

## Panopticon

*The panopticon is a disciplinary concept brought to life in the form of a central observation tower placed within a circle of prison cells.*

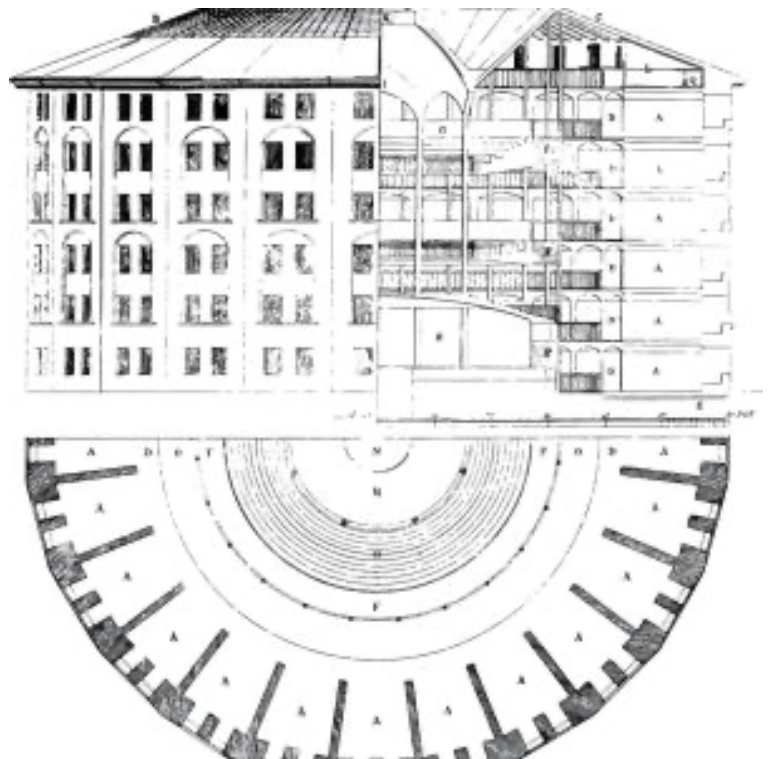
*From the tower, a guard can see every cell and inmate, but the inmates can't see into the tower. Prisoners will never know whether or not they are being watched.*

*This was introduced by English philosopher Jeremy Bentham. It was a manifestation of his belief that power should be visible and unverifiable. Through this seemingly constant surveillance, Bentham believed all groups of society could be altered. Morals would be reformed, health preserved, industry invigorated, and so on—they were all subject to observation.<sup>1</sup>*

### Michael D. Yates

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**C**apitalism's two main underpinnings are control and exploitation/expropriation. There are many sites of control: school, religion, laws, media. These are all generally supportive of the interests of capital, namely, the endless drive to accumulate wealth. They all help to ensure that we behave so that the system continues to reproduce itself. Since workplaces are the sites where profits are extracted from our labor, it is here that control is most critical. From capitalism's birth a few hundred years ago, successive efforts by business owners to command the labor process have given rise to what can be called managerial control mechanisms.



<sup>1</sup> ↪ "Ethics Explainer: The Panopticon," Ethics Centre, July 18, 2017.

In the early years of capitalism, people worked in their homes, often as a family, to produce products such as cloth from the materials and sometimes equipment provided to them by merchant capitalists. The final goods were then returned to the owner for a price. This “outworking” or “putting out”—meaning the raw materials were “put out” to those who wove the cloth from the loaned wool—was abusive. Workers separated from one another could easily be pressured to accept lower prices if the merchant told them others would work for less than they demanded.<sup>2</sup> However, outworking or putting out was subject to much uncertainty. Workers might “cheat,” using less wool per unit of cloth, keeping the unused portion for cloth that could be sold to other merchants. The family controlled the pace of the labor, and the employer could have no grasp of how the work was done.

