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Introduction

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The story of Greece in the last decade is a story of crises. One would struggle to find an area of public life that has remained unscathed by the economic, political and social crises that redrew the political and legal landscape and profoundly affected the psyche of the Greek people. Against this backdrop, it is fair to say that the changes to the Greek labour market and the employment relations system have been cataclysmic, both from an institutional and from a normative point of view.

As the worst of this crisis may hopefully be behind us, it is time to reflect where we are and where we go from here. Identifying what old problems remain or what new problems have been created by austerity policies and deregulatory interventions, and figuring out what challenges lie ahead for regulators and social partners is the key aim of the present volume. The safest – if not the only – way to gauge the future prospects of the Greek labour market is to have a clear understanding of the political context of the crisis that has shaped the present state of affairs.

Towards the end of 2009 the sustainability of the Greek debt made international headlines. With its government gross debt standing at 126.7% of GDP, Greece was considered by the international markets as a liability that, sooner or later, would have to face the consequences of running extensive public debts. This line of analysis was, of course, not new; already in January 2009, less than a year after the 2008 financial crisis that would determine the political and economic realities of the following decade, Greece was considered by international observers as a critical case (Gourinchas *et al.* 2016).

It is true that the country was not hit by the global economic downturn as heavily as most of its EU counterparts – primarily due to the fact that its banking sector was not as exposed to the international markets and to toxic debts as other European countries. Yet the global financial crisis found Greece in a vulnerable position , its public debt and its budget deficit seemed to grow at a rate faster than that of other EU countries, culminating in what Gourinchas *et al.* (2016: 14) call the 'three shocks' in the Greek economy: a sovereign debt crisis, a banking crisis, and a 'sudden stop', with foreign investors unwilling to lend to Greece. The revelation by the newly elected PASOK government in September 2009 that the country's actual debt and deficit was much larger than what had officially been reported to the EU authorities opened Pandora's Box. For the first time since 1932 the prospect of defaulting was once again in the horizon (Tsoulfidis and Zouboulakis 2016).

In reality, the Greek economy was showing some disconcerting signs since the late 2008s – early 2009s, with consumption in slight decline – largely as a response to the 2008 global crisis – and Greek businesses feeling an unfamiliar pressure on their finances after more than two decades of relative economic tranquillity. Nevertheless, and despite these turbulences, this was still a period of belief in the dynamic potential of the Greek economy. This belief was fuelled by the bubble of economic prosperity created in the past decade, due to the cheap money that both businesses and households had access to after the country's entry into the Eurozone (Theodoropoulou 2016).

It was only in the late 2009s – early 2010s – not long after the international rating agencies downgraded Greece's long-term debt from (A-) to (BBB+) – that public mood started to shift. It was then gradually becoming apparent that Greece's liquidity problems rendered the country's public debt unsustainable and the prospect of defaulting more real than ever. Against this backdrop, George Papandreou's PASOK government turned to its EU partners for assistance. As it turned out little could be immediately achieved on that front, as the EU was equally unprepared (both institutionally and politically) to deal with a prospective default of a Eurozone member-state. The absence of a support mechanism emerged as a potential Trojan horse that could derail the Euro project and revealed the political and economic "black holes" at the heart of the EU's monetary system.

Since the ECB and other EU member state banks were holding a lion's share of the country's sovereign debt, finding a solution to the Greek case became a matter of the utmost urgency, in order to avoid a new round of financial crises that could shake the very foundations of the European project. As a result, and after a long round of negotiations with its European partners, the Greek government signed, in May 2010, the first (of three) Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the IMF (the three institutions that would thereafter be infamously known as the Troika) (European Commission 2010; European Commission 2012; European Commission 2015). In return for financial assistance of €110 billion, the Greek government agreed to implement a series of fiscal and structural changes to the Greek economy and society. Unsurprisingly, the demands of the Troika obeyed the same neo-liberal logic and were inspired by the same austerity rationale that dominated responses to the 2008 crisis and defined the political trajectory of the IMF and the European Commission in the last decade.

In 2010, therefore, Greece found itself in the midst of a *double crisis* that struck at the very foundations of its economy, its society and its political establishment. A *fiscal crisis*, on the one hand, that quickly evolved to a *financial crisis*, leading to high levels of unemployment, closure of businesses, rise in poverty and emigration of capital (both human and otherwise). And an *institutional crisis*, on the other hand, that radically transformed the identity and function of deeply-embedded institutions that governed Greek life.

