


Practices of Fordism and Employee Alienation in the Company PT EVERYBRIGHT

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ABSTRACT

The concept of fordism is currently widely used by companies in Indonesia, in this concept explains that every worker will be rewarded by giving them high wages for the work they do. The purpose of fordism is to ensure that workers will also buy the products they have produced by buying the products from the wages that have been given to them. This research aims to find out how alienation and fordism practices that exist at PT EVERYBRIGHT are felt by its workers. This research uses qualitative research methods with a case study approach. This research also uses observation and interview methods as well as documentation as research data collection techniques. The results of this study indicate that this fordism work system has a good impact on the company and is not good for its workers. The company also divides the workers into several divisions and shifts by dividing the working hours. Through this work system, workers feel alienated from the world of work and have to endure this discomfort. In addition, workers also feel boredom and the limited abilities they get as a result of the application of the fordism concept at PT EVERYBRIGHT.

Keywords: Alienation, Fordism, Labour, Industry.

ABSTRAK

Konsep sistem kerja *fordisme* saat ini banyak dimanfaatkan oleh perusahaan yang ada di Indonesia, dalam konsep ini menjelaskan bahwa setiap pekerja akan dihargai dengan memberikannya upah yang tinggi dari hasil pekerjaan yang mereka lakukan. Tujuan dari *fordisme* adalah untuk memastikan bahwa para pekerja juga akan membeli hasil produksi yang telah dihasilkannya dengan cara membeli produk tersebut dari upah yang telah diberikan kepada mereka. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana *alienasi* dan praktik *fordisme* yang ada di PT EVERYBRIGHT yang dirasakan oleh para pekerjanya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus. Penelitian ini juga menggunakan metode observasi dan wawancara serta dokumentasi sebagai teknik pengumpulan data penelitian. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa sistem kerja *fordisme* ini memiliki dampak yang baik bagi perusahaan dan kurang baik bagi para pekerjanya. Perusahaan juga membagi para pekerja kedalam beberapa divisi dan *shift* dengan membagi jam kerjanya. Melalui sistem kerja ini para pekerja merasakan keterasingan dari dunia kerjanya dan harus menahan ketidaknyamanan tersebut. Selain itu para pekerja juga merasakan kejenuhan serta terbatasnya kemampuan yang mereka dapatkan akibat dari penerapan konsep *fordisme* di PT EVERYBRIGHT.

Kata Kunci : Alienasi, Fordisme, Pekerja, Industri.



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1. Introduction

Industry and sociology have a very complex relationship and influence each other, especially in terms of how social structures, labor relations, and community dynamics are certainly greatly influenced by changes in the industry. One of the things that can be seen in the relationship between industry and sociology is the dialectics of labor relations and worker alienation. The concept of alienation introduced by the famous economist Karl Marx explains how the dynamics of workers working in the capitalist system feel alienated from their work, their work products, and their peers. With massive mass production systems and assembly lines that often limit workers' creativity and control, this phenomenon is still relevant in many industrial

contexts today. Not to mention that the fairly complex relationship between management and workers is often influenced by the structure of the industry. In industries with more formalized and hierarchical working relationships, such as in many large factories, conflicts and negotiations over wages, working conditions, and workers' rights are common.

The rapid development of the industry both domestically and abroad makes industry competition more competitive with each other. Companies must be able to manage various risks, both high and low risk. In Indonesia, industry or industrialization, plays an important role in the national economy. The rapid growth and improvement of our economy is supported by industry, which has the effect of changing the composition of the national economy.

The transformation of the national economy through industrialization is not without its challenges. As industries grow and evolve, there is a constant need for adaptation in both the workforce and the societal structures surrounding it. One of the major sociological impacts of industrialization is the shift in labor patterns, as the demand for skilled labor increases while the manual, unskilled labor force may face job displacement. This shift can create new social inequalities, as those who fail to acquire the necessary skills for the modern industrial economy may experience a sense of marginalization or exclusion from economic opportunities. This phenomenon contributes to the widening gap between different social classes, where the divide between the educated, skilled workers and those who rely on unskilled labor becomes increasingly apparent.

In addition to skill disparities, industrialization often leads to urbanization, as factories and production centers are concentrated in certain regions, drawing rural populations to cities in search of work. This mass migration from rural to urban areas creates a host of new social dynamics. Cities grow rapidly, often without adequate infrastructure to support their expanding populations. This can lead to overcrowding, inadequate housing, and rising poverty levels in urban centers. The rapid urbanization process, fueled by industrial growth, can exacerbate social tensions and inequalities, as those who migrate in search of work may struggle to find stable housing or decent living conditions. These social challenges are frequently compounded by the exploitation of workers in poor working conditions, further alienating individuals from the societal benefits that industrialization promises.

