

Critical approach to post-fordist theory

Alexia Kapravelou, M.Ed., Doctoral candidate, Department of Social Policy, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens, Greece, akaprave@gmail.com, akaprave@sch.gr

Abstract

Post-fordist theory proceeds a basic distinction, at the organization of production and work, between taylorism-fordism and postwar toyotism or current post-fordism. So its supporters consider that production and work, with approximately the 1980s as a demarcation, was being organized, for the most part, at the basis of a) the discrimination between intellectual and manual function and, subsequently, between production design and performance, that was led to extended managerial control, b) the deskilling of the independent producer, the semi-skilling of the wage-laborer and his/her detailed tasks for the speedup of the routine-work, focused at the standardized and mass production and consumption.

In the last two decades we are driven from industrial to monetary and informational capitalism, that is characterized a) by the modern flexible, lean-and-plain, on-time with-contract work, automatized production of differentiated products and services, after total quality control, and by the minimization of stored supplies, b) by the participatory, communicative, adaptable, multi-skilled, lifelong re-skilled as well as self-educated precarious worker, removed away from syndicalism-from-below and integrated in creative team-work, according to principles of human resource management, in a client-oriented, small-or-medium firm, which collaborates with others, in the framework of the international mobility of commodity.

Post-fordist theory, although it describes real challenges in work organization due to technological changes and due to capital restructure, however it raises, in its generalization, questioning and critique, because fordism and post-fordism could co-exist, as post-fordism is not the dominant regime of capitalist accumulation worldwide. That means that neither big and heavy production industries have been abolished, nor mass production has been vanished, nor the employer's planning to reduce the cost, the precarious work and the atypical marginalized work, the emphasis in innovation, the forms of hierarchy in work, the discussion about state intervention to economic system are new phenomena in the labor market.