

Work contracts of limited duration make only part of the larger phenomenon termed in academic language as a plurality of institutional forms of labor and, as journalist often write, junk jobs. Regardless to the term choosing, what counts is the fact that we face quite fundamental changes in the structure of labor market. We have to deal with inescapable process – inescapable due to the fact that it is the part of modern capitalism dynamics, be it ‘turbo-capitalism’, ‘corporate capitalism’, ‘new economy’, etc.

Authors of the papers that are presented in this issue of *Social Policy* are make attempts to deal with part of challenges we face, for an analysis and measures do cope with many others we still need to wait. There is no other way, we will need to think over such questions as possible ways to combine economic effectiveness and – important for employers – labour market flexibility with social protection expected by employees and trade unions. Of equal importance is the question of precarious labor market impact on family incomes as well as on social security system and, in particular, on pension system. Do the precarious jobs and their share in labor market arrangements will undermine the idea of social cohesion and intensify processes of social exclusion? If so, what to do with nowadays fashionable idea of work-fare state?

Questions are numerous, our modest attempt is just to focus our concerns. Preliminary answers, by nature, are tentative and far from being complete: our aim is to begin public debate and to provide data that may make such debate a little bit less ideological. Anyway, research findings we present, far from perfection, are the first in Poland and make the present issue of *Social Policy*.

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POLISH LABOUR MARKET DYNAMICS: BETWEEN MODERNISATION OR DEPENDENCE?

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THE MASQUERADES OF EVOLUTIONISM

One could say that, as a matter of fact, nothing especially new is going on: [...] *in mid-18th century, i.e. at the beginning of the English “industrial revolution”, changes in our civilisation started to occur at an ever faster pace, and after two centuries they have already reached even the most remote parts of our globe and the most isolated communities [...] those who devise those changes, though not always aware of their implications, are but a handful among all humankind, which remains conservative in nature [...] that handful of restless demiurges of grand transformation [...] have finally managed to impose upon the entire globe an incessant variability of landscapes and lives [...]* (Jedlicki, 1988, p. 8). Two important and apparently very topical thoughts are embedded in the fragment quoted above. The first one is that changes are “devised”, as Jedlicki puts it; thus, they do not follow from some historical necessity, the decrees of Providence, or from invariable and unavoidable laws of social evolution, etc. They are “devised”! This means that, to a greater or lesser extent, the kind of social order that arises from the change is the result of a more or less entangled twist of someone’s decisions and political practice. Limiting that thought to what is of greatest interest for us here, i.e. to the attempts at understanding the dynamics of the labour market and its transformations, the above means that there are no reasons why we should interpret them as manifestations of “historical necessity” or of the operation of the “laws of social development” or the like. The assumptions behind this line of reasoning refer to the rhetoric of classical evolutionism in social science, to a perception of the course of history – and of the developments in the labour market – in terms of inevitable progress. It is worth noting that if we adopt such a point of view, we fundamentally change the manner of raising important questions: we no longer ask whether the coming changes are in any way reasonable – since they are a necessity, after all – yet we do ask about their pace, about the obstacles that appear in the path of progress, and possibly about ways to overcome them. Obviously, also the questions of the existence of alternatives disappear: what is happening is what must happen, irrespective of whether we are looking at the processes referred to as globalisation or at the processes of change in the institutional forms of human labour.

A thorough critique of this cognitive perspective has been presented by Karl Popper and there is no reason to return to it here. What might be worth noting is the extent to which that

rhetoric is sometimes used – if only as an ideological screen – to force various interests, construct frameworks of political correctness or justify institutional changes.

The other thought comes down to saying that *the variability of landscapes and lives*, observed by some with anxiety and by others with hope, has been imposed on both the former and the latter. Treated seriously – and there is no reason to deem it only a stylistic figure – that notion would have to mean that changes in the life of the collective constitute, above all, an adaptive process. If the change-generating stimulus is sufficiently strong, then – willingly or not – the world has to adapt to it, and it is in this sense that those changes are somehow imposed. The chance of prospering or just merely surviving in the changing world would then be a function of the ability to recognise the signs of the time correctly and to adapt to the rules one has not created.