Although the severity of the measures introduced by the MoU came both as a surprise and as a shock to the Greek citizenry, the new direction of travel was, in reality, not at all new. Policies of a similar or of the same, "spirit" had been introduced across the EU since the early 1990s. As Hyman (2015: 5) has argued "EU policy has moved increasingly towards the economists' orthodoxy that employment protection is a source of labour market rigidity, creating a dichotomy between privileged 'insiders' and the socially excluded". Fiscal consolidation, the retreat of the state and the deregulation of employment relations were common features of policies that became part of the normative picture across Europe (Crouch 2011), but especially in the UK and Germany (Traxler 1995), as well as in the (then) new EU member states (Soulsby *et al.* 2017).

Still, and despite appearances, the Greek case is somewhat different – and in more than one ways. Contrary to (de)regulatory interventions elsewhere, the measures introduced in Greece came at a time of economic stagnation and were reflective of a top-down approach with questionable democratic pedigree. Crucially, the inclusion of a non-European actor in the Troika was, both symbolically and substantively, an admission that the handling of the situation was no longer a European "family matter". Even more importantly, however, the Memoranda policies were introduced in bulk and abruptly, thus creating a deep and profound shock to the economy and to the Greek society, as neither had the necessary time to adjust to the new reality through a process of smooth institutional change.

Despite the profound shock, the new policies were not left uncontested. The Greek public reacted to the threat that the double crisis posed for their livelihood in a variety of ways: politically, socially and psychologically. Unsurprisingly, much of the reaction converged in or around the workplace. Industrial conflict rose exponentially and strikes (especially political strikes) became an everyday reality in the post-MoU environment (Hamann *et al.* 2013; Lindvall 2013; Vandaele 2016). The strikes were accompanied by mass demonstrations in the big urban centres (especially in Athens and Thessaloniki) and many were characterised by severe violence. On the 5th of May 2010, during one of the most massive demonstrations in recent history, unknown individuals burned a subsidiary of a bank in Athens resulting in the death of three employees who were trapped inside[1]. This event, together with the violent nature that many demonstrations tended to acquire, led to a search for alternative means of protest. Inspired by the Spanish *Indignados Movement*, as well as from the Arab spring events, a call to occupy Syntagma square – the main square in the centre of Athens, just opposite the Houses of Parliament – on 25 May 2011 attracted increasing support from diverse segments of the population (Simiti 2014).

[1] https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2010/may/06/greece-crisis-protest-killed (Link correct as of July 2018)

At the same time a large portion of the electorate, disappointed by the failure of mainstream politics to protect their standards of living, and motivated by nationalist feelings fused by what was perceived to be an outside interference into Greek life, turned slowly towards radical politics. Nothing demonstrates this tendency better than the meteoric rise of the extreme right-wing Golden Dawn party in public life. Until the 2009 elections Golden Dawn commanded a mere 0.3% of the vote but during the 2012 elections managed to secure its place in the Greek parliament with 7% of the vote (Halikiopoulou *et al.* 2016; Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou 2013). Finally, disillusioned by the emerging new reality, the destruction of their hopes and the pressure on their wellbeing, many Greeks opted for the 'exit' route: migration, especially among the young and highly skilled workforce, rose (Labrianidis 2014; Labrianidis and Vogiatzis 2013), as did the number of suicides and attempted suicides among the general population (Branas *et al.* 2015; Economou *et al.* 2013).

The signing of the first MoU took place under conditions of extreme pressure. Despite the provisions in the original agreement for the initiation and carrying out of social dialogue regarding, at least, issues related to the labour market little, if any, such dialogue took place. Moreover, the 'one-size-fits-all' model that was introduced by the Troika meant that no research regarding the possible consequences of the adopted policies on the economy and society was ever conducted. In the end, the Greek government appeared as a passive recipient of policies dictated to it by the Troika, with little or no power to alter the course or content of the proposed measures.

