

Endorsements

Joshua Cohen, Professor, Apple University and University of California, Berkeley; editor, Boston Review and
Joel Rogers, Professor, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Director, COWS

“Isabelle Ferreras presents a forceful case for a very big idea. Firms, she argues, are political entities, and democracy is the right kind of governance for political entities. So firms should be governed democratically—by a bicameral body, representing workers as well as owners of capital. We urgently need creative, ambitious, constructive thinking, and Isabelle Ferreras delivers it: clearly, gracefully, and with great intellectual power.”

David Singh Grewal, Professor of Law, Yale Law School, Yale University

“An urgent and exciting contribution to the debate about corporate power and democracy: Ferreras pushes us to reach beyond the existing forms of the corporation to ask what democratic organization might look like in our workplaces.”

Philippe Van Parijs, Professor, University of Louvain, Hoover Chair of economic and social ethics

“A simple and radical proposal — bicameral firms — supported by a powerful analogy with the history of political democracy and by an insightful analysis of the growing tension between corporate despotism and civic equality. This is the sort of smart interdisciplinary thinking that we need to shed light on the present and feed hope for the future.”

Erik Olin Wright, Vilas Distinguished Professor, University of Wisconsin – Madison ; Past President, American Sociological Association (2011-12)

“Isabelle Ferreras presents a deeply original and provocative proposal for deepening and extending the ideals of democracy in capitalist economies by democratizing the governance of corporations.

She provides a powerful, nuanced critique of the autocratic forms of rule that are taken-for-granted within capitalist firms as they exist, and a compelling model of an emancipatory alternative that could be realized in the future. The book is a brilliant contribution to the kind of progressive thought desperately needed for the 21st century.”

Elaine Bernard, Labor and Worklife Program, Harvard Law School, Harvard University

“Democracy must not stop at the workplace door. While many have lamented the autocratic rule of corporations, Isabelle Ferreras offers a radical and exciting proposal on how democracy can be inserted into corporate governance. Arguing that workers, not just capital, are investors in enterprises, Ferreras demands that workers be granted the rights of citizenship and a role in the government of firms. With corporate power challenging democracy everywhere, Ferreras challenges workers, unions, and anyone interested in breathing life into democracy to recognize firms as political entities. She shows how to extend democratic structures into these authoritarian entities that play such a commanding role in our lives and economy”

Christopher Mackin, American Working Capital, LLC ; Lecturer at the Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations

“Economists have long been content to describe corporations as an abstract legal shell, a “nexus of contracts” governed by narrowly constructed notions of property rights. Political scientist Isabelle Ferreras introduces us to an alternative view of the corporation as a political association comprised of stakeholders who expect to be governed according to democratic rules and norms. In times of skyrocketing inequality, a deeper debate about the “theory of the firm” is urgent and timely. Ferreras has launched that debate.”



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Firms as Political Entities

Saving Democracy through Economic Bicameralism

Isabelle Ferreras



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Argument

Democracy has been disrupted by capitalism to the point of near extinction. Isabelle Ferreras proposes a simple, yet revolutionary solution: democratizing capitalism.

For generations, workers have been viewed as human capital, and firms as private economic organizations. Starting with the sociological observation that workers expect to be treated as full citizens, and drawing on the history of Western democracies, this book argues that workplaces are part of the public sphere, and that firms can only be fully understood in that light – as political entities in need of democracy.

Examining political revolutions since Roman Antiquity, Ferreras identifies a “bicameral moment” that was the lynchpin of their successful democratic transition, and argues that the time has come for corporations to undertake this transition in a bicameral moment of their own, by granting the same rights to workers – firms’ labor investors – as the ones held by capital investors.

Economic Bicameralism, the book’s central idea, is a revolution that is no less political or powerful for its quiet efficiency. Once read, the idea cannot be ignored: firms are political entities with global impact, and must be governed as such – democratically.

Author bio



Isabelle Ferreras is a tenured fellow of the National Fund for Scientific Research (FNRS, Brussels), a professor of sociology at the University of Louvain (IACCHOS-CriDIS) in Belgium, and a senior research associate of the Labor and Worklife Program at Harvard Law School. A sociologist (PhD Louvain 2004) and political scientist (MSc

M.I.T. 2004) by training, Ferreras is driven by the conviction that ideas matter, and that they can make a difference in people’s life. This book is the keystone of her long-term research into the tensions between capitalism and democracy.