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Edited by
Paul Thompson and Chris Warhurst

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Preface

As is usual in this Series, most of the chapters are drawn from papers contributed to the Annual International Labour Process Conference. Indeed the main impetus for the book came from a feeling that the Series needed a volume that returned to some of the 'classical' roots of labour process writings. This does not imply anything negative about the new directions and issues dealt with in recent volumes, but represents a positive desire to enable contributors writing in a critical tradition to focus on some of the core themes of changes in the nature of work itself, which was after all the motivating force of early labour process analysis.

This is particularly pertinent in the current period. As the millennium approaches popular discourse is deluged with futurist babble. When work is not ending, it is beginning anew, transformed by fresh challenges and visions: smart, flexible, committed employees replacing the sullen, disengaged factory hands and office drudges of industrial society. But what is the office, the factory or the hospital of the future? We hope that the eleven chapters in this book can help answer that question and provide a more accurate picture than that filtered through the 'popular'.

This is also our purpose in our introductory chapter. But we want to engage *with* those popular images of change more than engage *in* another review of the literature and debates. It is important to engage and, whenever possible, supplant erroneous mainstream accounts of the future of the workplace. To do otherwise would be to repeat those mistakes of social science that Braverman sought to rectify. However this is not a sterile exercise in maintaining a legacy. Mainstream accounts have far too much leverage on public perceptions and the deliberations of policy makers. It is a task for all of us to attempt to enjoin and make a positive contribution to those perceptions and deliberations about the future of the workplace. Our introductory chapter therefore starts with an exposition of those popular themes before exploring the issues through an examination of the key sectors of waged work: routine, technical, professional and managerial.

We have tried to bring together a collection of papers that covers key developments in all the main sectors of work, but, inevitably, given the sources available, some areas are covered more than others. It is, additionally, about waged work rather than all types of work activity. Though the internationalisation of the political economy is the context for many of the contributions, the empirical focus is primarily Europe and the US.

Finally, empirically-informed theoretical analysis has always been the aim of the Labour Process Conference and Series. This volume is squarely in that tradition. Though the theoretical perspectives sometimes differ, the chapters

as a whole provide a sceptical, research-led antidote to much that is misinformed or misunderstood about the 'new workplace'.

Two hard-pressed colleagues whom the authors would particularly like to thank in the preparation of this volume are Kirsteen Daly and Janie Ferguson for their secretarial and library resource support respectively.

Paul Thompson
Chris Warhurst

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