Ultimately, the putting-out process was not sustainable because too much control was in the hands of the producers. The first great weapon instituted to lessen worker control was to herd producers into central locations, that is, into factories. Initially, work was carried on as before, with weavers and helpers, the latter often women and children. Many of the children were leased to factory owners by orphanages.<sup>3</sup> Employer control was enhanced by what soon became a ubiquitous factory whistle, a sound that summoned people to work and signalled when they could take a break and when the workday ended. Failure to abide by the whistle’s command meant discipline in the form of loss of wages or dismissal. I remember hearing the whistle day and night at the glass factory in my hometown. Its piercing noise was set to the clock, sounding at the shift changes: 8:00 a.m., 4:00 p.m., and midnight. Failure to be on time could be seen on the timecards each person had to punch when entering the enclosed spaces that were home for the next eight hours. A minute late might cost someone an hour’s pay.

Dictating when work started and ended was a step forward in capital’s rationalisation of production. However, centralisation soon gave rise to two radical changes in how work was done. When workers are confined, caged if you will, they can be observed, like pet birds. Management hired special personnel—later called industrial engineers—to observe what the workers did. Observation led to the insight that the labor tasks dominant in early capitalism could be broken down into component parts, with each one doled out to less-trained workers. When faced with a large order, craft workers divided their tasks into subtasks so that the order could be filled more quickly. However, the same result could be achieved more cheaply if the subtasks were done by those paid much less than the craft worker. The idea was to always economise on the wage bill to the higher-wage employees, using them only for jobs others could not do.

Thus, the detailed division of labor was born, termed by Harry Braverman the Babbage Principle, after the man who first proposed it, the inventor Charles Babbage. Now control could be enforced by the easy substitution of one labourer with another. Craft personnel were difficult to replace, but this was not the case with those who performed simpler, repetitive details of a more complex task. Furthermore, by increasing the number of people who could do any given job, the detailed division of labor significantly increased what Karl Marx called the reserve army of labor. This reserve of potential labor functioned as a brake on the power, and hence the wages, of all employees. Both Babbage and Andrew Ure (the other early proponent of detail work) noted that more women and children could be employed in place of adult men once this principle became widespread.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> ↪ See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963; reimpr., Nueva York: Open Road Media, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> ↪ For a horrific fictional account of orphanage labor, see Glyn Hughes, *The Rape of the Rose* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> ↪ John Bellamy Foster, foreword to Harry Braverman, [Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century](#) (1973; repr. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998), xvi, note 5.

Men, women, and children performing relatively repetitive, simpler tasks acted as a spur to the introduction of machinery, which, once propelled by an independent power source, offered capital a potent means of control. The pace

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of work could be regulated by mechanical means, making labor, using Marx's famous phrase, into "appendages to the machine."

Mechanisation also sped up the degradation of work, as Braverman and Harvard professor of business James Bright made clear. The latter correlated the degree of mechanisation and a composite of work complexity. He found a strong inverse correlation between the two

variables so that, with the highest degree of mechanisation, almost no job knowledge was required. Braverman, who incorporated Bright's work into his book *Labor and Monopoly Capitalism*, references an oil refinery personnel manager who placed an upper limit on the IQ scores of prospective machine operators, such that only those testing below a cutoff IQ would be hired. The work was so monotonous and routine that the employer felt that higher IQ workers would not be as productive as those with lower ones.<sup>5</sup>

Mechanisation—today robotics and artificial intelligence come to mind—continuously eliminates jobs, which, by making workers fearful of unemployment, greatly aids the employer's ability to control the labor process. In the wake of COVID-19, employers have become more amenable to automating their workplaces. Machines do not get sick, they do not try to unionise, and they can reduce costs. Now, growing labor shortages, fuelled in part by an unprecedented number of workers quitting their jobs, are leading to further mechanisation and many in the service sector might be on the chopping block. "Employers seem eager to bring on the machines. A survey last year by the nonprofit World Economic Forum found that 43% of companies planned to reduce their workforce because of new technology. Since the second quarter of 2020, business investment in equipment has grown 26%, more than twice as fast as the overall economy." One type of employment that could be adversely affected is in fast food. "Restaurants have been among the most visible robot adopters. In late August, the salad chain Sweetgreen announced it was buying the kitchen robotics startup Spyce, which makes a machine that cooks vegetables and grains and spouts them into bowls."<sup>6</sup> Sweetgreen says that this will give its remaining workers "more time to focus on preparing food!"<sup>7</sup> Ironically, celebrity chef Daniel Boulud is an investor in Spyce. Machines will not be mixing and pouring ingredients in his restaurants, however.

