

## **Best Practices: the Artificial Negativity of Agri-Food**

*Alessandro Bonanno*  
Sam Houston State University  
USA

### **Abstract**

Employing instances from the agri-food sector and a Critical Theory approach, the concept and actions known as best practices are criticized. Developed in terms of the uses and ideological content of best practices, this critique is directed at probing the “alternative” dimension of this construct. The analysis is carried out through the review of texts that advocate best practices. It is argued that the concept of best practices promotes and legitimizes Neoliberalism by stressing its desirability, effectiveness and superiority in decision making. Best practices calls for actions that transform the functioning of the market to the level of the most desirable form of rationality. The superiority of the market is further employed to advocate the desirability of the neutralization of politics for market generated consensus is preferred to, and replaces, debates, contestation and political scrutiny. The rationale behind this posture rests on the neoliberal assumption that competitive advantage is the primary objective to be achieved. Accordingly, other forms of rationality are considered undesirable and, therefore, excluded. Downplaying structural issues, individual action is the preferred form of action for best practices and Neoliberalism alike. It is concluded that rather than representing a system that promotes alternative forms of action, best practices reproduces the dominant ideology of Neoliberalism.

*“Best Practices sounds interesting and intriguing; in fact it is the way of the future for enhanced business performance. ... Best Practices is seeking out the ‘best of the best’ business concepts and adapting them into your business. Many industries have researched, analyzed and identified the keys that can be used for sustainable growth and survival in the global economy. Businesses today, in any sector in any country, have to consider these ideas within their own resource mix and business strategy.”*  
*Jack Welch (former CEO of General Electric)*

*“Best practices has emerged as an effective tool for measuring performance... In order to achieve comparative advantage and... surpass their competitors, organizations have always been exploring best practices leading to superior performance.”*  
*(Moazzam, Garnevska and Marr 2012: 3).*

*“Good Agricultural Practices are “practices that address environmental, economic and social sustainability for on-farm process, and result in safe and quality food and non-food agricultural products.”*  
*(FAO)*

“More and more activists...are increasingly speaking market-friendly language. They are calling for a gentler capitalism – for fair trade, for certification, for eco-market... Solutions to global problems involve campaigns for ethical purchasing: to brand social causes and sell feelings of ‘doing good’ to the ‘cappuccino class.’”  
(*Dauvergne, Peter and Genevieve Lebaron.2014:1*)

## **Introduction**

Since the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the construct known as *best practices* has emerged as one of the most used tools in the management of a great number of activities including education, the preservation of the environment, the delivery of health care and the provision of social services. It has also been advocated for, and employed in, agri-food. It is often presented as an instrument that replaces inefficient, authoritarian, bureaucratized top-down decisions with a system that offers fair, effective, technically superior solutions. Moreover, it is described as a strategy to improve quality regardless of whether it is understood in terms of production, consumption, or the management of public resources. Its desirability is legitimized by its appeal to the success of its applications and the desirability of its objectives. More importantly, this construct’s extensive use of “progressive” concepts such as sustainability, social acceptability and the safeguard of workers makes its claims acceptable to groups and individuals that oppose corporate ideology and politics and transforms best practices into an instrument of resistance in itself. Best Practices are seen both as superior ways to do business and an excellent manner to pursue socially desirable and ethically relevant goals. Better food, farming, working conditions and a safer environment are claimed to be achieved through the application of best practices.

In a historical context in which the ascendancy of Neoliberalism makes resistance a process deserving attention and scrutiny, it is relevant to probe the alternative dimension and content of best practices. In this paper, this objective is pursued through a review of “texts” that promote best practices. Employing the methodology of *grounded theory* and validating results through the techniques of “analytic induction” and “negative cases,” a number of key aspects of this construct are illustrated. In particular, it is argued that best practices ground their claims on the enhanced market competitiveness that they create. Additionally, this superiority in market relations, it is illustrated, justifies the claims that best practices are an effective system of governance, labor control, conflict resolution and decision making in production and consumption alike. The paper concludes that these claims are consistent with the tenets of Neoliberalism: a situation that makes assertions about the alternative dimension of best practices highly questionable.

