hell and how we might make it a little bit more like heaven on earth by way of regulation and institutions.

In a market-based economy, we, of course, have to ask for the justification of such regulatory intervention. The mainstream understanding of our economic model in Europe is that we usually trust the market to organize the relationships of its participants by way of a contract to reach outcomes that benefit us all. But when it comes to organizing work, we have realized that the market approach does not function that well because of at least two factors: the subordination and the dependency of the worker.

- **Subordination**, meaning that those workers have, in a way, sold their freedom to a certain extent—usually for a certain number of hours of the day they have subjected themselves to orders of their employers. They can, therefore, tell them what to do during that time. This way of exerting authority over another person not only restricts the autonomy of the workers but also leads to democratic deficits.

- The second factor, **dependency**, is usually understood as an economic dependency, which means the dependency on the income from the work to sustain oneself due to the lack of other sources of income. This leads to unequal bargaining powers and often to low levels of pay and other unfair working conditions. Some have an even broader understanding of the notion of dependency, also taking into account the importance of work for fulfilling social and psychological needs making employees even more vulnerable and dependent on their employment relationships.

This is nothing new, and in the past, we have found arrangements and compromises that made work, if not heaven, at least bearable to some extent: unions and collective bargaining, codetermination at the workplace and company level, and—last but not least—protective labor laws regulating among other issues minimum wages, working time restrictions, antidiscrimination legislation, and protection against dismissal.

If we now look at the changes in the labor markets—or, in other words, at the future of work—we have to ask ourselves if these strategies of the past are still fit for purpose in the future. In a way, they still are because the mode of production has not changed so much that the two factors, subordination and dependency, do not play a role anymore. Regardless of all narratives about disruption and business models that allegedly do not fit into existing regulations, they are still prevalent but—and this is the change—may look differently now.

But let’s ask ourselves briefly what is actually happening. Globalization, technological developments, demographic change, and climate change, as well as the
change of personal values like individualization, all alter the way we are working today, and they will do so in the future.

4 And Again: Flexibility

There seems to be a need for increased flexibility by both employers and employees. It seems that nobody wants a classic “nine to five” office job anymore. Everybody is looking for a flexible work schedule but for different and often conflicting reasons: a better work-life-balance and reconciliation of work and family life on the one hand and, on the other, a reduction of idle times and costs for extra work. Before this background, we see the emergence of new forms of employment across Europe and also globally. On the one hand, these new forms have transformed the traditional one-to-one relationship between employer and employee, and on the other, they are characterized by unconventional work patterns and places of work or by the irregular provision of work. To name but a few: employee or job sharing, ICT-based mobile work, voucher-based work and platform work (Eurofound, New forms of employment, 2015a). These examples give a good impression of the present dynamics of the labour markets and the contractual parties’ as well as policymakers’ creativity to fulfill the need for the increased flexibility of both employers and employees. And usually, they only work because of the availability of new technologies like smartphones, cloud technology, and big data.

This leads us to the technical side of the developments: Here, the concept of the fourth industrial revolution and the digital transformation of work comes in. Like the revolutions that preceded it, the so-called “Fourth Industrial Revolution” has the potential to raise global income levels and improve the quality of life for populations around the world. Technology has made new products and services possible that increase the efficiency and pleasure of our personal lives. Following this line of argument, technological innovation may lead to a supply-side miracle, with long-term gains in efficiency and productivity. Transportation and communication costs will drop, logistics and global supply chains will become more effective, and the cost of trade will diminish. All of this will open new markets and drive economic growth. This sounds like a globalized consumers’ heaven.

But at the same time, this digital revolution—and this is where the hell perspective comes in—could yield greater inequality and lead to the degradation of the quality of work. This may be particularly true for the potential of technology to disrupt labor markets. As automation substitutes labor across the entire economy, the net displacement of workers by machines might exacerbate the gap between the returns to capital and the returns to labor. On the other hand, it is also possible that the displacement of workers by technology will, on the whole, result in a net increase in safe and rewarding jobs.