Frederick Taylor, the patron saint of industrial engineers, took what had already been done by capital in terms of control and systematised it. He developed three principles of what he termed scientific management.<sup>8</sup> First, through close observation of the motions involved in each task and the time it takes to do each one, using stopwatches and cameras, the engineers could collect all the knowledge that had been in the hands and minds of the workers. The conceptualisation of work would now be monopolised by capital. Second, each task would be "rationalised," that is, the motions would be reorganised so that the necessary time for the job was minimised. From the beginning, cameras were employed by industrial engineers, and today, often unseen closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras are ubiquitous in workplaces, cities, and towns around the world. These allow employers to monitor their hired hands no matter where they labor: offices, banks, grocery stores, factories, warehouses, delivery and other vehicles, classrooms, any building, retail outlets, homes, even construction and road repair sites.<sup>9</sup> There may be fifty or more CCTVs in a large grocery store.

<sup>5</sup> ↪ Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. The relationship between mechanization and skill requirements for jobs is examined in chapter 9, "Machinery," 184–235.

<sup>6</sup> ↪ "Do We Need Humans for That Job? Automation Booms After Covid," *Triblive*, 5 September 2021.

<sup>7</sup> ↪ Amelia Lucas, «Salad Chain Sweetgreen Bets on Automation by Acquiring Spyce and Its Robotic Kitchen Tech», *CNBC*, 24 August 2021.

<sup>8</sup> ↪ What follows draws on Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, chapters 4 and 5, 85–138.

<sup>9</sup> ↪ For example, see Rachel Sandler, "Amazon Is Installing AI-Powered Cameras to Monitor Delivery Drivers," *Forbes*, 3 February 2021.

Smartphones can be used to compel workers to self-monitor, noting delivery times and anything else the boss demands.

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For example, Amazon issues Inpax hand scanners to monitor its drivers' work as they deliver packages and dictate the routes they drive.<sup>10</sup> Algorithms and related apps can direct those who shop for others to minimise the time they traverse a grocery store's aisles or make deliveries. Amazon warehouses provide an extreme example: an algorithm dictates the flow of goods from one aisle to another so that workers never

intersect, thus minimising contact among them. It is almost as if each worker in a space that might employ hundreds of people is working alone.<sup>11</sup>

There were (and are) numerous standard motions, with standard times, so direct observation is often no longer needed. These motions were named therbligs, after the husband-and-wife engineering team Frank and Lillian Gilbreth (their name spelled backward with th transposed). For example, room attendants in hotels and motels make certain similar movements as they clean a room. Hidden cameras can easily capture these, and then industrial engineers can note the standard motions (removing a pillowcase, for example) and look up the standard time for this. A total time per room is then calculated, and, based on this, each attendant is expected to be able to clean a certain number of rooms in a shift.

Finally, every employee would be given detailed instructions to be followed precisely each time a task was performed. Braverman has a telling account of what was really going on here, namely that workers would be sped up, and those who could not keep pace would be fired. It is well worth reading Braverman on "Schmidt," the man Taylor directed to load pig iron at a speed four times faster than had been standard. If the new rate could be maintained and wages rose by less than four times, unit labor costs would fall.<sup>12</sup> This is simply speed-up masquerading as science. My wife and I met a room attendant at a chain hotel in Albuquerque, New Mexico, who told us that she was expected to clean twenty-nine rooms a day. Ironically, in Las Vegas, Nevada, where most hotel labor is unionised, attendants had to clean only fifteen rooms each day. In addition, they worked in pairs to reduce the likelihood of being sexually assaulted by customers.

Let me add here that scholars writing about work are often ignorant of what a job entails. Braverman tells us that famed sociologist Daniel Bell, in his description of the labor Schmidt was performing, had not the slightest idea what a pig of iron was. Similarly, Nobel Laureate in Economics Joseph Stiglitz seems unaware of all the monitoring and control that employers use, all the time, on as many employees as possible. He hypothesised that one reason for unemployment is that some employers chose to pay above-equilibrium wages—which, according to neoclassical economic theory, causes unemployment—because they could not effectively oversee those they hired. The higher wage would keep unmonitored employees productive. On average, workers have endured stagnant wages for nearly fifty years, with wages badly lagging productivity increases. So, which companies are paying these higher wages? And hasn't Stiglitz ever heard of Frederick Taylor and his progeny? No doubt, he has not been to many workplaces. Had he gone to those modern automobile plants Ben Hamper called gulags or an Amazon warehouse, hopefully he would have seen the foolishness of his theory.