## **Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Resistance**

The theme of resistance and associated concepts, such as opposition, class struggle and conflict, have been constant topics of investigation and debate in the social sciences. In the classical sociological tradition that developed with the growth of industrialization, urbanization and the establishment of modern social relations, resistance was associated with the struggle of subordinate classes against undesirable rulers and economic, political and cultural arrangements dominant in society (Goldberg 1996; Smith and Johnston 2002). For most of the last two centuries,

resistance took primarily the form of struggles of labor and their organizations. While in some salient cases it was directed at the radical transformation of the entire society, such as in the cases of communist revolutions (e.g., Bolshevik, Chinese and Cuban revolutions), the struggles of labor unions and parties against dominant industrial relations defined early forms of resistance to capitalism (Le Blanc 1999; Moody 1988). As the 20<sup>th</sup> Century progressed, struggles in other spheres of society acquired relevance. Resistance in the spheres of race, gender, ethnicity and identity and those that involved broader alliance among these and other groups (such as workers and students in the 1960s) populated the time universe of resistance (Geschwender 1977; Kendi 2012; Robnett 1997).

These struggles were primarily rooted in Modernism and Fordism. Their modern dimension involved the centrality of objectives such as freedom, justice, the end of economic exploitation and the full recognition of natural and political rights. While struggles in urban industrial areas centered on the democratization of labor relations in factories and social justice in communities and neighborhoods, in farming they took the form of struggles for the physical and financial control of land and the just remuneration of hired labor. The Fordist component of these struggles involved calls for the greater social and political inclusion of subordinate groups in advance societies of the North and the emancipation of local social groups in the less developed South. Led by strong trade unions, left leaning political parties, and benefitting from the labor-management accord that defined Fordist labor relations, the labor movement was able to obtain higher wages, good fringe benefits and better working conditions (Harvey 1990; Lichtenstein 2002; Bonanno and Cavalcanti 2014).

In virtually all these cases, resistance was based on “social places of opposition,” that is, spatial locations of socio-political aggregation where the agents, objectives and strategies of struggles were identified and practiced. Marx wrote about the aggregating force that the creation of the factory meant for the formation of the working class. The bringing together of large groups of laborers under one single roof was simultaneously an effective system for the establishment of labor discipline but also the source of labor organization and resistance (Marx 1977 [1867]). In his book *The Making of the English Working Class*, the noted British historian E.P. Thompson (1963) illustrated the manner in which the togetherness of laborers working in the factory, walking back to the neighborhood at the end of the work day and socializing at the local pub in the evening shaped the structure, culture and class consciousness of the British working class. Similarly, the struggle of the American Civil Rights Movement found its points of aggregation in churches and neighborhoods, while workplaces and neighborhoods were fundamental for the growth of the Feminist movement. The anti-war student protest grew out of aggregation in universities and schools.

Describing the emerging crisis of Fordism in the early 1970s, James O’Connor (1974) illustrated the contradictions embodied in a system that attempted to regulate capitalism by balancing the requirement of the growth of profit with the emancipation of subordinate classes. Similarly, contending that Fordism could not maintain the promises made to large segments of society, Jürgen Habermas (1975) illustrated not only the economic contradictions of regulated capitalism, but also the impractical nature of its ideology and culture. He contended that the state directed system of negotiations that rewarded labor but left the capitalist class in control of the economy and society was unable to address crises and achieve legitimation. For some of his critics (see Streeck 2014), rather than the inability of the broader system to deliver the promises made to the working and middle classes, it was the renewed power of the capitalist class that ended Fordism (see also Harvey 2005). Freed from the fear of a new Great Depression and the return of totalitarian

(i.e., fascist) regimes, the ruling capitalist class felt that it could get rid of its uncomfortable alliance with labor and the middle classes and restore its undisputed rule.

