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The modern workplace, or subjects willingness to subject

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Área: LA EMPRESA COMO COMUNIDAD DE PERSONAS: PROPÓSITO COMPARTIDO Y ORIENTACIÓN AL BIEN COMÚN

Palabras Clave:

Private governments, normalizing power, Foucault, false consciousness, corporate authoritarianism, workplace democracy, wealth democratization

RESUMEN:

This paper aims at exploring why working people are willing to give up their autonomy and freedom in the context of work in a way that would be unacceptable for them to do in other settings, i.e., social and personal relationships, political elections, consumption behavior, etc. Furthermore, it analyses why this willingness is not justified only on the basis of its “survival” value? given the current organization of work in capitalist societies and the assumed connection between work and income? but is embraced, and even argued for, by those very subjected to it. The paper draws on Elizabeth Anderson’s research on workplace democracy to analyze authoritarian modes of governance in the private sector, i.e., what Anderson calls “private governments”, which main characteristics for working people are lack of voice in the corporate decision-making process and no easy exit. The paper proceeds to provide a partial explanation as to why this subjugation is rationally justified, embraced and, in some cases, even celebrated by working people. To do that, it draws upon such notions as “willful ignorance” and “ideology”. This investigation is informed by insights from several research traditions: Marxist work on “class consciousness”, Hacking’s “styles of reasoning”, Tuana’s “epistemological ignorance”, and, especially, Foucault’s analysis of modern power. I suggest that Foucault permits to understand what I call “willingness to subjugate” that is more convincing than the one provided by traditional analyses of “false consciousness”. Part of its intellectual appeal is eliminating the patronizing element of the “false consciousness” notion that places “the enlightened” or “woke” person in a position of moral/intellectual superiority. Foucault’s ideas of “disciplinary power” and “normalization” - power is nowadays mostly exercised through defining a standard and having the subjects discipline themselves into fitting into the standard - reveal that, what is at stake for the willing worker, is their very own self-constitution as a subject. Therefore, in order to produce change, new narratives and practices must be developed that would allow subjects to constitute themselves in different directions. Since the analysis in this paper reveals that authoritarianism in the workplace is not a choice of singular authoritarian managers - but rather the design of specific modes of governance at the institutional level-, alternative existing and possible forms of governance are explored that provide a glimpse into a way out of the quagmire of the modern workplace.