
21st Century Market Socialism? Lessons from the Mondragon Cooperative Experience

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Résumé

As economic growth unfolds and capital, commodity and labour markets are liberalised, the specific dilemmas associated with the organisation of material life around labour-cooperatives and market exchange come to the fore, that is, the problems associated with market socialism as an alternative mode of production to bourgeois capitalism. Historically, after the decay of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Experience, we have seen how Mondragón Corporation remains an important experience for those scholars advocating for the feasibility of Market Socialism (e.g. David Schweickart; E.O. Wright, Al Campbell; Bruno Jossa). More specifically, the Mondragón Corporation has transformed its two main political structures to remain competitive in increasingly global markets. On the one hand, it has seen a stratification of those institutions related to ‘internal’ or ‘workplace democracy’ and the economic organisation of cooperatives since greater automation and the transnationalisation of production have transformed the old-Fordist regime into a global ‘lean production’ one. On the other hand, it has seen the conditioning of those processes related to ‘external democracy’ or ‘inter-cooperation’ that are governed by the conflicting logics of inter-firm solidarity and economic efficiency/profitability. The paper draws upon Critical Political Economy and Political Economy of Labour contributions to argue that, and *in contrast to* static models, there are two crucial political problems to which market socialist advocates must give an informed response if they seek to theorise a convincing alternative of bourgeois capitalism. First, to the question of how to democratise the labour process if the division of labour is still governed by the self-valorisation of value (i.e. by capital as a social relation), and which in Mondragón is concretised around the structurally conflicting views that managers, coop-members and wage-workers hold towards the project of ‘self-management’ and the need to increase labour productivity. Second, to the question of the limits of inter-firm solidarity and the allocation of collective (public) funds when the determinant factor in the evaluation of economic projects is corporate profitability, and which in Mondragón has recently been exposed with the closure of Fagor Etxetresnak and a modification of the mechanisms of inter-cooperation. As a conclusion, the paper argues that market socialism changes the relations of production and that it may be conceived as labour capitalism, but that it does not imply a new mode of production since it remains capital the dominant form of the social metabolism.

Mots-Clés: Market Socialism, Cooperatives, Mondragón Corporation, Self, Management

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