However, the connection between industry and sociology is not entirely negative. Industrialization also brings about positive social changes, particularly in terms of technological progress, increased access to goods and services, and the creation of new job sectors. The development of the manufacturing industry, for instance, can foster innovation and open up new opportunities for social mobility. It can also promote greater interconnectedness through improved transportation and communication systems, which can lead to a more integrated society. This increased connectivity not only boosts economic activity but also promotes cultural exchange and social integration, as people from diverse backgrounds come together to work and live in urbanized areas.

Moreover, industries can play a significant role in shaping social values and norms. As industries evolve, so too do the expectations surrounding work ethic, productivity, and social responsibility. Many modern industries now emphasize corporate social responsibility (CSR), where companies are expected to contribute positively to the communities in which they operate. This has led to the growth of new forms of labor movements and environmental activism, as workers and consumers alike advocate for fairer treatment and more sustainable practices within industrial operations. The pressure to address issues like climate change, labor rights, and environmental degradation has created a new layer of sociological awareness that is transforming industrial practices around the world.

In Medan itself, the industrial movement began to develop since Indonesia's independence in 1945. This was marked by the establishment of one of the largest battery factories in Medan City, PT EVERYBRIGHT in 1959. The company, founded by Mr. Chandra Djojonegoro and Mr. Chu Sok Sam, is located in Indonesia and produces dry batteries. The presence of advanced equipment and laboratories dedicated to producing high quality dry battery products, the company is located in Medan, North Sumatra. A combination of system controls and standard operating procedures to monitor every step of the production process and guarantee the highest possible battery quality. ISO 9001 certification proves the company's continuous compliance with product quality standards (Almustaqim and Toscani 2022).

The concept of fordism itself in the industrial world was introduced by Henry Ford who developed a production philosophy called fordism. Fordism is a production system that aims to achieve high productivity and constantly modify products to meet standards. With the aim to fulfill mass consumption at the time in this case, the demand for Ford cars was the first mass production implemented in the era of fordism. Fordism was enacted at the time to help the company lower production costs and raise the price of its cars, which allowed the company to earn more commodities from its vehicle manufacturing (Schmidt 2013).

The application of fordism in the industrialized world has brought about major changes in the way goods are produced and distributed. The concept of fordism, developed by Henry Ford, has influenced many industrial sectors and contributed to the modern industrial revolution. However, it cannot be denied that the fordism system can cause alienation in a number of ways, including monotonous work. Although fordism creates very high efficiency and productivity, it also often results in work becoming monotonous and fragmented, which can increase feelings of alienation. Lack of ownership as workers are not directly involved in the overall production process and have no control over the outcome of their work, they may feel alienated from their own work.

Then wages and satisfaction alienate workers from this system of fordism, although we know that high wages can reduce some forms of economic dissatisfaction, it does not necessarily address the deeper issues of alienation related to the nature of work itself. Overall, while fordism brought many innovations in the way goods were produced and distributed, it also introduced new challenges in terms of welfare and job satisfaction, expressed in the marxian concept of alienation.

The concept of fordism itself is currently many companies that have begun to utilize their labor system by adopting the workings of the concept of fordism, one of which is PT EVERBRIGHT. From the results of initial observations, the workers there began to be divided into their respective work divisions by forming divisions and shifts according to existing regulations. At PT EVERBRIGHT there are also rules that have been determined by the company which are almost the same as other companies to create workers to be disciplined and work well. When the workers can work well and produce goods more than the specified target, they will be given high wages. This is what makes the workers at PT EVERBRIGHT complacent in living their days as laborers. Taking advantage of this fordism work system, the leadership of PT EVERBRIGHT can minimize the expenditure of existing production funds and get more profit from the production carried out. Seeing the existing conditions, the researcher took steps to conduct deeper research on how alienation occurs for workers at PT EVERYBRIGHT who apply the concept of fordism in running the wheels of their industry.

2. Method

In this research, the chosen method plays a crucial role in ensuring the depth and relevance of the findings. As mentioned, a qualitative research approach was employed with a case study methodology. The qualitative approach is particularly valuable when exploring complex, context-dependent phenomena, where the goal is to understand the deeper meanings and motivations behind human behavior. This methodology is rooted in the idea that human experiences cannot be fully understood through quantitative data alone, but require a more nuanced approach that considers the individual, social, and cultural contexts in which those experiences take place. According to Moleong (2017), qualitative research provides a way to explore phenomena in their natural settings, allowing researchers to gain insights into people's perspectives, behaviors, and the social dynamics at play. In this case, the focus was on understanding the experiences of workers within a Fordist industrial system and the specific dynamics of labor alienation at PT EVERBRIGHT.