### *Neoliberalism*

Symbolized by the election of Ronald Reagan at the presidency of the United States and Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister of Great Britain, the establishment of the neoliberal regime signaled the defeat of those social forces and ideologies that supported Fordism and the advent of a socio-economic system that advocated competition, individuality and the reorganization of the state (Brown 2015; Crouch 2011; Harvey 1990; 2005; Mirowski 2014). The ideas promoting this new regime were developed during the pre-World War II years in response to the crisis of classical Laissez-Faire, the implementation of the New Deal and worries about the establishment of socialist left regimes (Stedman Jones 2012). Fearing the development of an organized capitalism based on Keynesian economics, expanded state intervention and a large welfare state, in Europe and North America a group of theorists proposed a variation of the classical concept of the free market centered on a new understanding of freedom, equality, social justice and stability.

Based on the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century economy theory developed by members of the Austrian School of Economics (Von Mises 2010 [1949]; 2007 [1944]; 1981 [1912]; Popper 1966 [1945], Neoliberalism departs from classical Liberal theory primarily because of the decision making role that its promoters attributed to the free market system. In Classical Liberal theory, ethics and politics frame the functioning of the market as they are the loci where the objectives to be achieved by society are decided. In this classical theory, the free market is only an instrument through which these objectives are pursued (Smith, Adam 2009 [1776], 2010 [1759]). In Neoliberalism, conversely, the market is considered the sole decision maker and as such transcends politics (end of politics) and neutralizes its negative effects. The free functioning of the market, it is argued, allocates resources in the best possible way, indicates the appropriate course of action and resolves controversy in an impartial and efficient manner. It is superior to the politically negotiated and always limited solutions offered by political bodies. Decisions made by the latter are often directed by powerful interest groups, the outcomes of inefficient compromises, and inadequate to address the problems in question. Ultimately, it is contended, politically proposed solutions to problems are always constrained by the limited knowledge of the members of these political bodies<sup>1</sup>(Friedman 1982 [1962] 1980; Hayek 2011[1960], 1980 [1948], 1972 [1944]). Any intervention of the state in the economy and society is considered negative unless it is directed at the creation of markets and monitors and represses opposition. Therefore, while state intervention is condemned by neoliberals, it is also advocated when it establishes new rules that favor the neoliberal version of society (Mirowski 2014).

For neoliberals freedom is understood in terms of the economic freedom to compete in the market (Crouch 2011; Hayek 2011 [1960]; Mirowski 2014). Accordingly, any impediment to competition is to be viewed as a limitation of freedom (Friedman 1982 [1962]). Dismissing Classical Liberal ideas about substantive equality, the unrestricted freedom to compete is seen as

---

<sup>1</sup> Neoliberals contend that while the solutions to problems offered by the market automatically include all relevant variables, this is never the case in decisions made by political bodies. Even the most scientifically accomplished group of decision makers can never have the total and impersonal knowledge contained in, and deployed by, the “natural” functioning of the market. Accordingly, the superiority of market “decisions” over political decisions is technical more than political. Because it transcends politics, the free functioning of the market is always the source of the most appropriate “solution” (see Hayek 2011[1960]).

the mechanism through which labor relations are best regulated and merit is awarded. Moreover, competition is not characterized by an institutional dimension (e.g., a fair market), but it is transferred to the individual as individuals compete in every sphere of life. Accordingly, competition justly ranks people and those who are successful should be rewarded accordingly. In this context, social stratification and inequality rather than social problems are the appropriate outcomes of the application of freedom (Brown 2015; Crouch 2011; Mirowski 2014). In this reading of the organization of society, justice cannot be achieved through the democratic deliberations of political bodies as the rule of the majority is not only ineffective but an infringement of the individual freedom of those who disagree with it. Justice is the justice generated by the free functioning of the market. Ultimately, as freedom is exclusively contemplated at the individual level, actions to achieve and reinforce it are equally placed in the hands of individual initiative and each individual's ability to compete (Brown 2015; Mirowski 2014).