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<sup>10</sup> ↪ Caroline O'Donovan and Ken Bensinger, «Amazon's Next-Day Delivery Has Brought Chaos and Carnage to America's Streets—But the World's Biggest Retailer Has a System to Escape the Blame», *BuzzFeed*, 31 August 2019.

<sup>11</sup> ↪ Richard Seymour, "Slaves to the Algorithm," *Patreon*, 9 April 2021. To read this essay, you must be subscribed to Seymour's *Patreon* column.

<sup>12</sup> ↪ Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, chapter 4, 85–123.



Taylor's ideas have been thoroughly implemented by corporate management worldwide; today, they are built into the design of the products themselves. There is even so-called financial engineering, with courses of this name given in engineering schools. And like any successful practice, it has been further developed since Taylor's time. The Toyota Corporation pioneered what is now called lean production, termed accurately by critics "management by stress."<sup>13</sup> There are many aspects of this "improvement" on Taylorism:

- **Systematic hiring:** Prospective employees must go through a rigorous set of interviews and tests, presumably to see if they qualify for the job. In truth, employers want to have a psychological profile of each person to determine whether he or she will be amenable to working in teams, if they have sufficient physical strength and dexterity to perform the required tasks, if they can work fast, or if they might vote for a union. Today, metadata are available from various companies, and these, along with searches of social media accounts, can yield enormous amounts of information about employee behaviour. These can guide businesses in their hiring decisions. Once hired, data from e-mails and various programs used by workers to communicate with one another can allow employers to assess conduct that may be inimical to corporate control.<sup>14</sup> Incredible amounts of information are being constantly collected about all of us. It would be surprising if employers did not try to access as much of this as they need to control their workforces.
- **Team production:** Capitalists are aware that, contrary to the precepts of neoclassical economics with its fetish of individual choices, production is always done by collectivities of workers. The Toyota production system sought to turn this fact to its advantage. Workers are termed associates and placed in small groups responsible for some part of a production process. As in the military, the idea is to get team members to commit to one another in a perverse solidarity. Soldiers do not kill for the glory of their country but to protect their buddies. Similarly, workers will go to extremes to get the job done. Corporate loyalty is encouraged, even by group exercises and singing before forming into teams and getting to work.<sup>15</sup> Teams are expected to solve problems on their own. At one plant, team members were taught to time study themselves and then, in effect, speed up their labours to attain greater efficiency. Taylor would have smiled from the grave if he could have seen this. The employees were compelled to see themselves as objects to be manipulated and made to function in a machine-like fashion. Some enjoyed it, thinking they were learning a new skill.
- **Cross-training:** It is often assumed that working in the modern economy requires much knowledge and training, though this is not usually the case. With lean production, every job is Taylorised in advance of the advent of production. This means that the expertise needed for as many jobs as possible has been reduced to a minimum. Suppose that, in a team, someone is absent from work. The other team members have to pick up the slack, so they have been trained to do a variety of unchanging subtasks. This is not multi-skilling as we might typically think of it.

<sup>13</sup> ↪ Mike Parker and Jane Slaughter, *Working Smart: A Union Guide to Participation Programs and Reengineering/With Union Strategy Guide* (Detroit: Labor Notes, 1994). For more on lean production as well as a discussion of the propaganda put forward in its favor, see Michael D. Yates, "The 'New' Economy and the Labor Movement," *Monthly Review* 52, no. 11 (April 2001). See also Mike Parker, "Toyota and the Myth of Quality," *Labor Notes*, 23 March 2010.

<sup>14</sup> ↪ For a detailed account of hiring at a Japanese transplant automobile company in the state of Indiana, see Laurie Graham, *On the Line at Subaru-Isuzu* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 1995). For a brief description of metadata, see Philip Arkcoll, "The Age of Behavioral Analytics at Work: Using IT Metadata to Make Improved Business Decisions," *IHRIM* 2 (2020). The title of this article is telling with the term "Behavior Analytics."