The case study approach was selected for this research because it allows for an in-depth examination of a particular instance or phenomenon, which is critical for understanding complex issues such as labor relations, worker alienation, and the effects of Fordism. A case study enables the researcher to dive deeply into the context of PT EVERBRIGHT, which, as a real-world setting, provides rich data that might be difficult to capture through other methods. This approach allows the researcher to explore the unique features of the company's work system, the relationship between management and workers, and the impacts of mass production on worker satisfaction and social dynamics. By focusing on one case, the researcher can analyze the specificities of this organization while drawing broader implications for similar companies in the

industry. This method also offers flexibility, allowing for the inclusion of various types of data (e.g., qualitative interviews, direct observation) to create a comprehensive picture of the studied phenomenon.

Data collection in this research involved a triangulation of methods, including observation, interviews, and literature study, which together enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. Observation allowed the researcher to gain firsthand insights into the daily operations of PT EVERBRIGHT, as well as the work environment and interactions between workers and management. This method provided valuable contextual information, which helped the researcher to understand the dynamics of the Fordist production system in action. Interviews with workers, supervisors, and company managers further enriched the data, offering an inside perspective on the lived experiences of employees, their attitudes toward their work, and how they perceived the impact of Fordism on their labor and social relations. The qualitative interviews were semi-structured, providing flexibility for respondents to express their views in their own words while also ensuring that key topics related to worker alienation, job satisfaction, and production practices were covered.

In addition to observation and interviews, literature study was utilized to supplement the primary data collected. The review of relevant academic sources, industry reports, and previous studies on Fordism and labor alienation provided a theoretical framework for the research. This literature review helped contextualize the findings from PT EVERBRIGHT within broader academic debates on industrial production systems and their social implications. It also allowed the researcher to identify existing gaps in the literature, particularly in the context of Indonesian industries, and build upon previous knowledge regarding the social consequences of mass production techniques.

The research was conducted at PT EVERBRIGHT, located in Paya Geli, Sunggal, North Sumatra, which is an industrial area known for its large-scale manufacturing operations. The location of the company, situated in a rapidly developing industrial region, offered a unique setting to observe the intersection of industrialization, labor relations, and social dynamics. PT EVERBRIGHT, as a company practicing Fordist principles of mass production, provided an ideal case study for exploring the realities of such a system in contemporary Indonesia. The choice of this company was based on its prominence in the local manufacturing sector and the availability of access to key stakeholders within the organization. By studying this particular case, the research sought to contribute valuable insights into the real-world application of Fordism in modern industrial contexts and its consequences for workers' well-being and social cohesion.

Overall, the qualitative case study approach with its combination of observation, interviews, and literature review allows for a comprehensive and multifaceted exploration of the research topic. By focusing on PT EVERBRIGHT, the study provides a detailed understanding of how Fordism operates within a specific company and its broader implications for workers, highlighting both the benefits and drawbacks of this production system. Through this method, the researcher was able to uncover the complexities of labor alienation and the social dynamics at play in a mass production environment, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of industrial work in the 21st century.

3. Result and Discussion

Fordism is a concept named after Henry Ford that describes an economic system and social system based on the production of goods in large quantities with standardized quality. This concept is mostly applied in the world of manufacturing industry. However, it can also be applied to other products especially those that can be produced in large quantities such as food and fuel, as well as mining products and chemicals (Selkov, E & Roe 2004).

The concept of Fordism can be used in several social phenomena related to production. It can also be used in other related socioeconomic phenomena. The meaning of the theory varies depending on the field in which it is applied. However, despite the variations, all the meanings are interrelated with each other. In this concept, workers are rewarded by being given high wages for their work. The main purpose of this concept is to ensure that they will buy the products produced in large quantities (Beynon, H., & Nichols 2006).

Fordism, as a production model, not only revolutionized industrial manufacturing but also had

profound effects on labor dynamics and consumer culture. One of the key aspects of Fordism is the integration of mass production with mass consumption, a relationship that reshaped both the workplace and the marketplace. By standardizing production processes and introducing the assembly line, industries were able to produce goods at a scale never seen before, lowering costs and making products more affordable for a wider population. The promise of higher wages for workers, as introduced by Henry Ford, was seen as a means to create a stable workforce while simultaneously fostering a new class of consumers. This cycle of production and consumption underpinned the economic growth of the 20th century, particularly in Western economies.