Under the cover of "urgency", the MoU put forward a series of actions that radically altered public management, the role of the state, and employment relations (Kouzis 2010). Even after the signing of the Memorandum, during the long implementation period that followed the original agreement, and up to the signing of the Second MoU in 2012, the same *modus operandi* was followed: social dialogue was marginalised, evidence-based policy was inexistent, and the justification for the adoption of said policies rested on a familiar discourse of urgency, crisis and catastrophe, that reinforced and replicated the hegemonic role the creditors had now assumed in the Greek public sphere. The marginalisation or exclusion of social partners from the process of decision making was not something unique to the case of Greece. Similar trends had been observed in Europe in previous years (Heyes *et al.* 2012; Heyes and Lewis 2014), and would be observed in subsequent years in other countries forced to introduce structural adjustments to their employment relations systems (Armingeon and Baccaro 2012; Culpepper and Regan 2014; Hyman 2015; Ioannou and Sonan 2017).

Whether the trajectory of change would have been different had a more democratic and evidence-based approach been adopted, or whether the Troika would indeed be open to such a prospect, is a counterfactual question that is impossible to address. Yet the fact that all social partners complained about the lack of consultation and about their exclusion from the decision-making process is quite telling (Voskeritsian *et al.* 2017). Such an inclusion might have seemed immaterial, or even counter-productive, to the government and Greece's creditors, but this assessment could not have been further from the truth. If one appreciates that resurfacing from a crisis calls for the extensive support and collaboration of all productive forces, the *process of change* becomes as important (if not more) as the *content* of change.

Unfortunately, all subsequent MoUs failed to make this realisation. Breaking with years of tradition, and with deeply-embedded institutions and behaviours, they implemented generic "ready-made" policies without properly considering the institutional context and its underlying dynamics. Inevitably, the MoUs and their drafters failed to accumulate popular and institutional support, which in turn led to a variety of socio-economic problems, conflict being just the tip of that particular iceberg.

All the MoUs were constructed with a simple, and quite straightforward, dual objective: first, to reduce public expenditure and increase taxation to help balance the budget and, second, to create an environment that would help businesses survive and attract investments. Hence, following the classical neo-liberal rationale, flexibility was introduced in the labour market and wage determination was disconnected from sectoral and occupational level collective bargaining, through a process of gradual decentralization (Kornelakis and Voskeritsian 2014; Koukiadaki and Kretsos 2012). Although national and industry level collective bargaining continued to exist, their function, especially in the first couple of years after the signing of the first MoU, became almost entirely marginalized (Grimshaw and Koukiadaki 2016). The logic behind this exercise on internal devaluation was that a decentralized and flexible labour market would allow companies to adjust their costs and labour processes to the new economic realities, thereby avoiding a spike on unemployment, gradually improving their productivity and competitiveness and helping create a welcoming investment environment. Thus, in a series of policies from 2010 till 2012 the Greek institutional context was transformed from a protective one to an extremely deregulated and flexible one, resembling very much a Liberal Market Economy, albeit in a disorganized fashion (Kornelakis and Voskeritsian 2014).

The adopted measures severely impacted various labour market indices. In the two years following the signing of the first MoU, wages plummeted – especially after the curtailing, in 2012, of the National Minimum Wage (MNW) by 22% (32% for workers under the age of 25), the marginalization of sectoral collective bargaining, and the consequent rise of firm-level wage determination (Christopoulou and Monastiriotis 2016; Daouli *et al.* 2013; Ioannou and Papadimitriou 2013; Koukiadaki and Kokkinou 2016; Laliotis *et al.* 2014). Moreover, flexible forms of employment (such as part time employment, compressed hours and flexitime) replaced the more stable and full-time contracts that until then characterized the labour market (Gialis *et al.* 2017; Kretsos 2011).

However, only one part of the equation seemed to function as envisaged: for although wage and employment flexibility was firmly established, their effects on productivity and competitiveness were not discernible. Greek businesses, especially the small and medium ones, continued to close, big capital started to migrate to more stable economic and political environments, the balance of trade remained in deficit and unemployment continued to erupt, reaching levels that the country had not witnessed since the Second World War.