This is no news either; stylised in a number of ways, this concept has re-appeared systematically in social studies, for instance in the diverse forms of dependency theory, i.e. such concepts of social, economic and also cultural dynamics that focus on demonstrating the necessity, often perceived as a painful dependency, to integrate local dynamism into the broader processes of social change.

What those processes exactly are is a topic for a not so entirely separate theoretical discussion in which, one way or another, we have to opt for one of the theories of social change available in the modern marketplace of ideas, keeping in mind the fact this means accepting its intrinsic assumptions. As it happens, the simplest solution here would be to refer to some concept of modernisation or neo-modernisation – especially if they were to help in the search for theoretical background for devising and/or justifying strategies to overcome a condition perceived as economic or cultural backwardness.

In more general terms, and already in the stylistics of one of such concepts: if one focused on the endeavour to move from the periphery towards the centre of the modern world. Yet the problem is that stressing modernisation often entails overlooking what is in fact fairly obvious, namely – as most accurately observed by Piotr Sztompka – that [...] *both the theory of modernisation and that of convergence may be treated as the last embodiments of the evolutionist orientation [...]* regardless of the fact that [...] *under the pressure of criticism, the strong evolutionist assumptions have gradually become more liberal, and have been rejected almost entirely in the neo-modernisation and neo-convergence variants [...]* (Sztompka, 2005, p. 131). What has not been rejected are the visions of moder-

nity embedded in those concepts, which should be adapted to if one wants modernisation to succeed. In this – and only this – sense the otherwise complex social engineering of neo-modernisation is adaptive in nature. Thus, whether we want it or not, it is a way to adapt to the patterns of economic, institutional and cultural order that form a certain reference system or “developmental metre”, or a benchmark of modernisation, to use a more modern phrase.

Thus, it turns out that – putting aside the Marxist premises behind the first concepts of dependency theory, those associated with the work of Raul Prebisch and the functioning of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America in the 1950s and their later versions, but also with the more up-to-date work of Fernando Cardoso or Thomas Gould – the dependency-theory notion of the necessity to adapt to the rules of the game determined elsewhere is deeply embedded also in the concepts of neo-modernisation, evolutionary as far as their fundamental assumptions are concerned. Incidentally, literature in this field sometimes notes that the concepts of globalisation (relevant here only to the extent in which they serve to substantiate the statement that agreeing to otherwise controversial institutional changes related to the legal framework for the provision of labour is a function of globalisation processes or rules of competition that operate in global markets) reiterate a very similar theoretical paradigm. An in-depth analysis of these issues reveals that [...] *the study of modernisation processes usually helps to explain the process in which a country or region transforms from an agrarian to an industrial society, while the study of globalisation processes most often aims at demonstrating the influence countries located in the centre exert on other countries, and also at describing the reactions of the latter to that impact [...] within both these theories the reasoning follows a similar pattern: studies that take a country or region as a starting point must eventually arrive at questions about large-scale processes of development; starting with the study of those processes we end up with questions of how individual countries react to global trends [...]* (Wang, 2009, pp. 73–74).

Obviously, neither neo-modernisation nor globalisation upholds the thesis of the universality of development processes or the progressivist illusions associated thereto. In this regard, Stiglitz has said that [...] *globalization today has been oversold [...]* (Stiglitz, 2005, p. 229), and this concerns both globalisation understood in terms of describing economic or cultural circumstances, and globalisation seen as a theory of social change or an ideology for the progressive political project (Held, Mc Grew, 2007, p. 2).

WHAT ANTHROPOLOGISTS CAN TEACH US?

Today we can understand – better than at any other time – that this is all about fairly complex processes, full of local peculiarities that are perhaps perceived more clearly by anthropologists rather than sociologists or economists for that matter. The former argue – as shown in the opening remarks of the new book edited by Tomasz Rakowski – that [...] *even the most specific, most subjective social experience remains almost completely mute. That void is filled in almost immediately by external interpretations [...] of what the extent is to which one may accept as obvious the fact that the meanings of experience produced within the society may be incorporated in the circulation of very efficient types of discourse [...]* (Rakowski ed., 2011, p. 7). This entails a dramatic question of [...] *what forms of knowledge of social experience reach the locations where the more or less direct policies are implemented?* (ibid.).