<sup>15</sup> ↪ PBS produced the film *We Are Driven*, about a Nissan plant in Smyrna, Tennessee, as part of its Frontline Series. It is amazing to see what a fraud all of the hype about the Japanese employment system is, with its promise of lifetime employment and diehard employee loyalty to the corporation. But it is eye-opening to watch U.S. plant workers visit Japan and joyfully watch Japanese workers submitting to what one would think was absolutely craven behavior. See *We Are Driven*, PBS. The film's title is a take on Nissan's advertising slogan of the same name. It also means that the workers are driven, so much so that a Japanese word was invented to describe death from overwork: *karoshi*.

Consider the job of machinist, which of all blue-collar occupations requires the most training. It takes an apprenticeship lasting a few years to learn how to fashion a machine part by making complex and high tolerance cuts in a piece of metal. With numerically controlled machines, however, the knowledge of the machinist has been transferred to a computer program, which then controls the mechanism that performs the cuts. To learn to operate it takes no more than a few weeks. Imagine then how few hours are needed to learn to do a set of routine details. The real purpose of cross-training is to maintain high production volumes with fewer workers if necessary.

- **Just-in-time inventory:** Firms employing modern-day Taylorism contract out as much labor as possible. For example, an automobile plant can lower its production costs in terms of wages, machinery, and space by subcontracting the production of steering mechanisms. A nearby plant, built for just this purpose, will hire workers at a rate less than that of the central plant where automobiles are assembled. Sometimes, this occurs with the cooperation of the labor union, which, even if it manages to organise the subcontractor's workers, will accept wages lower than at the assembly plant—to assemble the steering mechanism. These mechanisms will be delivered “just in time,” that is, only as needed by the main factory, with deliveries made several times a day. Thus, no inventory is kept in reserve, saving space. In some cases, it is even possible that the subcontractor can contract out some of its work to peripheral firms at still lower costs. Here, managerial control is enhanced by the splitting of the automobile workforce.<sup>16</sup>

The just-in-time concept can be applied to employees as well. The reference to the scheduling program in the following quotation refers to a software program that uses an algorithm to show businesses how to best allocate hours of work:

*Today, just-in-time inventory is applied to workers themselves. Rather than assuming the utilisation of someone for a week or even a day, scheduling is based upon an analysis of how many total work hours are likely to be needed during any particular hour or set of hours during a shift. If the scheduling program tells you that for an eight-hour shift, seven workers are needed for the first three and the last three hours but 10 are needed for the two-hour period around lunch time, then you will use 10 workers only for those two hours. Employees may be scheduled for two-hour workdays, or “on-call” personnel may be asked to come in.<sup>17</sup>*

It has become more common for work to be subcontracted out of a country. Global supply chains now link far-flung dependent enterprises to a central corporation, almost always located in the rich nations of the Global North. Firms in the Global South that supply production parts use various control mechanisms, as do their counterparts in the Global North. Workers in poor countries then bear the brunt of managerial control, which is often combined with physical violence perpetrated by public and private police. Ruthless cost reduction is critical for managers of workplaces in the Global South, given that competition for the business of the central corporations is intense, as is the work itself.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> ↪ Here is where the psychological aspects of forming and training teams come in, as well as the willingness of labor unions to go along with this. Labor and management argued that any given plant was in competition with every other plant, whether it was inter- or intra-company. It is obvious that when work is parceled out to various subcontractors, the production of the end product, in this case automobiles (or trucks, buses, any transportation vehicle), could be brought to a halt by a strike at the subcontractor's facility no matter where it is, even in another country. However, a broad sense of solidarity must exist among all the workers involved for this to succeed. In this regard, the failure of unions to educate members; the power of nationalism; and individualism and the cry for personal “freedom” drummed into everyone's heads for the past fifty years of neoliberalism all play a role in weakening solidarity.

<sup>17</sup> ↪ Michael D. Yates, “The Growing Degradation of Work and Life, and What We Might Do to End It,” Truthout, 21 March 2015.

<sup>18</sup> ↪ See Intan Suwandi, *Value Chains: The New Economic Imperialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2019). This book is based on field research in Indonesia.