On top of that, several unintended consequences started to emerge. Faced with increased taxation, increased non-wage costs, and the dissolution of the welfare state, employers and employees reverted to the shadow economy to complement their income and to survive. Undeclared work and other illegal practices (such as under-declared employment, under-payment or non-payment of wages, illegal firing of employees, suppression of trade union activities etc.) started to become a norm in the labour market (ILO 2016). Moreover, many companies opted for the opportunities that the new institutional framework provided to unilaterally determine the terms and conditions of employment in their establishments, giving rise to a labour process and a working environment characterized by authoritarianism and exploitation. Faced with increased unemployment, weak trade unions in the private sector, the absence of robust statutory protection, and a crumbling social protection system, many employees had no choice but to embrace the new realities of work.

Greece, being an inward-looking economy that historically relied on internal consumption and internal investments for its growth, and on the presence of a multitude of SMEs (almost 97% of Greek businesses employ less than ten employees), failed to overcome its chronic structural problems and become more competitive in the international markets. A contributing factor was that product prices remained quite inelastic, despite the reduction in production costs (primarily due to the lower labour costs). This inelasticity was attributable both to the currency, as euro fluctuations in line with Eurozone performance did not allow for massive changes in prices and overall cost of living within a single country; and to the fact that Greek companies used the savings they made on labour costs to maintain or, in some cases, increase their profits (Ioakeimoglou 2018). Eventually, this trend was partially addressed through the functioning of the market, but it did not happen overnight and it allowed enough time for serious negative social consequences to play out. Moreover, the focus on labour cost reduction – and not on improving labour productivity through training or investment in the development of human resources – as a means to increase competitiveness further accentuated the negative climate that characterized the labour market.

Structure of the book

As is the case with any radical change, the new employment relations environment generated more questions about the future than answers about the present. What effects, for example, did the decentralization of collective bargaining have on the structure of the employment relations system, the balance of power between the actors, on competitiveness and productivity, on motivation and job satisfaction? How did the Greek companies respond to the changes in law and how was the organization of the labour process influenced? What effects did these changes have on day-to-day employment relations, on managing conflict, on enhancing productivity? How did unemployment and under-employment impact human capital development, and what are the longitudinal consequences for Greece's employees? What are the implications of institutional change for equality and diversity, and especially gender equality, in the labour market? How did the dual crisis impact the labour mobility of young employees? How did the new realities of work impact work-life balance, job quality and overall happiness? What challenges and opportunities did the new institutional environment create for the social partners, and how have they responded to them?

This is just a small sample of the questions that are bound to dominate research on employment relations in Greece for years to come. The purpose of the present volume is to contribute to the ongoing debates about the impact of the crisis and about the post-crisis future of Greece by exploring some of the most significant facets of the Greek labour market. It goes without saying that the multi-faceted nature of the relevant issues entails that one cannot, and indeed should not, attempt to engage with them from a single disciplinary perspective. Identifying, understanding and addressing inherently complex social situations that are dynamic and involve multiple social and institutional actors can only be done through an inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary analytical lens. As a first step in that direction, the present volume contains contributions from scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds, including labour economics, employment relations, and sociology of work. Despite the different analytical tools and theoretical starting points, all the contributions share a common denominator: their objective is to enable our readers to better understand the consequences of the double crisis on the Greek labour market broadly defined.

To better appreciate the direction of change and the effects of the adjustment policies, one should consider the impact the institutional changes and the economic crisis had on the power dynamics in the employment relations system. In the *first chapter*, therefore, Voskeritsian and Kornelakis examine how the new institutional environment led to a redistribution of power across all levels of the employment relations environment. By doing so, they also consider the effects of this power redistribution on capital's and labour's strategies in determining the employment relations realities at the firm and industry levels. The authors argue that apart from the obvious alteration in the two actors' bargaining power, the crisis also changed the legitimacy framework in which the power of the two actors was exercised. Consequently, the way the demands of capital were perceived (and accepted) by individual labour was also altered. Moreover, the structural and institutional dependency of organized labour on the state over the past decades created a space which prevented the development of an effective resistance to capital's demands. Hence, capital was able to take advantage of the legal tools provided by the institutional changes and transform collective bargaining to a zero-sum game. The redistribution of power in the employment relations arena and its concentration in the hands of capital explains the way the MoUs policies impacted on employment relations practices.