That question is accompanied by case studies. One of them shows, for example, how the idea of expanding the national park, proposed as a way of implementing the idea of eco-growth, conflicts with local thinking: [...] *here we can see a community that derives entirely different meanings from [the concept of] processing the surroundings [...] which does not as much refer to a certain established vision of the environment, as to a certain practical agricultural activity [...]* (ibid. p. 9).

One could quote dozens of such anecdotes, however, dramatic they may be. One of them is William Easterly's story on

how mosquito nets, meant to protect Zambia's inhabitants from malaria-carrying mosquitoes, are used as fishing nets or wedding veils when distributed free of charge (Easterly, 2006, pp. 13–14). The distinction into planners and searchers, suggested in Easterly's book, demonstrates the mistakes that tend to be made when the rationality of the cultural or economic centre is superimposed on the rationality of the local worlds. Thus, the problem is not that we fail to perceive the dangers of dependency theory, which tells us to imitate allegedly proven and universal patterns, but that when recognizing those dangers we stick to it anyway, smuggling in the assumptions embedded therein, but in the form of ever new phrases that serve to justify political programmes.

Irrespective of what those programmes offer, they usually have a common core, i.e. the imperative of adaptation. Thus we learn that an essential condition of survival is to adapt to reality, and the variability of the latter is a process that cannot be controlled. As a result we learn, for example, that the only solution for those who try to take root in the labour market is to adapt constantly to its varying expectations. This gives rise to the approving stories of how in one country or another the fact that people change jobs, employers or qualifications many a time in their lives is perceived as something obvious.

We are also being persuaded systematically that even if all that adaptation proved very expensive to the individual and the society, it could not be helped anyway, because the institutional changes in the forms of the provision of labour are only a function of the adaptive effort of companies, which themselves try to adjust to the rules of the global economy. Yet those rules themselves result from adapting to variability, or – as some may put it – to the essential unpredictability of global markets. And one could go on with this forever.

One could also suggest a conclusion along the lines proposed by Michael Sandel in a book published recently under the enigmatic title *What Money Can't Buy*. Sandel writes: [...] *without quite realizing it, without ever deciding to do so, we drifted from having a market economy to being a market society. The difference is this: A market economy is a tool – a valuable and effective tool – for organizing productive activity. A market society is a way of life in which market values seep into every aspect of human endeavour. It's a place where social relations are made over in the image of the market [...]* (Sandel, 2012, pp. 10–11).

In order to somewhat simplify the above, one should say that Sandel's book shows in a series of case studies how various areas of social life are transformed into markets. To a greater or lesser extent, we are getting accustomed to the institution of the surrogate mother; it is much more difficult to come to terms with the opportunities faced by those involved in trade in special rights – irrespective of whether the latter concern pollution quota or, as in Sandel's analyses, to walrus killing rights. The walrus is under strict protection, controlled by Canadian authorities. The terms of that protection are waived for the Inuit, who have lived on hunting the walrus for centuries. This means that out of respect for the cultural peculiarities of the Inuit, Canadian administration gives them the right to hunt a number of walruses, specified each year. The point is that the right turns into a commodity. The Inuit may sell their rights on to those willing to pay: [...] *in the 1990s, Inuit leaders approached the Canadian government with a proposal. Why not allow the Inuit to sell the right to kill some of their walrus quota to big-game hunters? The number of walruses killed would remain the same. The Inuit would collect the hunting fees, serve as guides to the trophy hunters, supervise the kill, and keep the meat and skins as they had always done [...]. The scheme would improve the economic well-being of a poor community without exceeding the existing quota. The Canadian government agreed [...] selling the right to kill a walrus is like selling the right to procreate or to pollute. Once you have a quota, market logic dictates that allowing tradable permits improves the general welfare. It makes some people better off without making anyone worse off. [...] And yet there is something morally disagreeable about the market in walrus killing [...]* (ibid, pp. 82–83).