### *The Transformation of Resistance*

The message about the objectivity and goodness of the free functioning of the market became one among the most decisive instruments through which the post-World War II Fordist regime was opposed and eventually replaced. Referring repeatedly to the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of state intervention, neoliberals transformed the market into the only possible viable alternative to the severe crisis that affected the world throughout the 1970s and most of the 1980s. In this context, the superiority of the market was employed to mount formidable attacks on labor and their political organizations. As a result and since the early 1980s, labor unions have initiated a sharp and steady decline in membership and political clout that has led them to their current weakness. Similarly, left leaning parties that once proudly supported the struggles of the working class, have decisively moved to the center and dropped many of the distinctive features of their long pro-labor histories. Most importantly, the strategies that once allowed the transformation of resistance into actual gains for subordinate groups have been made ineffective and eventually abandoned (Lichtenstein 2002; Schiavone 2007).

Under Fordism, the emancipatory actions of labor were complemented by the intervention of the state. Called to buffer the contradictions of mature capitalism, the Fordist state not only promoted the establishment and growth of a large welfare system but, more importantly, acted instrumentally as a mediator between the conflicting interests of management and labor (Harvey 1990; Bonanno and Cavalcanti 2014). This mediation pacified social and industrial relations and codified the gains of labor and subordinate classes. While the state remained a class institution and its actions in favor of the dominant capitalist class became more sophisticated and intensified and disparities continued to exist, it also allowed the establishment of practices and discourses that promoted the transformation of many labor's socio-economic claims into actual gains. The beneficiaries of the intervention of the Fordist state were not only members of organized labor but a significant portion of the subordinate classes. Racial, ethnic and gender minorities improved their position in society. In agri-food, state intervention promoted land redistribution, the growth of infrastructure, economic support to family farming and programs that promoted food consumption among the poor and marginalized (Bonanno, Busch, Friedland, Gouveia and Mingione 1994).

Affected by a crippling fiscal crisis and accused of inefficiency and waste, the Fordist state was replaced by the Neoliberal state. Often described in terms of the "retreat of the state," the implementation of neoliberal policies has drastically reduced state sponsored social programs but has increased state intervention in favor of the implementation of market mechanisms, pro-market

policies and social control (Block and Somers 2014; Crouch 2011; Mirowski 2014). This change has signified that while the state has greatly reduced its intervention in favor of subordinate classes, it has increased its political and economic support for the upper class. In the advanced North, the state has expanded economic support for corporations, or corporate welfare, in much greater terms than the so-called “savings” that it has generated through welfare cuts. It has also created a system of securitization of life that protects private property and criminalizes opposition (Dauvergne and Lebaron 2014; Mirowski 2014). In the name of the implementation of the free market ideal, it has also imposed restrictions to the circulation of goods and labor to countries of the South through numerous “free trade agreements” (Bennet and Nader 2015; Spalding 2014). Because of its new role and actions, the state has exonerated itself from being the counterpart and mediator of working class and opposition struggles.

The combined effect of the crisis of labor unions and the neoliberalization of the state have shifted resistance from the state to the corporatized market and from organized unions, parties and movement to the individual. These are precisely the spaces where neoliberalism is more incisive. Claiming effectiveness, resistance has become increasingly corporatized as the fusion of activism and the corporate world has begun to define mobilization on key social and economic issues. A good number of activists, NGOs and other organizations championing a cause have sought the dollars, and found acceptable the sponsorship of, large corporations. Profiting from the visibility and popularity of just causes, corporations have also been eager to support resistance (Dauvergne and Lebaron 2014; MacDonald 2008). Accordingly, a new and historically odd alliance between opposition movements and corporations has emerged in the new century. This alliance not only involves direct partnership between corporations and opposition movements but, above all, the adoption of neoliberal traits in the organization of resistance. As this process has escalated in recent years, resistance groups not only have begun to act like corporations but have pursued the commodification of activism and the individualization of political action as their preferred strategies. In the post 9/11 world, these new forms of corporate sponsored opposition have gained legitimacy and popularity over grass-root movements and, adding to the criminalization of traditional resistance, have emerged as the “civilized” forms of opposition (Dauvergne and Lebaron 2014).