The influential green paper “Arbeiten 4.0” (Working 4.0) by the German Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, published in 2015, names the following possible areas of conflict: labor market effects, digital platforms, big data, industry 4.0, flexible working—beyond a culture of employee presence—and finally changes in the
company organization. Here, all the topics that are touched upon are where existing regulations may not be fit for purpose anymore. It has to be stated that—at least in Europe—instead of an abrupt, disruptive change, a rather linear continuation of the megatrend away from the formal employment relationship toward atypical employment and beyond into the realms of self-employment can be detected (Risak 2017; Eurofound 2015a). The current developments can be clustered under three headers that stress the flexible and even liquid form of organizing work in the twenty-first century. Central to all of them is that the use of new technologies is blurring the boundaries between the traditional employment contract and self-employment:

- “Working beyond working time”
- “Working beyond the internal workplace”
- “Working beyond two-party relationships” (Risak 2017)

Interestingly, in some fields (especially working time), the changes were driven by new legislation and policy decisions like the extension of the daily and weekly maximum working hours in Austria in 2018 or the increased possibilities to opt-out of the maximum weekly working hours (48 on average according to the EU Working Time Directive 2003/88/EC) over the last decade in the member states of the European Union (Eurofound 2015b). In others (especially mobile working and home office), new forms of work organization are becoming more prevalent due to practices in some companies and lately due to externalities like the COVID-19 pandemic (Deloitte 2020). They will then lead to the adaption of existing legislation. And other forms of work, especially platform work, are often not regulated yet (European Commission 2019).

5 Where Do We Go from Here?

And this brings us back to the title of this chapter: Working in 2030: Heaven or Hell? The direction developments will take also depend very much on how we will adapt existing legislation and labor market institutions like unions, collective bargaining, and company-level employee representation to a changing environment. All these institutions are the product of learning how to deal with technological progress during the (first and second) industrial revolution and the societal changes resulting from it if left unchanneled. Not dealing with the abovementioned “labor problem” not only led to enormous inequality and social conflict but also to the First World War. It is, therefore, no surprise that after this war that the Versailles Peace Treaty of 1919/1920 also includes the foundation of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) based on the finding that “universal and lasting peace can only be established if it is based upon social justice.” The rest of the preamble addresses issues that are as pressing now as they were 100 years ago:
“And whereas conditions of labour exist involving such injustice, hardship and privation to large numbers of people as to produce unrest so great that the peace and harmony of the world are imperiled; and an improvement of those conditions is urgently required; as, for example, by the regulation of the hours of work, including the establishment of a maximum working day and week, the regulation of the labour supply, the prevention of unemployment, the provision of an adequate living wage, the protection of the worker against sickness, disease and injury arising out of his employment, the protection of children, young persons and women, provision for old age and injury, protection of the interests of workers when employed in countries other than their own, recognition of the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value, recognition of the principle of freedom of association, the organization of vocational and technical education and other measures.”

The question is again how to direct the future of work in 2030 toward heaven and not, as one might be tempted to say, back toward hell. One of the main challenges is the scope of application of labor law and collective bargaining that now culminates in the question: employed or self-employed? The answer is essential as, in the past, only persons working in subordination were seen needing protection and therefore covered by labor laws and collective agreements. However, new ways of organizing work have led to the conclusion that there is a growing number of self-employed workers that are in a similar situation as employees and therefore in need of protection. It is, therefore, essential to adapt the personal scope of labor laws and to include vulnerable self-employed as well (Risak and Dullinger 2018).

Just like 100 years ago, the question of flexibility has to be dealt with. Then, it was about the limitation of work hours and the introduction of the 8-hour working day. Now, it is also about safeguarding rest periods in times when employees can be reached 24/7 due to modern information and communication technology (ICT). In order that flexibility works not only in favor of employers but also to the benefit of employees, a real right to disconnect is now essential to protect not only the health but also the social life of workers.