One such important impact concerns the effects the crisis had on the structure of collective bargaining and the level of wages. Indeed, as previously mentioned, the downward adjustment of wages was among the cornerstones of all successive MoUs. Ioannou, in the *second chapter*, reviews the effects the changes had across Greece's bargaining structure. Sectoral and occupational agreements, which determined the terms and conditions of employment for most private sector employees up to 2011, suffered a decisive blow. From 2011 onwards, a radical decentralization of collective bargaining takes place, and the once dominant sectoral agreements give up their place to firm level agreements. A major characteristic of the latter, especially those signed by a new negotiating body that was introduced into the employment relations system (the Association of Persons), was that they led to a steep decline in wages. Hence, the implication of these changes was the rapid and extensive disconnection of wage determination from pre-existing collective bargaining structures. These changes have been so profound that even if the 'old' system of wage determination returns, Ioannou argues, we may not necessarily observe a return to the 'old' habits.

Despite the fact that wages in general declined, this was not the case across all sectors. In the *third chapter*, Christopoulou and Monastiriotis explore this issue further, by studying how inter-sectoral wage differentials evolved in Greece before and during the crisis. Using data from the Greek Labour Force Survey, they demonstrate that sectoral wage premia are directly linked with the availability of rents in a specific sector, rather than with the sector's potential for rents or the ability of workers to extract such rents. They also show that the market inefficiency in the allocation of premia increased instead of declining as envisaged by the MoU policies: although the crisis coincided with a lowering of the extent to which premia may be attributable to the availability of rents, it also led to a widening of gross and net sectoral wage differentials. Thus, the reforms did not necessarily lead to a more competitive market environment, as firms continued to offer wage premia when they could.

This may, of course, be a reality in certain sectors and for certain firms, but the conditions in companies that utilized the provisions for decentralized, firm-level bargaining were quite different. As Giannakopoulos and Laliotis argue in *chapter four*, the 2011 reforms on collective bargaining had profound implications for firm-level employment relations. By analyzing almost 900 firm level agreements, the authors conclude that decentralized bargaining was used by companies as a tool to minimize pressure within the workplace, and to reduce wages to the level of the national minimum wage. However, the effects of decentralization differed depending on the negotiating party. Hence, all firm-level agreements signed by Associations of Persons led to severe wage decreases, whereas agreements signed by firm-level trade unions had more moderate wage effects.

Wage moderation and decline was, of course, an expected result of the internal devaluation policies. However, the profound institutional changes had an important impact on other labour market indices as well. All the Memoranda emphasized the *quantitative* element of adjustment, be it an increase in competitiveness through wage adjustment to reflect labour productivity, or the further flexibilization of the labour market to reduce, among other things, unemployment. Yet the double crisis had an important *qualitative* dimension as well, as reflected for instance on the quality of available jobs or the efficient utilization of human capital.

Moving therefore beyond the question of quantity, Veliziotis and Kornelakis in *chapter five* discuss an under-explored issue in Greek employment relations – job quality. Utilizing data from successive European Working Conditions Surveys, they provide a detailed account of the overall quality of jobs in Greece during the past two decades, adopting a comparative European perspective. Their findings reveal a 'twin gap' in the Greek labour market: on the one hand a quantity gap – as reflected on the high levels of unemployment – and on the other, a quality gap – as reflected on the diachronically low levels of reported job quality among Greek employees. Interestingly, Greek employees were generally unhappy about the quality of their jobs even before the crisis, although, as expected, the crisis magnified these experiences. Compared to other EU countries of similar institutional and economic characteristics, Greece seems to be constantly occupying one of the lowest places in the relevant rankings.

The issue of job quality is linked, in one way or another, to the type of job one has. Although the adjustment programmes further enhanced flexibility in the Greek labour market, thus creating a vast market for atypical employment, not everyone participating in this market did so voluntarily. Even though specific demographics – such as students or women with children – seized the new opportunities to their benefit, others found themselves in non-standard employment out of need. As appreciated, involuntary employment has important implications for one's performance, productivity and general well-being, but it also begs the question of the efficient utilization of the country's human capital. If employees cannot effectively utilize their skills then there is high possibility of skills obsolescence, brain-drain and of an increasingly discouraged workforce. Livanos and Pouliakas deal with this important issue in *chapter 6*, by focusing on the extent, trend and determinants of involuntary non-standard employment during the crisis. Their findings are suggestive of a general deterioration in the quality of workplace employment relations. People in this type of employment receive lower wages, have higher chances of not being covered by any type of health or social insurance and are often involved in occupations characterized by low job quality. The authors argue that if Greece is to recover from the crisis, the issue of under-employment must be addressed in parallel to the issue of unemployment.

