

Gender Inequality in Post-Capitalism: Theorizing Institutions for a Democratic Socialism

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Most proposals for democratic socialism include worker control of enterprises or democratic planning processes. While these institutions can theoretically address issues of class power, there is no reason to assume that power inequalities across gender or other categories will be resolved. The persistence of sexist or racist beliefs or expectations would likely undermine the ability for democratic economic decision making to eliminate discriminatory hiring, promotion, or pay practices. Thus, a feminist democratic socialism would require additional conditions.

The Problem with Worker Cooperatives

Advocates of a democratic socialist alternative to capitalism propose worker control of firms or democratic planning processes. Burczak's (Burczak 2006) proposal for a model of socialism starts from the premise that markets would continue to be an important part of a feasible socialist economy. Instead he proposes an economy filled with worker cooperatives and focuses on a solution to facilitate how young people would buy into the cooperative.

Worker control of enterprises would overthrow the power base of the owners of capital because workers would now be the owners of capital. This replaces the self-interest of capitalists with the self-interest of workers. The capitalist logic of production for profit would be replaced with production decisions that satisfy the needs of workers. The goal of production becomes the creation and maintenance of worker's livelihoods. Firms would not choose to outsource production to China, for example (Wolff 2016). Exploitation would be limited to circumstances in which workers perceived a valuable return for foregone wages. Workers would choose production methods that minimize the risk of worker injury.

However, what if Tesla were a cooperative? Would a Tesla Cooperative hire female engineers? Would it pay them equally? How would the works council respond to complaints such as those by AJ Vandermeiden (Levin 2017) or would women even feel that there were a place to complain to? Ms. Vandermeiden's description of a workplace plagued by pay inequity and inappropriate sexual behavior is

consistent with other reports from Silicon Valley (insert citations). How might a cooperative differ? Chinese agricultural cooperatives did not pay women equally (insert citations). Chinese cooperatives were not democratic, gender bias in cooperatives was built on patriarchal culture not on hierarchy.

It is unlikely that democratic decision making in a male dominated organization, such as Tesla, would resolve gender bias. Worker ownership in a complex organization, such as Tesla, would most likely still have to have people who are responsible for coordinating tasks and managing resources. Given the male dominated culture that Ms. Vandermeiden describes, it is unlikely that women would be elected to these positions. There is no reason to expect gender bias to be eliminated by democratic decision making. The kinds of discriminatory meeting behaviors that women experience pervasively, such as ignoring a woman's ideas until a man repeats them, would most likely persist in a cooperative environment. For women of color these experiences are intensified as their ideas are also ignored by white women.

The problem of gender discrimination in a post-capitalist economy is different from problems that might arise within the cooperative movement. First, experiments with cooperatives within our capitalist economy tend to be smaller enterprises, which facilitates more efficient democratic decision-making. Second, people who choose to work in cooperatives represent a biased sample of people who have chosen to work for a cooperative. These people are likely to hold different values. They are more likely to be progressive and familiar with feminist values.

Theorizing outcomes in an economy built on worker cooperatives, must assume a broader representation of citizens. The experiences we have in universities might offer a better example. While faculty clearly do not have all the authority, there are many opportunities for group decision-making through faculty governance. Universities are clearly not devoid of gender and racial bias. The literature on work place bullying provides an important insight into the problems that can arise. Workplace bullying refers to harassment that occurs not merely from supervisor to employee, but also between individuals at the same

rank. In this case the removal of hierarchy does not address the problem. I have observed in a university setting how the power to influence whether an individual receives or is denied tenure can be used to control others including how they vote on collective decisions and participating in mob bullying of women of color. In this context, collective decision making creates a cover for informal leaders, protecting them from the kind of accountability that an individual with organizational authority might face. Research shows that workplace bullying intensifies after tenure, because any opportunity to simply fire an individual has been lost. The only way to remove the target is to make life so miserable that they want to leave.

Applying these insights to an imaginary tech cooperative does not offer much hope. There is no individual that can be held accountable for ensuring women receive equal pay, equal opportunity for desirable work assignments, or a harassment free environment in which to work. If women form women only cooperatives, racial conflicts might arise. Women only cooperatives would likely face discrimination in the marketplace.