The neoliberal individualization of resistance calls for the empowering of individuals in the selection and execution of acts of resistance. It assumes an inherent beneficial dimension associated with the act of transcending organized and community based opposition in favor of market based resistance. Ultimately, the political action of resisting dominant arrangements is displaced from the political arena into the individual sphere of market behavior (Dauvergne and Lebaron 2014; Mirowski 2014). In this process, individuals, free to act, are transformed into consumers and their freedom materializes only as they participate in market activities. As people satisfy they need to support “a just cause” and wish for change, their actions contribute to corporate growth and the expansion of their power. The counterpart of this individualistic form of resistance is corporate responsibility for corporations “respond” by meeting the desires of consumers as if corporate planning and strategic actions (advertising, lobbying, etc.) were, all the sudden, eliminated from the classical arsenal of corporate management and transferred entirely in the hands of consumers. While this “good behavior” is narrated as if it would generate more desirable production practices and products, it enriches corporations, legitimizes their behavior and creates the justification for the argument that there is no better system than the market system (Dauvergne and Lebaron 2014; Davies 2014). In this context also significantly lessen is the relevance of “social

places of opposition.” Through individualization, resistance does not take place in workplaces, neighborhoods or churches, but it is transformed into the act of buying online or at the mall.

Under neoliberalism, this market oriented form of resistance is further legitimized by the appropriation of discourses that had historically been part of the patrimony of the left and had previously informed critiques of domination and actions of opposition. Throughout most of the first four post-World War II decades, state regulated capitalism and the Fordist labor-management accord were criticized for contributing to the establishment of the “totally administered society” and the “one dimensional man” (Adorno 1973 [1966]; Marcuse 1991 [1964]) This was a view of society in which individuals were seen as controlled and manipulated by the state and the corporate complex that transformed reason from the source of emancipation into instrumentality and domination (Adorno and Horkheimer and Adorno 1972 [1944]; Habermas 1975; Marcuse 1991 [1964]). According to this Critical Theory argument, state-regulated and corporate-promoted mass production and mass consumption destroyed individuality and controlled opposition. As abundant goods and services were delivered to a stupefied population, the state technocratic management of social relations dwarfed people ability to think independently and reflexively. Moreover, the total regulation of social relations and the political compromise between labor and capital led to the managing and programming of opposition. This “artificial negativity” created administered processes of resistance and a society in which opposition became functional to the domination of capital (Piccone 1977). For Piccone, the monopolization of society found its legitimation in the creation of pseudo-resistance generated and controlled by the system and managed by the state. Because it was system generated and lacked originality and particularity, its emancipatory claims provided legitimacy to the system and allowed dominant groups to strengthen their power (Piccone 1977:45-47).

Employing the view that every type of state intervention, and above all planning, is oppressive, neoliberals propose the emancipation of the individual from the planned and managed society. They call for the established of that freedom from institutional constraints and bureaucracy that was once championed by the left. Differing from the left, though, they equate freedom with the individual’s ability to participate in market activities. Additionally they dismiss the ability of the state to contribute toward the creation of substantive equality. The state is viewed as an oppressive institution by definition unless its actions are directed toward the creation of markets and the criminalization of those who oppose it. For neoliberals, the solution to the overbearing ‘nanny state’ is ready available through the free functioning of the market.

## **The Objectives of the Research and Methodology**

Given the context presented above, the research question proposed by this study refers to the extent to which the concept of best practices represents the “most desirable way for sustainable growth” and an alternative strategy that can achieve “environmental, economic and social sustainability” as claimed by the literature that supports its philosophy and application. To address this research question a qualitative analysis based on the examination of pertinent texts is produced. These texts are accounts of best practices in fields related to agri-food. They are examined through the application of Grounded Theory and validated through the techniques of “analytic induction” and “negative cases” (Bryant and Charmaz 2007; Charmaz 2006; Glaser and Strauss 2009 [1967]).

These texts are part of a theoretical sample of documents that illustrates the development and implementation of best practices in agri-food. They were prepared by the following types of actors.

