

Capitalism, Social Privilege and Managerial Ideologies. By *Ernesto R. Gantman*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005. viii + 185 pp. Index, notes, bibliography, figures, tables. Cloth, \$99.95. ISBN: 0-754-64186-4.

Reviewed by Daniel A. Wren

Ernesto Gantman, a professor at the Universidad de Buenos Aires and the Universidad de Belgrano in Argentina, wrote *Capitalism, Social Privilege and Managerial Ideologies* with the following goal in mind: “to contribute to the existing debate about how managerial ideologies evolved” and “to critique the discipline of management, calling into question its status as an authoritative source of knowledge by highlighting its ideological character” (p. vii). He defines ideology in two ways: as a neutral system of beliefs; and as “ideas and systems of symbolic action . . . resulting from a manipulation carried out by the dominant strata of society with the intention of making their own interests prevail” (p. 1). It is clear from the outset that the author will use the second definition to develop his theme. He relies on the classifications described by Stephen Barley and Gideon Kunda, in “Design and Devotion: Surges of Rational and Normative Ideologies of Control and Managerial Discourse” (*Administrative Science Quarterly* [1992]), to emphasize his point that the primary goal of managers is worker control, a goal that is achieved in various ways: through coercion, by imposing discipline; through rational supervision based on social engineering, or “Taylorism”; and through normative authority, whereby the manager gains workers’ compliance by manipulating their values and feelings. Although Wayne Eastman and James R. Bailey, in “Mediating the Fact-Value Antinomy: Patterns in Managerial and Legal Rhetoric, 1890–1990” (*Organization Science* [1998]), have raised strong doubts about the efficacy of Barley and Kunda’s classification, Gantman nevertheless stresses control as the central rhetoric of management ideologies.

In five chapters, the author presents a chronology of these ideologies to demonstrate how capitalism was legitimated by the transformation of managers into “privileged agents of the capitalist class” (p. 82). These ideologies were beliefs about *who* and *how* organizations should be managed, and they took different forms during

each of the three stages of capitalism: “liberal capitalism,” which was represented by the operations of small firms and lasted from 1790 to 1900; “organized capitalism,” which lasted from 1900 to 1980 and featured the emergence of bureaucratic organizations whose owners became separated from control over their companies; and “disorganized capitalism,” which witnessed limited attempts to establish networks and self-managed organizational forms.

However, the demarcation of these historical periods is grossly oversimplified, and the ripples and currents underlying the surface of each era are overlooked. Gantman offers no documentation for his categories, nor does he name the nations involved in his chronicle, though the United States is apparently his intended target. Another difficulty is his use of one-liners to link the stages of capitalism to social and political concepts. For example, he writes that the role of government in liberal capitalism was that of “night-watchman,” but he does not explain what he means by this. He sums up the period of “disorganized capitalism” as a time when the government stressed privatization and deregulation. In discussing social developments, he states that the social inequality between classes increased from one stage to the next, though he adds that it was less marked under organized capitalism. The picture becomes no clearer when he ties managerial ideologies to stages of economic, social, and political development.

The managerial ideologies are also fitted into three neat pockets attached to the three stages of capitalism: Liberal capitalism is represented by “authoritarian paternalism.” Organized capitalism is a potpourri of bureaucracy, Taylorism, human relations, and contingency theory. Disorganized capitalism is represented by attempts to drive out bureaucracy, create a knowledge society, flatten organizations, gain self-control, and implement participatory decision-making. These categories bear the same global simplicity as the three stages of capitalism, ignoring differences among individuals and combining approaches, such as operations research and contingency theory, into one time period. From this jumbled past, he predicts that a “new paradigm” will emerge only if managers “transcend the current phase of disorganized capitalism, diluting its perverse features and transforming the current structure of social privilege” (p. 156). However, he offers no plan for achieving this transcendent state, leaving the reader to figure out what this all means.

A number of his attributions are dubious. For example, “Taylorism” is used globally to include bureaucracy (which was Max Weber’s idea, not Taylor’s) and mass production (more plausibly, this concept should be credited to Henry Ford); and he states that “human relations” fueled a “consumer society” during the years 1930 to 1960, whereas in reality this was a period of depression, war, and postwar recovery in many nations). Such errors should alert the reader to examine critically Gantman’s labels and categories.

Business, economic, and management historians will be disappointed with this book. The author does not clarify the target he is criticizing, although it appears to be the United States. His classification of economic stages has no basis in history. The managerial ideologies are inaccurately slotted into arbitrary time periods, nor does he account for differences of opinion among the authors he cites. The connections he makes between capitalism, managerial ideologies, and social privilege are overly influenced by the author’s Marxist agenda. Gantman has an ideological axe to grind; the book is not recommended for those desiring a factual basis for understanding change in a historical context.

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