

THIRD ROUNDTABLE, EUROPEAN PROJECT DIRECT II • FEBRUARY, 2022

DEMOCRACY AT WORKPLACE: DISCUSSION ON ORGANIZATION AND WORKING CONDITIONS

Last Friday, the 4 February, the online conference "Democracy in the workplace: discussing organisation and working conditions" was held and organised by the Fundación 1º de Mayo. It was attended by more than 80 people from different countries and organisations. Alicia Martínez and Jesús Cruces participated on behalf of the 1º de Mayo Foundation.

This is the third international round table of the project "Expanding and improving workplace democracy as a prerequisite for humanising work and the working environment" (DIRECT II).

Funded by the European Commission, the project focuses on the analysis of direct participation mechanisms in companies with the aim of democratising labour relations, as well as assessing the impact of digitalisation and technological innovation and their interaction with representative participation mechanisms.

The project is led by the CITUB trade union (Bulgaria) and involves researchers from various organisations, such as: Giuseppe di Vittorio Foundation (Italy), Warsaw School of Economics (Poland), IDE-AS (Ireland), Cyprus Workers' Confederation (Cyprus), Confederation of employers and industrialists (Bulgaria), Bulgarian Industrial Association (Bulgaria), Royal Holloway and Bedford New College (UK) and the 1º de Mayo Foundation. The project follows on from previous work (Infpreventa and Direct), which addressed the role of information and consultation in industrial relations and a first approach to direct participation.

The international roundtable started with a welcome addressed by **Vicente López** (Fundación 1º de Mayo), who stressed the need to analyse the mechanisms of direct

participation in the context of the capital-labour conflict, pointing out the opportunities and criticisms that this type of practice presents from the point of view of trade unions.

After this welcome, **Jesús Cruces** (Fundación 1º de Mayo) gave way to the first roundtable of the day, focused on the results of the project.

Thus, **Ina Atanosova** (CITUB) presented the contents and activities carried out to date, as well as the steps that remain to be developed in the project. **Kevin O'Kelly** (project expert) described the content of the work. In particular, he detailed the analytical framework of the project, the concepts used and the results obtained from the research process, the

outcome of the analysis of a wide range of case studies from different economic sectors. After addressing the conceptual delimitation of digitalization and direct participation, he showed the existence of

participation mechanisms and their impact on organisation and working conditions.

The second roundtable was moderated by **Salvo Leonardi** (Fondazione Di Vittorio) and was focused on the mechanisms of workers' participation in work organisation.

The first speaker, **Sara Lafuente** (European Trade Union Institute), addressed the analytical framework of democracy at work from the perspective of collective action. She placed special emphasis on pointing out that, today, there is a new

"The project explores experiences from various countries that have successfully introduced new technologies with employee direct participation"
(Kevin O'Kelly)

political opportunity to boost this debate in the public sphere and in companies: to demand greater decision-making power for workers at work and in the economy, as well as to revitalise trade unionism: to regenerate practices of organisation, mobilisation and trade union action.

Secondly, **Pedro Chaves** (University of Alcalá de Henares) raised several issues related to workers' participation in work organisation. Specifically, he addressed the content of the research study focused on the participation of workers through Agile systems in the company Endesa. The research, based on an action-research perspective, has been motivated by the CCOO trade union section at Endesa and is currently in the development phase.

The third round table of the day, moderated by **Ekaterina Ribarova** (CITUB), focused on the participation of workers in working conditions.

Arturo Lahera (Complutense University of Madrid) gave a presentation on the analysis of the digitalisation process, starting from the questioning of techno-nocratic positions and questioning their impact on employment. He proposed the need to approach this process from the point of view of the social organisation on which it is based, identifying three major models or forms of social organisation: digitalisation as a replacement of labour; digitalisation as a complement to human labour; and digitalisation that hides human labour.

His contribution on participation in innovation processes was particularly interesting, in which it is necessary to have a good knowledge of the technologies, of previous experiences, as well as a delimitation of the objectives of participation, of the negotiating subjects, subjects to be negotiated and the moment in the innovation process in which the workers participate. Finally, he concluded by pointing out

the occupational risks that occur in Industry 4.0 and proposing a tool for the evaluation of digitalisation processes.

Next, **Clara Serrano Llorens** (ISTAS) presented the results of studies on psychosocial risks and their relationship with the mechanisms of worker participation. In particular, she mentioned existing studies on the subject, indicating that the exposure to high demands and under control increases the chances of suffering from cardiovascular diseases and depression. He concluded by pointing out that direct participation practices could be a way to address psychosocial problems in the work environment, becoming an effective preventive organisational tool to reduce risk exposure and health inequalities.

Following this round table, **Michael Gold** (Royal Holloway and Bedford New College) summarised the main elements and debates that had emerged during the international roundtable.

Finally, the meeting was closed by **Alicia Martínez** (Fundación 1º de Mayo), who, after highlighting the impact and interest of the day, thanked the speakers, interpreters and technicians for their participation and work.