A STRATEGY OF HELPLESSNESS: THE PARADOX OF THE MARKET SOCIETY

It is fairly easy to generalise this story, as well as many others, perhaps more moving for human moral sensitivity: the market society brings cultural barriers down to a level that is dangerously low; yet the latter still do not allow us to transform various goods into tradable commodities. In the case of labour, those barriers have been practically eliminated. Its commoditisation and rather unsuccessful attempts at de-commoditising it have been discussed extensively (Esping-Andersen, 2010, p. 55ff), and the term “labour market” is no longer just a heuristic metaphor used in economic analyses. It has come to describe one of the segments of the economy. Thus, there are no particular reasons to be surprised that being a commodity, labour is “confected” according to the changes in demand.

It is “confected” in different institutional forms but – in principle – one needs to say that in a Durkheimian sense of the term the phenomenon is normal, inscribed in the logic of functioning in what has come to be a market society.

Much has been said about the consequences of that phenomenon (Bednarski, Frieske eds., 2012), and it has been pointed out, among other issues, that it leads to fundamental changes in social structure, i.e. to the creation of a segment of it which, to quote a book by G. Standing (2011), has come to be referred to as the precariat (Polawski, 2012).

It is not impossible that the modern precariat is not a particularly new phenomenon. Careful analysis could reveal that in a number of aspects it is similar to the “loose people” of early industrial revolution (Assorodobraj, 1966), the *lumpenproletariat* of a century later, or the underclass of the last decades of the 20th century. Two interrelated features always characterise this segment of social structure. First, it is seen through the 19th-century cliché of *dangerous classes*, which captures the notion that those who belong in it are a threat to social order. Second, that threat is related to their unpredictability – just as their existence is unpredictable and thus also in a sense uncertain.

The first of those appears dubious, if only because the modern precariat is largely amorphous and thus there seem to be no circumstances that could give it any political representation; whether it can become a source of any durable social movement remains an open question. As regards the second issue, one may easily observe that it too has its obvious further consequences which for example affect the demographic dynamism and more specifically procreation decisions or the condition of social security systems (Oczki, 2012). Here, however, we should rather focus on a slightly different issue, i.e. on the question of how those people cope with the uncertainty they live in.

This is not a particularly original question. Very instructive in this respect are the results of the *Jena Study on Social Change and Human Development*. The studies conducted within that research project (the theoretical assumptions of which were presented, *inter alia*, in Pinquart, Silbereisen, 2004, pp. 289–298), included such situations when [...] *the increase in precarious forms of employment gives rise to growing economic problems and disturbs routine career planning. In a situation of growing uncertainty people face expectations to gain new skills and learn new behaviour [...]. Individuals faced with many such challenges risk excess burden on their personal and social resources and search for some ways to adapt to new circumstances [...]* (Tomasik et al., 2010, p. 385).

One of the key results of research carried out apparently in compliance with the rules of modern empirical study was that, in most general terms, [...] *those who happen to live in unfavourable circumstances and, at the same time, manage to give up on achieving unattainable goals or, at least, to protect their motivational and emotional potential, are among those that enjoy the greatest satisfaction with life [...]. One may even claim that strategies of psychological self-defence and the ability to know when to give up on something and when to make an effort are among the most important skills in times of rapid social change [...]* (Tomasik et al., 2010, pp. 396–397).

This, unfortunately, is not good news for those whose ideas of modern society centre on the concept of human agency and

thus on the conviction that everyone has a causative potential, and also for those who stick to the archaic concept of the self-made man and argue that success in life may be built upon the individual's own effort. Nor is this good news for those who try to solve all sorts of problems that affect our society, e.g. through various kinds of programmes of occupational activation.

Simply put, it is not impossible that the institutionalisation of the plurality of the forms of the provision of labour and the unpredictability that is related to it translates into inactivity, apathy and withdrawal in many – perhaps too many – cases, which is exactly the opposite of what we would like to expect from the new man of modern times.

