

A right to strike in democratic corporations

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 - how can democratic structures, once brought about, be made to last?

- 1 Degeneration as a problem for democratic workplaces

Content

- ① Degeneration as a problem for democratic workplaces
- ② A strategy against degeneration: the right to strike

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- ① Degeneration as a problem for democratic workplaces
- ② A strategy against degeneration: the right to strike
- ③ The efficacy of the strike

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- ④ The permissibility of the strike

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- ③ The efficacy of the strike
- ④ The permissibility of the strike
- ⑤ An objection

The promises of workplace democracy

- more equal status

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- more equal status
- more mutual recognition

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- more mutual recognition
- more democratic decision-making

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- more equal status
- more mutual recognition
- more democratic decision-making
- accountability of those in power

The experience of workplace democracy I

“[Sharing ownership in the firm] means nothing to me [...] I only go to the annual meetings of the General Assembly because it's required. Everybody goes because they have to. If we didn't have to, we wouldn't go.” - Sharryn Kasmir, *The Myth of Mondragón* (1996) p. 122

The experience of workplace democracy II

[W]orkers at Clima spoke of definite inequalities in their plant. They most often talked about “los de arriba” (those on the top) versus “los de abajo” (those on the bottom). Workers also spoke of themselves as “curelas” (working stiff) and called managers “jefes” (bosses). “Jefes” was used interchangeably for managers and engineers as well as for the elected representatives to the Governing Council and the Management Council, suggesting that workers perceived them as management-controlled bodies rather than democratic organs that represented workers’ interests. - Kasmir 1996 p. 151

The experience of workplace democracy III

“No, of course we are not equal. We are in no way different from other businesses. No matter how equal we are in theory, in reality we are not. I believe that we are less equal among ourselves than the workers in a capitalist firm: being members, many of us often have to put up with things that workers in other firms would not tolerate. [...] Those above make the rules, those below obey them.” - Davydd J. Greenwood and José Luis Gonzalez Santos, *Industrial Democracy as Process* (1989), p. 133

The problem of degeneration

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- an established phenomenon: cooperative degeneration
 - the informal norms of the organization become inegalitarian and undemocratic
 - a managerial caste emerges and captures resources and positions
- the empirical picture: it happens, but factors are complicated

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- especially realist contributions
- democracy is not trivial to realize!
 - policy is made more for elites rather than for ordinary citizens
 - elections are a flawed mechanism for accountability
 - voters largely don't vote based on policy but based on identity

My proposal

- two institutional innovations for democratized corporations:

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 - ① A class-specific tribunate

My proposal

- two institutional innovations for democratized corporations:
 - 1 A class-specific tribunate
 - 2 The right to strike

A rationale for strikes

- strikes could fulfill a specific democratic function

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- a credible threat to ensure that established democratic channels are respected

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- two elements of this argument:
 - effectiveness
 - permissibility

The effectiveness of strikes

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- democratic managers too will have an interest against this

The effectiveness of strikes

- unilateral withdrawal of labour brings production to a halt
- democratic managers too will have an interest against this
- for economic and political reasons

The permissibility of strikes

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- including an *ultima ratio* kind of means

The permissibility of strikes

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- the democratic right: a right to a say in things that significantly affect you
- if that right is threatened, it justifies employing means to protect it
- including an *ultima ratio* kind of means
- the strike is an effective means

The limits of the strike

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- No! That seems straightforwardly undemocratic
- but blocking strike breakers is permissible
- because that is undemocratic

Other constituencies?

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Other constituencies?

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- rent strikes, payment strikes and the like
- but, practically speaking, strikes require necessary contributions

Objection!

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Objection!

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- might be replaced by more antagonistic social norms
- we have data on what can happen without contestation: degeneration!
- having purely cooperative norms seems unachievable, at least for now

Constructive vs. defensive rights

- there's no straightforward way to distribute purely constructive rights

Constructive vs. defensive rights

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Constructive vs. defensive rights

- there's no straightforward way to distribute purely constructive rights
- without defensive rights, constructive rights aren't effective
- give up overly romantic notions of democracy

The upshot

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- include a right to strike to protect democratic rights

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- include a right to strike to protect democratic rights
- but we also have a new justification for strikes!

The upshot

- we've got more institutional detail for democratization
- include a right to strike to protect democratic rights
- but we also have a new justification for strikes!
- and it might also translate into an argument for a right for political strikes (?)

The end

Thank you for your attention!

Summary

- there's a degeneration/capture problem for democratic corporations

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- strikes are an *ultima ratio* means against capture
- they can effectively pressure elites
- they are morally permissible
- this might shift norms away from pure cooperation but those are not realistic anyway