

Recenzie

SEKERÁK, Marián: Ekonomická demokracia – dejiny, teória a prax (Economic Democracy – History, Theory and Praxis)

Banská Bystrica: UMB FPVMV, 2013, 224 p. ISBN 978-80-557-0521-7

Marián Sekerák presents an unforeseen publication in these geographical settings under the title **Economic democracy – history, theory and praxis**. One gathers from the first sight that author's ambition was to enlighten his readers who so far haven't had the opportunity to come to terms with economic democracy and employee participation in the field of theories of democracy. Hence, the readers are confronted with a vast publication which may serve not only the students of political sciences, but it may also be of benefit to scholars from other distinguished areas who long to extend their knowledge of deliberative democracy's localised forms.

The concept of economic democracy, or rather the „democratisation of workplaces“, quite understandably carries some ideological stigma in the environment of Eastern block, which comes alive as a form of discursive barrier to scholars who wish to delve into this topic. This is also one of the factors that author had to face before he endeavoured to elaborate this monograph. However, he further creates no illusions and without any irony he comments at the end of his publication, that economic democracy seems to be unacceptable for contemporary totalitarians, as well as modern elitists and the adversaries of democracy. Orthodox marxists and neomarxists will doom the concept for its reference to corporate capitalism and a possible negative attitude of liberalists and libertarians would be implicitly influenced by the collective feature of participation's various forms. (Sekerák, 2013, p. 196) This shall also be the reason why it is necessary to appreciate author's introductory chapter called “Ideological background of economic democracy”, where author comes back to classical, as well as post-modern theories of democracy. Via the works of Robert Dahl or Carole Pateman he explains the etymological foundations of employee participation and economic democracy from a variety of angles. Marián Sekerák works with a set of democracy theories which he then applies to the idea of employee participation. He also devotes much of his space to the questions of autonomy or the concept of positive and negative freedom (as presented by Isaiah Berlin). Author presents an exhaustive summary of theoretical as well as empirical work which has been carried out so far, while he argues that this concept and its elements are not only “*an illusionary fight against capitalism and a further establishment of some sort of socialist economy, or a free trade socialism*”. (Sekerák, 2013, s. 33) Quite the contrary, he points out that the principles of economic democracy resemble Dahl's vision of participatory elements applied to corporate sphere. We are thus precluded from talking about an alternative to capitalism. However, there is an ever-present question bound to the concept of economic democracy: If we deem the citizens to be qualified enough to choose their

political elites, why do we not trust them enough to let them make relevant decisions in their workplace? Author of this monograph and the so-far existing works in this area present the concept of economic democracy from the neo-functionalist point of view, hence as a form of localising democracy into an environment where we tend to spend most time of our days – into our workplace.

The second and the most comprehensive chapter of this monograph seems to be a clear contribution to political sciences as it is devoted to the theories of economic democracy and hereby author determines the primary constitutional elements of employee participation. At the same time Marián Sekerák proposes his readers a focused look at economic democracy in different economic and political theories. This also supports his thesis that economic democracy is as a concept of local democracy not inherent to any particular school of political philosophy. In this chapter, author exposes the etymological evolution of economic democracy in political thought; however he does not forget to speak of employee participation ideas in the territory of current Czech and Slovak Republic – most avidly present in the works of Czechoslovak economist – Oto Šik. For anyone's curiosity, author adds the study of employee participation principles in Catholic welfare doctrine by examining the works of various theological authorities. Author's own asset to this chapter is definitely his endeavour to conceptualise economic democracy in view of all known theories. The author is himself not satisfied with the vague definition of economic democracy as a "*variety of forms of collective participation of employees in relevant decision making at the workplace*". (Sekerák, 2013, s. 81) Based on the present empirical evidence he sets a model of three pillars constituting the concept of economic democracy in the limits of free trade. These three pillars are the participation of all employees at the ownership of an enterprise they work for; direct election of superior employees and last but not least, the participation of all employees at the distribution of assets, i.e. also on the covering of potential losses. (Sekerák, 2013, s. 101)

Author's interest in the topic can be observed in his complex approach towards participatory democracy. In this publication he also concentrates on the so-called spill-over thesis and the possibility of participation's spill over from the workplace to political arenas. Along with Carole Pateman, author asks himself the question whether employee participation can have its educational functions and could have the ability to „educate citizens into democracy“. Readers may be also pleased to find an analysis of the principles of cooperativism, which is not included into author's conceptualisation of economic democracy. He rather insists that the implementation of the economic democracy principles requires a predisposition of participatory features, such as knowledge and information transfer among employees or a safeguard of employee's position (Sekerák, 2013, s. 115). Ergo, the sceptics of economic democracy are quite understandably arguing against employee participation by stating that this concept could not find its place, nor its substratum in the system of globalised capitalism. That is why Marián Sekerák closes up his monograph with a chapter on practical application of economic democracy principles in chosen countries. This chapter contains the description of what we may call self-governed enterprises and their incidence. One can also find a somewhat needed analysis of the normative background and socio-economic conditions in given countries. This exposé begins with the United States of America

where the foremost norm in the scope of employee participation happens to be the Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) and the most successful project is the USA Pacific Northwest plywood industry. Author's knowledge of the concept does, however, allow him to indulge in slight comparison of the known efforts in employee participation. The chapter goes further examining the Yugoslav experiment, the German experience of codetermination and the Swedish example of funding policy. Apart from the mentioned examples, one can also find the analysis of the examples coming from Australia, Slovenia, Great Britain, France, Russia, Japan, China, Argentina and Israel. Some particular attention is also given to the normative environment related to employee participation in Slovak Republic and to the most famous cooperative in Spain – Mondragón. Author approaches each of these examples with analytical and descriptive apparatus, which signals that this publication may one day serve for many as a studying material.

Economic democracy – history, theory and praxis is a unique publication of political science fitting for a wide range of scholars interested in social philosophy or management. It is difficult to evaluate whether author's biggest asset to the problematic is his historical and descriptive approach over the existing examples of employee participation, or whether it is his value-analytical approach to the problematic (which is also appreciated by one of publication's academic reviewers – Luboš Blaha). It is once more necessary to point out that this publication came into being in an environment whose experience with cooperatives and planned economy condemns this monograph a priori to skepticism. However, it is exactly this type of analytical work that has the potential to push Slovak political science ahead as an engaged science with the ability for self-reflection.

Veronika Valkovičová
Independent author