Book Review

Werner Fricke, Hilde Wagner (Eds.) (2012).
Demokratisierung der Arbeit. Neuansätze für Humanisierung und Wirtschaftsdemokratie
(The democratization of work: New approaches to humanisation and economic democracy)
VSA Hamburg 2012, pp. 288, € 19.80
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Reviewed by Marika Höhn

Novel approaches and avenues to industrial democracy

The authors of *'Demokratisierung der Arbeit'* (lit.: The democratisation of work), researchers and practitioners in IG Metall's Employment Policy Workgroup, have injected some important new ideas into the current debate on the democratisation of the economy and society with their recently published book.

'Without democratisation of work there can be no democratisation of the economy' is the core thesis uniting the various contributions to the book by researchers, trade unionists and practitioners in the field. The authors cover topics ranging from the experience gained in initiatives to 'humanise the workplace', to the concept of 'Good Work' and the strategic challenges faced by IG Metall's 'Better, Not Cheaper' campaign.

The book focuses on how industrial democracy is experienced and on democratic learning processes among workforces at the workplace: essential prerequisites for democratisation of the economy and society. Co-determination, both within enterprises and across industries, is an absolutely essential ingredient of that process.

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However, the authors believe that to achieve 'democratisation from below', it is imperative that the representation of both collective and individual interests be completely rethought, away from a pure concentration on 'representatives': '... with more subjective autonomy, greater scope for negotiation within and between teams, with more interaction between old and potentially new forms of institutionalised co-determination, with stronger direct democracy and less representative democracy, also and especially at the workplace.' (Richard Detje & Dieter Sauer).

This is also accentuated by research conducted in support of IG Metall's 'Better, Not Cheaper' strategy, as Steffen Lehndorff argues in his paper: works councils that included the employees themselves in their 'strategic representation of interests' and who provide ways for workers to participate in that process, find that their legitimation is boosted as a result. Legitimation is weakened, in contrast, where works councils have supported certain measures without providing ways for the workforce to participate in the relevant decision-making.

Employee participation is the basis, and at the same time the 'fundamental innovation in co-determination practice'. It is in this way that 'representatives of strategic interests' can break the behavioural mould of 'policymaking by representatives'.

Gaining awareness of this cultural transformation in the way that co-determination is actually practised denotes a milestone in the development of new strategies and options, not only for work councils and trade unions, but also for employees themselves.

In recent decades, action research on democratic participation has compiled experience and developed methods relating to how 'democratic dialogue' (Werner Fricke) can be institutionalised, for example. The 'Peine Humanisation Project' presented by Werner Fricke illustrates '... how spaces for reflection can be created in which working people can communicate their interests, in which they can advance their innovative skills and agree on concepts for improving their working conditions.'

These experiences and methods take up the concept of 'Good Work' and develop it further. Tatjana Fuchs similarly points out in her paper that it is crucially important to involve '... employees in defining the standards of

Good Work being aimed for and the essential changes that need to be made, in addition to involvement as key stakeholders for changing their conditions of work and pay in the enterprise'. The projects on Good Work have likewise confirmed that employee participation brings about cultural changes in the way that works councils operate, and bolsters direct democracy within the enterprise.

The visions of the future promulgated in the book range from a government-backed 'humanisation drive' (Gerd Peter) to 'collectively bargained goals for workplace organisation' (Tatjana Fuchs). Strikes in their various forms, 'as one of the few acts of direct democracy, in which those in dependent employment make their own decisions about the conditions they work under' (Detlef Hensche), are also integral to the debate over the democratisation of work and the economy.

This book shows stakeholders and activists in enterprises and trade unions ways in which employees can shape their own working conditions through direct participation, in order to assert their needs and interests in working life against the control imposed from outside by corporate management and market forces.

The authors blend analyses from the social scientific, employment policy and theory of democracy perspectives with real examples of strategies developed within enterprises and by trade unions. In doing so, they achieve a cogent correlation between research findings and practical experience, while at the same time grounding the core thesis they put forward.

The wealth of ideas, analyses, information and arguments compiled in this one book gives interested readers, researchers and practitioners a sound basis for debating ways to democratise the economy and the workplace.

About the author

Marika Höhn, Head of the Department for Industrial Relations and Employment Policy in the Policy Division of the German Federation of Trade Unions (DGB), Henriette-Herz-Platz 2, 10178 Berlin, Germany.

Email: marika.hoehn@dgb.de.