In addition to its economic implications, Fordism had a significant sociological impact. The rise of mass production led to the rise of mass society, where industrial work became more specialized and segmented, often reducing workers to repetitive tasks on the assembly line. While this increased efficiency, it also led to the alienation of workers, a phenomenon that Marx had earlier described. Ford's emphasis on high wages, however, acted as a counterbalance to worker alienation by providing a sense of economic security, allowing workers to access the very products they were producing. This strategy not only reduced labor unrest but also contributed to the growth of a consumer culture that relied on mass production.

However, as the global economy evolved and new technologies emerged, Fordism began to face challenges. In the 1970s, with the rise of globalization, automation, and just-in-time production, the rigid and standardized approach of Fordism started to show signs of inefficiency. Companies began to focus more on flexibility and the ability to adapt to market demands, leading to the emergence of post-Fordism, characterized by decentralized production and more varied product lines. The focus shifted from mass production to mass customization, where consumer preferences began to play a larger role in shaping production processes. This transition also saw the erosion of traditional labor practices, as many factories shifted to more flexible, part-time, or outsourced labor forces.

The shift from Fordism to post-Fordism also had deep implications for workers. While Fordism emphasized stable, long-term employment with decent wages, post-Fordism brought with it greater job insecurity, especially in industries where automation and outsourcing reduced the demand for human labor. Workers in many sectors found themselves subject to precarious employment conditions, with fewer guarantees of job security or long-term benefits. This transformation in labor relations created new social tensions, as the promise of upward mobility through stable industrial work became increasingly elusive. In response, labor movements and unions adapted, pushing for protections in the new, more fluid labor market.

Despite these changes, Fordism continues to influence modern industrial practices in several ways. Large corporations, particularly in the automotive and electronics sectors, still rely on the principles of mass production, although they have increasingly incorporated more advanced technologies and automated processes into their production lines. In many ways, the legacy of Fordism can be seen in the way that production is organized globally today. The development of global supply chains and the rise of multinational corporations are a direct continuation of Ford's ideas about economies of scale and the integration of production with consumption. However, as industries continue to adapt to technological advancements and evolving consumer preferences, it remains to be seen whether the principles of Fordism will continue to hold relevance or give way entirely to new forms of industrial organization.

From the results of research conducted by researchers at PT EVERBRIGHT, there are divisions, such as the position of the battery warehouse or the forklift operator section which will be adjusted to the division of their respective shifts. At PT EVERBRIGHT there are 3 shifts that are applied when working, namely starting at 08:00 WIB-16:00 WIB, 16:00 WIB-24:00 WIB, and 24:00 WIB-08:00 WIB. Basically, the wages given for each shift are no different, be it the night shift or the morning shift. Every worker at PT EVERBRIGHT must obey the rules set by the company to create a good and disciplined work system, for example, an example of the rules given to workers at PT EVERYBRIGHT is that workers cannot come late and cannot be absent without permission from the superior.

This company also has different return hours every day such as on Monday to Thursday the workers will enter at 08:00-17:00 and Friday the workers enter at 08:00-15:30 and on Saturday Sunday the workers at PT EVERBRIGHT they will be on vacation. Based on data collected at the research location, PT EVERBRIGHT has long adopted the fordism work system, with the aim that the production costs that will

be incurred to workers will be smaller. This is what makes this company want to adopt this work system by forming a division of labor of its employees according to the existing divisions to meet consumer needs more quickly. In addition, there is no difference in the distribution of wages from these work divisions.

In addition, without realizing it (alienated) by the workers at PT EVERBRIGHT, they also use the products they have created themselves from the factory where they work but they have to buy them first from the wages earned so far. This is a strategy made by many companies to their workers so that they do not have awareness of the fordism system that has been adopted by the company where they work. From this fordism work system, not all workers there can get to know colleagues in their own workplace, so that the work system implemented by many companies creates alienation or alienation from each other. According to Henslin (Henslin 2007), alienation is a condition in which a person feels that they do not belong to something and thinks that no one pays attention to what happens to them. In addition, the solidarity created in this company is organic solidarity, where the solidarity that is built is adjusted to the division of labor or the division and shift of each worker.

