

Firms as Political Entities

When people go to work, they cease to be citizens. At their desks they are transformed into employees, subordinate to the hierarchy of the workplace. The degree of their sense of voicelessness may vary from employer to employer, but it is real and growing, inflamed by populist propaganda that ridicules democracy as weak and ineffective amid global capitalism. At the same time, corporations continue untouched and even unremarked as a major source of the problem. Relying on ‘economic bicameralism’ to consider firms as political entities, this book sheds new light on the institutions of industrial relations that have marked the twentieth century, and argues that it is time to recognize that firms are a peculiar institution that must be properly organized in order to unshackle workers’ motivation and creativity, and begin nurturing democracy again.

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Firms as Political Entities

Saving Democracy through Economic Bicameralism

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*In memory of Janek Kuczkiewicz,
in the name of his union brothers and sisters,
ardent defender of citizens at work
in the North and the South, in the East, and the West,
gone too soon but never forgotten*

Labor is prior to and independent of capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if labor had not first existed. Labor is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration. Capital has its rights, which are as worthy of protection as any other rights. Nor is it denied that there is, and probably always will be, a relation between labor and capital producing mutual benefits.

Abraham Lincoln (1861)

A civilization that uses its principles for trickery and deceit is a dying civilization.

Aimé Césaire (1972)

I have no doubt that many people will immediately reject the idea of extending the democratic process to business firms as foolish and unrealistic.

It may therefore be helpful to recall that not long ago most people took it as a matter of self-evident good sense that the idea of applying the democratic process to the government of the nation-state was foolish and unrealistic.

Robert A. Dahl (1989: 328)

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