Frankly speaking, this observation is not particularly new: it has been pointed out many a time, also in the classic work of sociologists or economic sociologists, that at the roots of capitalism there are internal inconsistencies or paradoxes (in Polish literature this has been pointed out recently by Jacek Kochanowicz; 2010, pp. 10–11). Taking the path shown by Kochanowicz, it is perhaps worth, for example, to re-read the last chapter of Weber's study on the relationships between Protestant ethics and the “spirit of capitalism”, if only to get convinced that at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries Protestant theologians were perfectly aware of the issues discussed now by aforementioned modern researchers, as far as the psychological consequences of the instability of employment are concerned. One of them was Richard Baxter, frequently cited by Weber, who wrote that [...] *outside the permanent profession all human activity is only an unstable, occasional preoccupation and such a person spends more time being idle than working [...]* (as quoted in: Weber, 1994, p. 154). Weber himself added the following comment to that thought: [...] *unstable work to which the day-labourer is forced is sometimes an inevitable yet always unwelcome temporary situation [...]* (ibid.) – at least to the extent that work is meant to serve the promotion of virtues fundamental to capitalism. The fact that Weber's general idea of the relationship between ascetic Calvinism and the rise of capitalism has been contested – to mention just Stanisław Andreski's work, where the author indicated that the predominance of Calvinism in Scotland did not lead to the rise of capitalism there, and its occurrence in Italy may not be explained by a religious schism (Andreski, 1992, p. 163) – does not alter the original idea. After all, the religious premises behind the mental orientation that is conducive to the accumulation of resources are not the point here. It is not impossible that all the mischief done in today's labour market – part of modern capitalism – not only means that the latter is becoming more and more detached from its cultural basis, but also that it is no longer what we got used to calling capitalism and what we painfully indulged in towards the end of the last century.

Of course, there is a legion of those who try to characterise post-Fordism, yet only few of them perceive its contradictions. The latter include Richard Sennett, who when writing about the “new economy” points out that one of its key features, i.e. emphasis on economic mechanisms based on competition, has highly destructive consequences. Sennett's thesis explicated in *The Craftsman* is as follows: [...] *sheer competition can disable good work and depress workers [...]. competition has disabled and disheartened workers; the craftsman's ethos of doing good work for its own sake is unrewarded or invisible* (Sennett, 2008, p. 54). On the other hand, Colin Crouch, a thoughtful and appreciated investigator of collective labour relations, writes about “corporation-dominated capitalism”, which is equally detached from the cultural assumptions of capitalism as conceived traditionally as Sennett's “new economy”: [...] *actually existing, as opposed to ideologically pure, neoliberalism is nothing like as devoted to free markets as is claimed. It is, rather, devoted to the dominance of public life by the giant corporation. The confrontation between the market and the state that seems to dominate political conflict in many societies conceals the existence of this third force, which is more potent than either and transforms the workings of both. [...]. The political power of the corporation is seen most obviously in the extraordinary lobbying activity that takes place, primarily in the United States Congress, but also around many other legislatures and governments. [...]* (Crouch, 2011).

This description of the new economic order, as well as the subsequent more detailed ones, make it also possible to understand what every observer of our economic life may perceive almost directly. One of the powerful Polish corporations, i.e. Polimex-Mostostal, is virtually bankrupt: [...] *the company's total debt – loans, bonds and guarantees – amounts to as much as PLN 2.5 billion [...] Nearly forty financial institutions have entered into an agreement that will prolong this company's financial "to be or not to be" [...] the agreement made it possible for the company to sign the biggest contract in years for the construction of a new power unit [...] Friday will come down in the history of Polish economy as the day when one of the largest construction groups was saved and a process of modernising the Polish energy industry, worth several billion PLN, was initiated [...] (Wloski..., 2011).* The triumphalism that echoes in the journalist's account may perhaps come from a secret source, yet one indeed needs a specific logic of "corporation-dominated capitalism" to understand the reasons why the state entrusts a company that is headed for bankruptcy with [...] *a process of modernising the Polish energy industry, worth several billion PLN.* This is certainly no longer the capitalism we know from *The Buddenbrooks...* it is something entirely different. Only what is it?

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