Through the implementation that has been implemented by PT EVERBRIGHT by adopting the fordism work system, it forms an increase in the productivity of existing goods by generating market demand, this company can also reduce production costs by getting higher profits from the production produced. Meanwhile, the impact felt by the workers in the company is that it creates workers there who are only able to do one thing or the lack of skills possessed by workers because they are limited to one ability. This is what makes the workers at PT EVERBRIGHT feel alienated so that there is boredom and dissatisfaction with the work system adopted by the company.

By adopting this work system, workers will always be controlled and supervised by the company on a regular basis, which can make them feel unfree at work. The work they do aims to get the maximum wage possible, without making any mistakes by following the rules that have been applied and enduring the boredom that exists to be able to meet their daily needs. In addition, the shortcomings of this fordism work system also create workers at PT EVERBRIGHT not knowing each other with all other workers, this is because there is a division of labor per division and a shift which is divided into three sessions. So that the workers there feel alienated (alienation) when working. This is because the workers there only know their coworkers who are the same division and shift as them.

The implementation of Fordism in industry undeniably brings high efficiency and low production costs, but this system often comes at the expense of worker satisfaction and well-being. Alienation is a significant impact of this system, where workers feel separated from their work, the work process, themselves, and their coworkers. Understanding the reality of alienation in the context of Fordism helps us to identify the challenges faced in the mass production model and encourages the search for solutions to improve the work experience and worker satisfaction in the modern industrial system.

4. Conclusion

The conclusion in this study provides an explanation and understanding that the work system implemented by PT EVERBRIGHT, namely fordism, has a good impact on the company and is not good for the workers there. The application of fordism makes workers alienated from the world of work and fellow humans. This is what creates the workers there to be not free or bound by the given working hours. In addition, workers in the company also realize that they also feel bored and the conclusion of this study highlights the dual-edged nature of Fordism as implemented by PT EVERBRIGHT. On one hand, the company's adoption of Fordism has been beneficial for its overall operations, contributing to greater efficiency, higher production rates, and economic growth for the organization. The mass production system, with its emphasis on standardized tasks and the division of labor, has allowed the company to streamline its processes and meet market demand more effectively. From a managerial perspective, this has created a stable and predictable framework for achieving high levels of productivity, which is often seen as a key driver of industrial success. However, the impact of Fordism on the workers at PT EVERBRIGHT has proven to be less positive. The application of this system has led to a significant degree of worker alienation, a concept rooted in Marxist theory, where workers become disconnected not only from the product of their labor but also from the broader social and organizational context in which they operate. In a Fordist system, workers

are reduced to performing repetitive tasks, often without any sense of personal achievement or involvement in the larger goals of the company. As a result, workers may feel like mere cogs in a machine, lacking the creativity, autonomy, and satisfaction that typically come from more varied and engaging work. This alienation is not just intellectual but emotional and social, as workers may also feel detached from their colleagues, with little opportunity for collaboration or personal connection. Moreover, the rigid structure of working hours and tasks under Fordism further exacerbates this sense of alienation. Workers are often bound by strict schedules and performance targets, which limit their ability to exercise any control over their workday. The monotony of the tasks, coupled with a lack of variety, can lead to boredom, burnout, and a sense of stagnation. Over time, workers may become increasingly disillusioned, as they recognize that their skills and abilities are not being fully developed or utilized. The repetitive nature of their roles can create feelings of frustration and a lack of personal growth, which can impact both their job satisfaction and overall well-being. Another critical issue arising from the Fordist work system at PT EVERBRIGHT is the lack of social cohesion among workers. As tasks become more specialized and segmented, workers are often isolated from each other, focusing solely on their individual tasks without engaging in meaningful social interactions or team collaboration. This fragmented approach to labor reduces opportunities for workers to form bonds, share knowledge, or support each other. In environments where teamwork and social connections are minimal, the workplace can become an impersonal and alienating space, further contributing to workers' dissatisfaction and disengagement. The absence of a sense of community among coworkers can also erode morale, making it harder for employees to feel a sense of belonging or shared purpose within the organization. Ultimately, the application of Fordism at PT EVERBRIGHT illustrates a key tension between organizational efficiency and worker well-being. While the company may benefit from the increased productivity and cost-efficiency associated with mass production, these benefits come at the expense of worker satisfaction, creativity, and social engagement. The long-term sustainability of such a work system depends on how well the company addresses these social and psychological challenges. If the alienation experienced by workers is not acknowledged and mitigated, it could lead to higher turnover rates, lower employee morale, and potential disruptions in productivity. Therefore, it is essential for the company to reconsider and balance the efficiency of mass production with more human-centered approaches to work, such as fostering greater autonomy, creativity, and social interaction among workers.

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