- a) Large corporations, such as the transnational accounting corporations, that are hired by public and private clients to assess the status of their business/initiatives and provide best practices.
- b) Smaller firms and/or individuals who offer their best practices recommendations through educational programs and/or workshops.
- c) NGOs and International Agri-Food organizations that promote best practices as a tool to perform their institutional missions.
- d) Certification agencies that employ best practices as a component of their system of certification.

Following Grounded Theory, the analysis of these texts began with the development of codes. Codes are analytical categories that are abstracted from the actual text and represent a first step toward its exegesis. The codes generated by a first round of analysis were followed by subsequent rounds of coding leading to the creation of more abstract categories. Following this procedure a final set of saturated categories was eventually created. The saturation of categories is achieved when the gathering of fresh data no longer generate new theoretical insights nor reveals new properties of these categories. The saturated categories were then placed in relations with each other (theory construction). The technique of memo writing was employed in the theory construction phase. The validity of the theory was supported through analytic induction for the search for proposition that apply to all cases was pursued. Additionally, the techniques of negative cases was also applied. It involved the search for instances that disproved the theoretical proposition under consideration.

## **Findings**

The application of the above mentioned qualitative methodology yielded a number of key analytical categories and theoretical insights that are reviewed below. These are *properties* that are claimed to characterize best practices.

- 1) *Best practices are what they are “the best.”* This statement is tautological: it makes explicit what is included in its assumptions. The concept of best practices is defined as the best possible way to achieve desired objectives. Because of it, best practices are proposed as effective solutions for existing problems. In particular, they are seen as essential for the resolution of environmental, economic and social problems. The actual results obtained by the applications of these practices are rarely scrutinized and, when they are, it is unclear if they achieved the promised goals. They often claim that they address economic social and environmental sustainability in agri-food production but refrain from tackling the highly debated issue of the incompatibility among different forms of sustainability and

corresponding rationalities. It is assumed that there is one “best” way to achieve these objectives and “best practices” represent it.

- 2) *The best practice is the market.* Ignoring the possibility that the production and consumption of agri-food items can be placed in alternative contexts, best practices are conceptualized and as exclusively market-based practices. They are promoted in terms of achieving better market competition, capturing new markets, creating new market opportunities and offering best market solutions. The common denominator of their claimed success is their ability to create excellent market outcomes and, above all, to establish competitive advantages. They claim to provide efficient business models, generate good market results and contain costs of production. These characteristics not only are invoked in cases involving production, but also in instances referring to the use of natural resources and consumer satisfaction. The underlying message is that best practices significantly improve the market performance of those entities that employ them.
- 3) *Best practices signify to improve the quality of products and allow consumers to make better choices.* While the economic efficiency of best practice is always stressed, equally emphasized is the quality of the goods and services produced. Quality is defined in terms of meeting consumer preferences and creating market ready products. Accordingly, different forms of rationality leading to the identification of quality and types of definitions about what constitute quality are excluded. In this context, the availability of rightly priced quality products enables consumers to make appropriate choices and reward quality producers. This consumer behavior is assumed an objective datum that best practices allow producers to meet. Finally, quality is always presented in the context of the business model of cost containment. Best practices allow the effective use of resources for the manufacturing of quality products.
- 4) *Best practices is an objective and effective system of governance.* Through the adoption of objective techniques and procedures, best practices represent a good alternative to the “too many” government regulations. While regulations will continue to exist, their reduction and/or simplification are seen as beneficial for government regulations are also too costly. This is particularly the case if government regulations can be replaced by performance based norms. Additionally, the application of best practices reduces the risk of non-compliance with existing regulations. Because best practices include government regulations, they generate compliance.
- 5) *Best practices is an objective and effective system of labor control.* The application of best practices helps the monitoring of labor performance. Following the same argument illustrated above, labor is controlled both in terms of quality and costs. Quality and costs of labor are addressed through performance requirements that increase productivity while containing costs. In particular, the high cost of labor is an industry challenge that hampers competitiveness. This is predominantly the case for small farmers. However, best practices addresses it, even though small farmers’ limited budgets and access to information remain important issues.