At the core of this discussion is also about how governments and social partners will have to deal with labor market disruptions by adapting collective representation, institutions, and—last but not least—social protection that is often very much based on the concept of the standard employment relationship. The answers to the question are still open and very much depends on both sides of the employment relationship as well as the governments and parliaments what direction the future of work will take. It is important to work together toward the goal and that this time it will not be a process of degradation of work in the twenty-first century but one of increased autonomy, better job quality, and more self-fulfillment inside and outside work. The potential to move in this direction, toward heaven, is there, but this will not come without a struggle.
Like 100 years ago, the ILO can play a significant role in making the transition into the new way of working, one that takes into account all the stakeholders, promoting social dialogue between governments as well as between worker and employer representatives on an international level. It has increased importance as innovative ways of organizing work make use of the virtual sphere and therefore do not stop at physical borders—ways to regulate work therefore have to follow this development and aim toward universal application to avoid a race to the bottom with regard to labor conditions.

Social dialogue, as promoted by the ILO, is first and foremost a fundamental principle of democracy, and it is at the heart of the work of this international organization. It embodies the right of representative groups to express their views on public policies affecting their interests and to have these views taken into serious account in the formulation and implementation of policies. Social dialogue includes all types of negotiation, consultation, or simply exchanging information between, or among, representatives of governments, employers, and workers, on issues of common interest. In the past, this has led to better policies by drawing on the knowledge and experience of the social partners, and it provides a forum where the trade-off between competing interests can be negotiated and resolved in the overall national interest. Social dialogue also induces support for the proposed measures and hence preempts future opposition and conflict that would otherwise reduce their effectiveness.

One of the issues of social dialogue is how proper representation of all members of society can be achieved. This has been discussed throughout the ILO’s more than 100 years of existence. Each time new structures were created in the labor market, the issue of freedom of association of those new structures was debated. The rapid developments in the beginning of the twenty-first century took these debates to the extreme. For example, it soon became evident that a wave of change in the way we live and work was ongoing, provoked by the fourth industrial revolution due to artificial intelligence and digitalization. And this also led to new ways of organizing work in the gray zone between dependent employment and self-employment. It is yet not sure who represents this group and if existing labor regulations apply to them. However, it wasn’t until after the COVID-19 crisis that it became evident that the wave had become a tsunami. The crisis not only challenged health systems but also how we work. This tsunami of change gave a final push to the ongoing shift in the way we valued and organized work, both paid and unpaid, and thus called for a change in how the different actors in society are represented. This was translated into a shift from shareholder to stakeholder engagement, where all actors in society became the protagonist. It became evident that social dialogue was the way out from a deep depression/recession, resulting from the lockdowns in 2020 and 2021. And in my view, it will also be the avenue of choice to face the challenges of making work in 2030 more like heaven and less like hell. But again, this is not an automatism but the result of struggles between the different interest groups. Proper representation
of all stakeholders at all levels of regulation (company and industry level, national and international) as well as participatory processes safeguarding the voice and influence of all relevant actors remain of vital relevance to make use of the advances in technology to benefit all: not only employers but also workers and society as a whole.

7 In 2030, Social Dialogue and Representative Participation Will Be as Relevant as Ever

It is assumed that debates, followed by initiatives and programs, including in the ILO, address the issue of proper representation for all in the name of social justice (ILO 2019a, b). For such social dialogue to take place, the following must exist in 2030:

- Strong, independent workers’ and employers’ organizations with the technical capacity and access to relevant information to participate in social dialogue
- Political will and commitment to engage in social dialogue on the part of all the parties
- Respect for the fundamental rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining
- Appropriate institutional support

Social dialogue has also changed. In order to facilitate social dialogue, industrial relations, collective bargaining, and the conclusion of collective agreements, many countries have:

- Adapted legal, institutional, and other frameworks that enable the parties to engage effectively. Many institutions have also strengthened their ability to function and influence the dialogue by improving their technical capacity, structure, and effectiveness.
- Encouraged collective bargaining in emergency situations to mitigate negative effects on workers. For example, in a health emergency, collective bargaining can establish any cuts in working hours, safety at work, etc.
- Governments facilitate forums for social dialogue that include different groups in society, such as youth, older workers, and disabled workers, including youth organizations and others that represent civil society in social dialogue.
- Informal workers (including domestic workers) and unpaid workers (including care workers), as well as some platform workers, are organized by occupation in order to encourage long-term association.
- Autonomous social dialogue between workers and employers and their respective organizations is also encouraged and supported.
- Resources are made available to strengthen the capacity of social partners.
- Include all workers in the economy, from those just starting out to those approaching retirement in unions or employers’ organizations. Young people
are particularly encouraged to join, and membership can be transferred to the many jobs that they may do during their working life.

- Communication to members of unions is facilitated digitally. Information campaigns target schools, students, and young academics, while others have opened up membership to the self-employed and students. Trade unions have also developed new forms of digital support and services and online communities.

By 2030, many countries have made a considerable effort to include all members of society in social dialogue for the development and maintenance of decent work for all as a reaction to putting in place suitable structures and institutions for a “better normal” post-COVID-19. The dialogue has supported the development of better employment outcomes and attempts to address the polarization of jobs. In 2030, there could be, however, other countries that are still struggling with the organization of social dialogue. The ILO supports creating an enabling environment for social dialogue in all its member states as a lifelong active society supported through social dialogue facilitates the transitions of people between school, jobs, training, care, and eventually retirement. An approach to lifelong social dialogue is conducive to meet the many challenges of today’s and tomorrow’s world of work (cf. Chacaltana and Prieto 2019).

8 Implications for Managers, Employers, Trade Unions, and Governments

It has become evident that the direction the future of work will take is not yet clear. As the Global Commission of the Future of Work of the ILO (2019a, p. 44) pointed out, technical advances can free workers from arduous labor as well as from dirt, drudgery, danger, and deprivation. They can also reduce work-related stress and potential injuries. But on the other hand, the recent technological changes may also reduce worker control and autonomy, as well as the richness of work content, resulting in a potential deskilling and decline in worker satisfaction. Thus, realizing the potential of technology in the future of work depends on fundamental choices about work design and, in the end, deciding on whom the new way of work should benefit in the end: the employer, the employees, or society as a whole? Or, in other words, will it result in heaven 2030 or hell 2030?

Which direction working in 2030 will take should be negotiated in a manner that allows the representation of all relevant interests and thereby balancing them evenly. We should never forget what we have learned from the past, i.e., that “universal and lasting peace can only be established if it is based upon social justice.” In this endeavor, employers and managers, as well as trade unions and governments, play an essential role in the implementation of a “renewed social contract” that works for all. Thus, they should not overstate their individual interests but also take into account those of the other side and of society in general. This way, the developments can be directed toward the vision of “heaven 2030” or, in other words, toward more rewarding and autonomous work that does not lack security and social protection.
This especially means avoiding the “flexibility trap” resulting from the narrative promoted especially by the business models of the platform (gig) economy: Flexibility and worker autonomy have to come at the price of giving up protection. This was not true in the past as the European, especially the Scandinavian, social model showed. And it should also be remembered that there is nothing new or even innovative about precarious working conditions. To avoid losing the benefits gained, the fruits of increased productivity due to technical change have to be spread evenly between everybody concerned. It can lead to fewer working hours for better wages for employees and greater profits for employers who can, at the same time, assume social responsibility more easily. Social dialogue and collective bargaining at all levels, as well as state intervention by way of legislation, have proved to be an adequate tool to achieve this in the past and are still able to do so in 2030 and beyond. They still matter.

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