- *Kaizen*: This is a Japanese word meaning constant improvement. In lean production, productivity is relentlessly pressured upward. Kaizen can be best understood in connection with team production, cross-training, and just-in-time inventory. Production is put under pressure. An assembly line's speed might be increased, a team member might be eliminated, or a shortage of needed material might suddenly appear. The stress will be great enough that a production bottleneck will eventually become apparent. This will force a warning signal to appear. There might be a system of lights along a line, with green meaning all is well, yellow showing that there is a problem, and red signalling a complete breakdown. Stress will continue until the lights turn yellow. A manager will run to the team and insist that the workers find a solution to get the lights green again. At one plant, the warning light was accompanied by the playing of "Mary Had a Little Lamb" over and over. Workers will have to move faster, do a missing person's subtask, or somehow find materials. Woe to them if the line has to be shut down, even though companies say that employees have the power to shut down the line if they see a safety hazard or possible destruction of equipment. What makes kaizen so insidious is that it is never-ending. It is simply a continuous work-intensification scheme camouflaged as something more benign, namely that workers are empowered by it.

Lean production is integral to most kinds of employment, from factories to offices to colleges and universities. In tech industries, it is hidden by prerequisites that make it appear that where you work is like a home. Free catered meals, gyms, massage tables, and games made being at work enjoyable. But they also kept people at work for long hours. The Internet kept them on call all day and night as well. In higher education, lean production has taken the form of minimising the number of tenure-stream faculty by hiring part-time adjunct teachers, who now teach the majority of classes. (Once granted tenure, professors have permanent employment and can be discharged only for cause. An exception might be if the college faced financial distress.) Adjuncts are utilised "just in time," often not knowing if they will have classes to teach until just before a semester begins. If enrolments are not high enough, the course is canceled. Faculty are required to provide a detailed summary of their productivity every year, which amounts to a time study of themselves. The universal use of Internet-based communication programs has meant that lectures, syllabi, and notes must be placed online, becoming the employer's property. Professors are on-call with students and administrators, with barrages of e-mails coming in every day. Matters have only worsened with pandemic-induced distance learning.

All the managerial control mechanisms generate stress for workers. Kaizen ruins bodies, including our minds. Alienation is the result, brutal and widespread. Imagine spending your day working at an Amazon warehouse, a panopticon if ever there was one.

*[Darryl Richardson] complained about the fast, unrelenting pace of work and about seeing co-workers terminated for falling behind Amazon's production quotas. As a picker, Richardson takes merchandise out of large metal bins that robots carry to his workstation, and he then hurries to put the items in various totes that a conveyor belt takes to packing. Nearby video monitors tell him what to do minute after minute. His quota is to pick 315 items an hour, five items a minute: toilet paper and toys, baby food and books destined for Amazon customers. "You're running at a consistent, fast pace," Richardson said. "You ain't got time to look around. You get treated like a number. You don't get treated like a person. They work you like a robot."<sup>19</sup>*

Owner Jeff Bezos is aware of the toll this work takes on the workers' limbs. But rather than change the insane work regimen, his solution illustrates just how indifferent capital is to what the labor process has become. He says, "We're

<sup>19</sup> ↩ Steven Greenhouse, «"We Deserve More": An Amazon Warehouse's High-Stakes Union Drive», *Guardian*, 23 February 2021.

developing new automated staffing schedules that use sophisticated algorithms to rotate employees among jobs that use different muscle-tendon groups to decrease repetitive motion and help protect employees from MSD [musculoskeletal disorders] risks. This new technology is central to a job rotation program that we're rolling out throughout 2021." It is hard to know whether to laugh or cry at this, especially given that in this same article he also says his goal is to make Amazon "Earth's Best Employer and Earth's Safest Place to Work."<sup>20</sup>

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The managerial control methods discussed so far are integral to the workplace. However, capital also uses consumers to enhance its control. As corporate methods have become the rule in higher education, students are considered consumers. Management encourages them to think of their professors as simply purveyors of a product they purchase, no different in principle than a fast-food sandwich or something ordered from Amazon. They are given the right to evaluate their teachers, and the latter are expected to encourage the practice. Student evaluations then become part of the employer's arsenal of control devices. Poor evaluations can spell the end of a teacher's career, especially those whose employment is precarious to begin with, such as adjuncts and untenured full-time teachers. There are also websites not run by the colleges, such as Rate My Professors, that serve the same function.

