Gouvernement de l’entreprise et investisseurs en travail
Histoire critique et relance institutionnelle

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1. **A critical, long-term reading of economic history**

grounded in *empirical research* (what is work today? => what is a firm?)


2. **leading to a practical proposal** (an economic form of bicameralism for the firm => the proposal: *the Bicameral firm*)

Method & Epistemology

- **Origin**: Inductive/field-research work - 6 year-long ethnographic study of a “critical case” (least favorable case): check-out clerks in the supermarket industry in Belgium.

- **Original data set**: 100,000 employees (across industries) in 9 countries (USA, UK, Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Finland, Argentina, and Brazil). Non-random sample, internet generated by the Wage Indicator.org, currently analyzed at the Harvard Labor and Worklife Program.

- **Scope/context**: Western post-industrial societies. Viz. “capitalist democracies” (Cohen & Rogers 1983)

- **Epistemology**: contribution to the hermeneutical (meaning, rooted in the actors’ reflexive understanding) and critical sciences (driven by the emancipatory ‘knowledge interest’ *Habermas* = potential for emancipation)
Contested domain

Private Sphere

Domestic interaction regime

Work

Economic Activities

Public Sphere

Civic -democratic- interaction regime

The central battle through the development of the industrial, now service-based capitalism
A historical perspective about
the **locus** of economic activities

- The history of “capitalist democracies” since the industrial revolution is best understood as a **history of the emancipation of work from the private sphere**, and its expansion into the public sphere.
- With 3 moments:
  - The *first* phase is the transition, caused by the industrial revolution in the 19th century, which slowly moved the workplace out of households into factories;
  - The *second* phase involves both the creation of labor law as distinct from other types of law (commerce), and first collective labor rights (associ., union, works council, Mit-Bestimmung), and, through the establishment of workers’ and union movements, work becomes a central locus of political action;
  - The *third*, and current phase, deepens this transition from private to public, spurred by the transformation of the industrial model into a service-based model, where the work experience confronts workers to the norms of the democratic public sphere.
Expressive attitude to work

- Five main components of the individual attitude toward work:
  - **Instrumental**:  
    1. Work is pursued for monetary compensation (wage)
  - **Expressive (relating to meaning)**:  
    2. Working means being included in the community,
    3. … feeling useful to others, the firm and/or society,
    4. … felling independent, capable to conduct one’s own life,
    5. … doing an interesting job.

- Overall, the individual attitude toward work is **EXPRESSIVE**.
- ✓ Overall, the attitude toward work is fueled with a quest for **meaning**. We should stop considering theories of work which understanding is grounded only in its instrumental dimension.
Public character of work

- **nature of the economy** => from industrial to service-based: more than 70% of the jobs are in the service industries.

- **nature of work** => key in the service model: the presence of customers in the workplace.
  - Working means taking part in the public sphere.

- 2 regimes are vying for governing the workplace
- Sociological account: 2 interaction regimes, pre-democratic vs democratic

  *Interaction regime*: the conventional, normative framework that shape the nature of interactions and give them their meaning (Martuccelli 2001).
Public character of work

Private Sphere

Domestic
-pre-democr.-
interaction regime

Hierarchical: consideration depending on status (master/slaves)

Public Sphere

Civic
-democratic-
interaction regime

Egalitarian: obligation of being treated, and treated others as equals

Economic Activities

Being under customers’ watch, workers mobilize the conventions typical of the public sphere inside the workplace.
Political nature of work

a. Flexibility! Today’s work is marked by flexibility = continuous experience of positioning oneself within collectives/groups.

b. Justice! Beyond the specifics of each situation... the fundamental grammar of the workplace lies with the issue of justice (or, injustice).

a + b = the experience of the political = our conceptions about the just with reference to the collective.
Political nature of work

The shared ‘intuition of democratic justice’

- Workers hold many different conceptions of the just (merit, seniority, private circumstance, formal equality etc.).
- Beyond these different conceptions, the ‘intuition’ of democratic justice.

- This intuition hints at the meta-conception of democratic justice best understood as being the procedure that should organize the debate, setting the choice among the different conceptions of the just, in order to choose the one that will govern the workplace, or each of its specific problems.
What is a Firm?

From this understanding of work, urgent need to recast our understanding, and theory for what is the firm, today:

Traditional theories of the firm (liberal and marxist) are inadequate as the firm is defined by 1 specific rationality: instrumental (for capital: investment for profit, for labor: investment for wage)

A different understanding of the firm based on the analysis of work: 2 types of rationality - instrumental and political - are at the heart of the firm’s success, not just 1 (instrumental)

The next step? How to push forward labor’s transition to the public sphere?
Content

1. A **historical, critical perspective on work** leading to...

2. **a proposal**: a new form of bicameralism at the level of the firm, the proposal: **the Bicameral firm**
A New Picture: Considering the Firm as a Political Institution in transition

➡️ from private to public government, from the government of a few to the government of the many, from the despotic to participatory, if not democratic yet...

➡️ We’ve been there already!
➡️ Learning from history:

Liberal revolutions in the Western world have been about setting limits to heteronomy (the norm of a king or a few), i.e. the quest of a legitimate government.

➡️ One key institutional innovation keeps coming back from Antiquity to modernity: The ‘bicameral moment’, i.e. the recognition of two constituent bodies
From Rome (see Titus-Livius) in 500 BC = Plebeians/Patricians;
to King William of Orange (Britain, 1688)’s Glorious Revolution = Lords/Commons, and on.
The consideration which tells most, in my judgement, in favour of two Chambers ... is the evil effect produced upon the mind of any holder of power, whether an individual or an assembly, by the consciousness of having only themselves to consult. It is important that no set of persons should, in great affairs, be able, even temporarily, to make their sic volo prevail, without asking any one else for his consent. A majority in a single assembly, when it has assumed a permanent character - when composed of the same persons habitually acting together, and always assured of victory in their own House - easily becomes despotic and overweening, if released from the necessity of considering wether its acts will be concurred in by another constituted authority. The same reason which induced the Romans to have two Consuls, makes it desirable there should be two Chambers: that neither of them may be exposed to the corrupting influence of undivided power, even for the space of a single year.

John Stuart Mill (1861 385)
Looking Back at the **History of Bicameralism**

The 3

A condition for:
1/ ____________________
*Lords/Commons*
2/ ____________________
3/ ____________________
many)

=> same requirements/expectations from the ___________
*the firm*

rationalities:
Today’s Capitalist Firm: Considered as Moved by Instrumental Rationality Only

See it as a *Monocameral* Firm

- **Shareholders General Assembly**
- **Board of Directors**
- **Executive Committee**
Proposal: to Recognize the 2 Rationalities, hence the Two Constituent Bodies Making the Firm Possible

the Bicameral Firm

Shareholders = Investors in capital

Labor Providers = Investors in person

Chamber of Representatives of the Capital Investors

Chamber of Representatives of the Labor Investors

Executive Committee = top management

majority vote/veto power

majority vote/veto power

election

election
The Stakes are High

- From this understanding of what work is today...
- To conceiving more just and efficient forms of economic growth

For not recognizing the ‘political rationality’, and its democratic intuition, that infuses work has severe consequences on
- workers’ psychological and physical well-being,
- the efficiency of the firm (innovation potential in a knowledge economy depends directly on employees feeling treated fairly, and being put in a position to contribute at their best),
- citizens’ conceptions of the just,
- in short: society’s general democratic health, and economic productivity at the same time are in the balance.
Thank you!

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