Folbre's (Folbre 1994) alternative to the Marxist and Neoclassical models of economic behavior provides a useful intervention into the model of class conflict that drives proposals for democratic socialism built around worker cooperatives. Folbre argues that class conflict needs to be expanded to a notion of group distributional conflict. Thus, economic systems are both the result of a complex game of distributional conflict and the environment in which such distributional conflict plays out. Individuals identify with groups based not just on class, but also gender, race, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age and more. Incorporating intersectionality, Folbre recognizes that individuals fall into several intersecting groups. Thus, it is not clear for any particular issue, which group identity will dominate when an individual considers what is in their interests.

Seen through this lens, calls for worker cooperatives eliminates class conflict by eliminating the capitalist class. Additional conflicts between workers of different types, such as highly educated product designers and

assembly line workers, would still be a challenge. Of greater relevance to the topic of this essay, conflict between women and men or between black and white cannot be resolved by simply eliminating the privileged group. Dismantling the institutions of male privilege and white privilege is more complicated, but would be a necessary condition for a democratic socialism to be fair.

The Problems with Democratic Planning

It is important to consider how allocation decisions might translate into consumption decision. The idea that others have a right to control the consumption decisions of others has been a problem for women in our current capitalist system. Women who work for companies such as Hobby Lobby face limited access to birth control. The owners believe that their conservative Christian values should dictate the kind of reproductive health that their employees can receive as part of their health plan(insert cite). In Berkeley, a group of vegans have harassed butchers as part of an agenda to make Berkeley a meat free zone. We should be somewhat concerned how democratic decision making will develop into a culture in which our consumption decisions have to be approved by our neighbors. (insert cite)

In contrast to those focused on the calculations, Albert and Hahnel (1992) in *Participatory Planning* focus on the process of decision making. In addition to spelling out a model for democratic planning that incorporates full participation of every member of the society, they stipulate specific values that should form the basis for decision-making. The first, is to distinguish between consumption decisions that involve costs to third parties, such as those that might contribute to the depletion of the ozone layer, and those that do not. The point is to internalize externalities by incorporating the affected party in the decision. This distinction forms an important consideration for circumstances in which others have a stake in one's consumption decisions. Under consensus decision-making, it effectively requires that those who hold conservative Christian views agree not to impose those views on others. In the case of the Berkeley vegans, they would make an argument that any consumption of meat is environmentally unsustainable, but it is

unfortunate that the local sustainable producer was the target of their protests. Not everyone can thrive on a vegan diet. This conflict translated into a participatory planning context seems difficult to resolve. The original principle of internalizing externalities by compensating those who face costs or deciding that such compensation is not worth it, offers resolutions. The issue that arises with the Berkeley vegans is a fundamental disagreement about the costs of various farming methods, and, presumably, the value of meat eating.

The second value, is to consider how each individual's contribution of work should be valued. Albert and Hahnel challenge the principle of marginal productivity as the basis for differential compensation. They agree that there is value in compensating for differences in effort, but they reject compensation for differences in innate talent or education provided by the wider community. This focus on effort is essentially an equal pay for equal work model with a stricter notion of equal work. Theoretically, this would lead to gender and racial equity. If tasks currently falling under unpaid work were treated as part of the community's accounting for tasks, this would be even more effective.

Feminist Democratic Socialism

For a democratic socialism to be a feminist democratic socialism, feminist need to develop institutions that provide additional protections beyond those provided by democratic decision-making in organizations and to transform the culture to create the conditions necessary for a feminist democratic socialism. Because democracy is not enough, legal structures that can hold co-operatives accountable to anti-discrimination would still need to be part of any system. However, the concept of anti-discrimination itself represents a deviation from an ideal market determined salary or share of employment. A feminist democratic socialism would also need to develop institutions for determining standards for fairness. External bodies, like an EEOC, would be necessary. Quotas for representation of women, women of color,

lesbians, and other groups on various decision-making bodies within organizations should also be part an effective system.

Education to transform a culture of capitalism into a culture of democratic socialism would also be needed. Members of society need to be trained to make decisions collectively and how to negotiate compromise. Given that leadership is the responsibility of all in a democratic socialism, each and every citizen needs to be trained to facilitate meetings. For a feminist democratic socialism, education about subaltern experience and intersectionality would also be a necessary condition to transform the society.

Part of the problem of capitalism, is that it creates institutions that reward and encourage selfish behavior. The goal of a socialist system is to build institutions that encourage the best in human beings. However, in some cases, those who have been expected to give more or compensate more, also need to learn how to demand more in order to achieve equity.

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