Given that evaluations are anonymous, students are free to say anything. This generates fear among the teachers, and this fear helps control how they teach and what they profess. Those hostile to higher education, believing it to be dominated by left-wing ideologues, are on the lookout for anything that smacks of heterodox thinking, encouraging students to spy on their professors, give them bad ratings, and urge that they be dismissed.

For workers who provide services, customer comment platforms such as Yelp are ubiquitous. Consumers are urged to evaluate the competence of automobile mechanics, waiters, hotel clerks, retail employees, delivery drivers, Uber drivers, medical practitioners, and many others. Employers can then use these ratings to discipline and thus control their workers. Political scientist Joshua Sperber calls this constant monitoring a "digital panopticon."<sup>21</sup> Workers are always being watched, and they never know what will result in a negative customer review.

These managerial control mechanisms do not form an exhaustive list, and it is essential to understand that underlying them is always the threat of force. Some workers might be fired or demoted to teach others that they must submit to the employer's power. Private detectives and electronic snooping can be used to get useful information about the private lives of employees. If a union comes on the scene, workers can be convinced to spy on it and report back to management.<sup>22</sup> Workplaces are always embedded in larger social structures, which usually work to strengthen managerial control. There are thousands of examples of police and military forces breaking strikes, often with ample violence. The laws, including labor statutes, protect the rights of property owners above all others, with various labor boards and courts interpreting the laws in ways favorable to capital. Rarely do media offer robust and unyielding support to workers, which is not surprising since typically these are capitalist enterprises. In

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<sup>20</sup> ↪ Both Bezos quotations are from Greenhouse, "We Deserve More."

<sup>21</sup> ↪ Joshua Sperber, *Consumer Management in the Internet Age: How Customers Became Managers in the Modern Workplace* (Washington DC: Lexington, 2019); Nora De La Cour, "Platform Capitalists Are Turning Customers into Managers in Disguise," *Jacobin*, 6 September 2021.

<sup>22</sup> ↪ For numerous examples of union busting, see Marty Jay Levitt and Terry Conrow, *Confessions of a Union Buster* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1993).



the United States, the Constitution might protect public employees against the depredations of their employers, but for private-sector workers, this is rarely the case.<sup>23</sup>

Managerial control aims to create a labor process in which the one active element, human labor power, is as limited as possible in its ability to interfere with capital accumulation. Businesses want the same predictability that can be expected from machines. If X-amount of labor power is hired, then Y-amount of output will be produced. This formula implies that workers must be conceived as machine-like parts that are combined with other inanimate entities to yield the product. How could this be anything but alienating? It is profoundly anti-human. It is not just that employers exploit labor. Rather, they consume workers, and in the process, deaden them. And when no more can be taken by capital, shells of human beings are simply disposed of, and fresh new ones put to work.

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<sup>23</sup> ↩ On the state's suppression of class struggle and its intimate connection to the accumulation of capital and all that entails, see István Mészáros, *Beyond Leviathan: Critique of the State*, ed. John Bellamy Foster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2022). On U.S. labor laws, see Michael D. Yates, *Power on the Job: The Legal Rights of Working People* (Boston: South End, 1999).

❖ **About Jus Semper:** The Jus Semper Global Alliance aims to contribute to achieving a sustainable ethos of social justice in the world, where all communities live in truly democratic environments that provide full enjoyment of human rights and sustainable living standards in accordance with human dignity. To accomplish this, it contributes to the liberalisation of the democratic institutions of society that have been captured by the owners of the market. With that purpose, it is devoted to research and analysis to provoke the awareness and critical thinking to generate ideas for a transformative vision to materialise the truly democratic and sustainable paradigm of People and Planet and NOT of the market.

❖ **About the author: Michael D. Yates** is editorial director of Monthly Review Press. For many years, he taught working people in labor education programs throughout the United States, seeking to teach, speak, and write for and with the working class and not just about it. He has helped organise labor unions and written extensively about them. This essay is adapted from chapter 5 of his forthcoming book *Work Work Work: Labor, Alienation, and Class Struggle* (Monthly Review Press).



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❖ **Tags:** capitalism, socialism, history, Marxism, movements, revolutions, modern slave labour.

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