- 6) *Best practices facilitate decision making and reduces conflict.* The adoption of best practices provides clear indications of the directions/measures to be adopted to address problems. They provide guidance to stakeholders and insights into key problems. Their application empowers individuals and avoids conflict. The availability of explicit information on measures to be taken and patterns to be followed diminishes the risks of dissent and confrontation among stakeholders. The application of best practices promotes consensus.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The argument that I propose in this final section is that the discourse that emerges from the analysis of best practices is based on many the same ideological traits that characterize Neoliberalism. Four points illustrate my argument.

First and paralleling neoliberal arguments about the end of politics and the elimination of controversy, best practices claim to eliminate contestation from the sphere of decision making and replace it with consensus (*facilitate decision making and reduce conflict*). It is argued that by following best practices the most desirable results would be achieved regardless of existing discussions, debates and objections. Like neoliberal pronouncements about the neutrality and impartiality of the market, these claims about the *neutralization of politics* transform processes that can be opposed, debated and the source of political scrutiny, into neutral know-how positions that find their legitimacy in the superior results that they achieve. They propose the replacement of the democratic dimension of discursive deliberation with the purposive oriented notion of desirability of functional results. Moreover, it is claimed that the neutralization of politics represents a more efficient system of governance (*best practices is an objective and effective system of governance*). Following Neoliberalism, state regulation is viewed as unnecessary, problematic and in need to be replaced by the performance-based best practices.

Second, the control of labor is presented as an important problem that is effectively addressed through best practices. This control, it is claimed, is achieved through an objective and, therefore, politically neutral system (*best practices is an objective and effective system of labor control*) that stresses performance requirements and the containment of costs. However, the idea of regulating labor through performance requirements and cost containment underscores the superiority of processes that increase productivity while containing wages. This is a posture that has historically advantaged firms and penalized workers. Moreover, as it is proposed as an objective system, it depoliticizes labor relations to the advantage of companies that can legitimize their position of power in regard to labor.

Third, the overall effectiveness of best practices is based on their declared objective of creating market competitive advantages (*the best practice is the market*). In this discourse, market rationality is considered the only viable form of rationality that, as such, assumes the uncontestable character of universality. Because market rationality cannot be challenged by other rationalities on functional grounds, it can be applied across sectors and activities. The commonly shared maximization of utility (profit) guarantees exchangeability. As indicated by neoliberal theory, the search for enhanced competitiveness should be applied continuously and ubiquitously.

Finally, best practices are “rules of conducts” that prescribe individual behavior and, through it, the achievement of best possible outcomes (*best practices allow consumers to make better choices*). Like in the case of neoliberal theory, the notion of individual responsibility is stressed. This posture downplays structural conditions, transforms social problems into personal

issues and places the burden of their solution on the individual. Social issues need to be solved by individual action through the means available by the individual.

As early as the 1990s celebrating the accomplishments of Neoliberalism, Francis Fukuyama (1992) declared that Neoliberalism had no alternatives. The discourse of best practices proposes the same point. Best practices are simply the “best.” They are the real alternative to virtual all of today’s problems. Yet, like Neoliberalism, best practices have come full circle. Their claim of being a system that opposes authoritarian, bureaucratic, top-down solutions and offers freedom, fairness and effectiveness has been translated into a system in which market competition is the only available rationality and desirable form of conduct, the unchallenged and commodified opinions of experts define the availability of choices and fairness is one that allows monopolies and large conglomerates to grow and prosper. As these conditions remain we are reminded of the danger represented by the real lack of alternatives and the presence of claims about the desirability of “the end of history.”