Although the under-employed may face a series of social and economic problems, their struggle is somewhat easier than that of the unemployed. Since 2010, unemployment levels in Greece quadrupled, reaching a peak of 27% in the general population (and almost 51% among young workers). Unemployment put a huge strain on Greek society, challenging the state's capacity to address the problem, as well as the society's ability to support the unemployed. Greece being a traditional Mediterranean society meant that the family played an important role in substituting the state in providing for, and supporting, the unemployed. However, the experience of unemployment came as a shock to many, influencing the way they perceived themselves, the world, and their future. The book's final section deals with the experience of unemployment and the coping strategies the unemployed developed to overcome the stigma of unemployment.

In *chapter 7*, Karakioulafis explores how the unemployed experience and cope with the loss of work, and how they perceive their present and future situation. Although different individuals develop different strategies to cope with the condition of unemployment, a generalized pessimism about the future and the ability to find a job is observed. Discouragement, therefore, prevails among other significations of unemployment. However, and contrary to the pre-crisis years, the stigma of unemployment seems to be more manageable, due to the shared experience of unemployment across all levels of society. Being unemployed in Greece is no longer the exception but a common experience; it is a reality, no matter how harsh, that has been normalized. Knowing that one is not alone helps mitigate the feelings of incompetence or guilt that burden many of the unemployed. In their struggle to survive, the family (especially the parents and, in some cases, the grandparents) has become an unofficial social security mechanism. Yet this assistance also comes at a psychological cost, since the unemployed carry the guilt of being a burden to their equally struggling parents.

The role of the family as a safety net became more prominent among the young adults – unemployed or not – during the crisis. As Christopoulou and Pantalidou point out in the final chapter (*chapter 8*), the two-way intergenerational dependency that characterized Greek society before the crisis has now assumed a one-way direction, with young people becoming the recipients rather than the providers of support. During these difficult times, families responded by providing either housing or monetary transfers, although due to the pressures on their finances housing became the prominent way to support the young. Using data from the Greek Labour Force Survey, the authors paint a comprehensive picture of the kind of support young people received during the crisis. Among other interesting findings, they reveal that parents 'rescued' more young men than women, something that also reflects the paternalistic structure of the Greek society, since young women were already safely "protected" by the family, conforming to their traditional gender-roles.

Before leaving our readers to delve into the relevant chapters, it is worth offering some final thoughts on how to approach this book and what (not) to expect.

As with any edited volume, there is no pressing need to read the book from cover to cover. It is true, of course, that the particular order of the chapters reveals how they fit together into a single narrative and we are hoping that this will become evident to those who choose to read the book in a linear fashion. But interdisciplinary endeavours such as this one are bound to attract attention from readers of different disciplinary backgrounds and diverse academic persuasions. With this in mind, we believe that interactive engagement with the book should also be encouraged. Starting with a chapter that "speaks" one's own disciplinary language before diving into deeper and, perhaps, hitherto unknown waters may be a perfectly legitimate way into the book, enabling the reader to appreciate how the different disciplinary outlooks shed light to different facets of the subject matter.

We must also concede one caveat that comes with the territory with works of this nature. We are not claiming that this book offers a comprehensive picture of the Greek labour market, of Greek employment relations and of the changes that have reshaped them over the last few years. What we are consciously aiming for, rather, is to provide a snapshot of the current state of affairs and to instigate substantive discussions on present challenges and future prospects. We have no ambition to persuade our readers that this book is telling the whole story – indeed we are not convinced that any book on a volatile and politically charged topic could ever claim to do that. More than anything else, then, this book should be seen as an inspiration for further, rigorous, interdisciplinary research and as an invitation to engage with a substantive and constructive academic, institutional and political dialogue. We are confident that this book will become part of a literature keen on *reimagining, redesigning* and *rebuilding* Greek employment relations for a post-crisis labour market, and we hope that many of our readers will join the fray.

The Editors,

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