## **Bibliography**

- Adorno, Theodore. 1973 [1966]. *Negative Dialectic*. New York: Continuum.
- Bennet, James T. and Ralph Nader. 2015. *Corporate Welfare: Crony Capitalism That Enriches the Rich*. Piscataway NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Block Fred and Margaret S. Somers. 2014. *The Power of Market Fundamentalism. Karl Polanyi’s Critique*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bonanno, Alessandro and Josefa Salette Barbosa Cavalcanti. 2014. Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing.
- Bonanno, Alessandro, Lawrence Busch, William H. Friedland, Lourdes Gouveia and Enzo Mingione. 1994. *From Columbus to ConAgra: The Globalization of Agriculture and Food*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Brown, Wendy. 2015. *Undoing Demos*. New York: Zone Books.
- Bryant, Anthony and Kathy Charmaz (eds.). 2007. *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Charmaz, Kathy. 2006. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Crouch, Collin. 2011. *The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism*. London: Polity Press.
- Dauvergne, Peter and Genevieve Lebaron. 2014. *Protest, INC. The Corporatization of Activism*. Malden, MA: Polity.
- Davies, William. 2014. *The Limits of Neoliberalism. Authority, Sovereignty and the Logic of Capitalism*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Fukuyama, Francis. 1992. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press.
- Glasser, Barney G. and Anselm Strauss. 2009 [1967]. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction.

- Geschwender, James. 1977. *Class, Race and Worker Insurgency*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Goldberg, Robert A. 1996. *Grassroots Resistance: Social Movements in 20th Century America*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1975. *Legitimation Crisis*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Harvey, David. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Hayek, F. A. (2011) [1960]. *The Constitution of Liberty*. Chicago University of Chicago Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1980) [1948]. *Individualism and Economic Order*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1972 [1944]. *The Road to Serfdom*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Horkeheimer, Max and Theodore Adorno. 1972 [1944]. *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment*. New York: Continuum.
- Kendi, Ibram. 2012. *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstitution of Higher Education, 1965-1972*. New York: Palgrave-Macmillan.
- Le Blanc, Paul. 1999. *A Short History of the U.S. Working Class*. New York: Humanity Books.
- Lichtenstein, Nelson. 2002. *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- MacDonald, Christine Catherine. 2008. *Green Inc.,: An Environmental Insider Reveals How a Good Cause Has Gone Bad*. Guilford, CT: Lyons Press.
- Marcuse, Herbert. 1991 [1964]. *One-Dimensional Man*. New York: Routledge.
- Marx, Karl. 1977 [1867]. *Capital: A Critiques of Political Economy*. Volumes I and III. New York: Vintage Books.
- Mirowski, Philip. 2014. *Never Let a Serious Crisis go to Waste*. London: Verso.
- Moazzam, Muhammal, Elena Garnevska and Norman Marr. 2012. Benchmarking Agri-Food Supply Chain Networks: A Conceptual Framework. World Business Capability Congress, 2012: 1-12. Retrieved at [www.worldbusinesscapabilitycongress.com](http://www.worldbusinesscapabilitycongress.com) on July 7, 2015.
- Moody, Kim. *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism*. London: Verso.
- O'Connor, James. *The Fiscal Crisis of the State*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

- Piccone, Paul. 1977. "The Crisis of One Dimensionality." *Telos* 35:43-54.
- Polanyi, Karl. 2001 [1944]. *The Grate Transformation*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Popper, Karl. 1966 [1945]. *Open Society and its Enemies*. London: Rutledge and Keagan Paul.
- Robnett, Belinda. 1997. *How Long? How Long?: African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schiavone, Michael. 2007. *Unions in Crisis: The Future of Organized Labor in America*. New York: Preager.
- Spalding, Rose. 2014. *Contesting Trade in Central America: Market Reform and Resistance*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Stedman Jones, Daniel. 2012. *Masters of the Universe*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Smith, Adam. 2009 [1776]. *An inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations*. Blacksburg, VA: Thrifty Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2010 [1759]. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. New York: Penguin.
- Smith, Jackie and Hank Johnston (Eds). 2002. *Globalization and Resistance: Transnational Dimensions of Social Movements*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman 7 Littlefield Publishers.
- Streeck, Wolfgang. 2014. *Buying Time*. London: Verso.
- Von Mises, Ludwig. 2010 [1949] *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (edited by Bettina Bien Greaves). Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2007 [1944]. *Bureaucracy*. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1981. [1912]. *The Theory of Money and Credit*. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund.