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PRECARIAT AND PRECARIOUS WORK AS NEGATIVE FACTORS AFFECTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Summary. In the paper the authors will present the concept of precariat and precarious work. It will be explained how this phenomena affects sustainable development. To present these topics, theoretical concepts, which present precariat in a wider perspective (such as globalization, consumer society, weakening of welfare state) will be presented. Additionally, statistical data will be presented from different European countries, which will illustrate the problem of working-poor. Particularly attention will be put on the young employees (younger than 24 years old), who are mainly affected by this problem.

Keywords: precariat, precarious work, globalization, economic crisis, sustainable development, consumer society, welfare state.

PREKARIAT I PRACA PREKARNA JAKO NEGATYWNE CZYNNIKI WPLYWAJĄCE NA ZRÓWNOWAŻONY ROZWÓJ

Streszczenie. W niniejszym artykule zostaną przedstawione kwestie związane z prekariatem i prekaryzacją pracy. Autorzy ukażą jak te zjawiska wpływają na zrównoważony rozwój. W tym celu zostaną przedstawione koncepcje teoretyczne, ukazujące ten problem w szerszym kontekście zmian społeczno-politycznych (globalizacja, społeczeństwo konsumpcyjne, państwo opiekuńcze). Ponadto, zostaną przedstawione dane statystyczne z różnych krajów europejskich, pokazujące skalę problemu biednych, pracujących. Szczególna uwaga zostanie przyznana młodym pracownikom (poniżej 24. roku życia), których ten problem najbardziej dotyczy.

Słowa kluczowe: prekariat, prekaryzacja, globalizacja, kryzys ekonomiczny, zrównoważony rozwój, społeczeństwo konsumpcyjne, państwo opiekuńcze.

1. Introduction

Each contemporary reflection on sustainable development has to be related to current social conditions. These conditions can have a positive or negative impact on sustainable development. These may include: hunger, social conflicts, thoughtless consumerism on the one hand and conscious consumption, or “CSR” policy on the other. All of these factors can be reduced to globalization and precarious work, which dominate over other aspects of life.

In this paper we show that precariat and precarious work are nowadays very important factors that negatively affect sustainable development.

2. Precariat – definition

Precariat is a new, apparently dangerous, class. However, it cannot be perceived as Marxian class "for itself", but rather as a “class-under-construction” - internally inconsistent, divided by resentment and bitterness.

In the times of globalization precariat does not exist yet- there is an intellectual project. The meanings of „precariat“ and „proletariat“ do not have character of a real theory. Marx in „The Communist Manifesto“ writes rather apology of the bourgeoisie: „The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones”¹. These concepts are like Kant’s regulative ideas; i.e. they do not apply to any specific empirical reality. They are rather author’s arrangement of social knowledge on future. This means that social phenomena are given meaning by axiologies related to supposed precariat. They are interpreted in accordance with a condition and mission of the group (precariat), which is supposed to appear as a social group. "Precariat" as an ideological concept (not explaining social reality) has the value that it designates the entire list of philosophical, ethical, economic problems incurring on them the veil of ideology.

Precariat is an ideological concept in Mannheim’s sense. Mannheim distinguishes two types of ideology: first, in a “total sense”, second in a “particularistic sense”, where ideology is understood as a motivation to mass actions, but in each of these ideologies there is a factor,

¹ Marx K., Engels F.: The Communist Manifesto, [online] [accessed; 07.05.2015] <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm>

which falsifies reality. Ideologies in a “total sense” resemble, in a psychological perspective, a lie, whereas the “particularistic ideology” from the same perspective looks like a mistake.

Precariat is an ideological concept in a particularistic sense. “Particularistic sense of ideology is when this world should mean only, that we do not want to believe in certain ideas of our opponent. These ideas are believed to be more or less conscious camouflage of actual conditions, whose real recognition is not beneficial to our opponent. There can be a whole scale of camouflage: from a conscious lie to semi-conscious lie, an instinctive camouflage, from betraying others to a self-betrayal. This concept of ideology, which slowly divided off a simple notion of a lie is particularistic in multiple sense. Its particularity is straight away visible, when opposed to a radical, total concept. We can talk about ideology of a certain epoch or precisely identified in terms of a group, for example a class, in a sense that we think of a distinctness and type of a total structure of the epoch or group’s consciousness”².

Ideology, as every social theory is a description of society from a certain perspective, which means that an ideologist identifies himself with a certain social group, among which he lives, and which he considers as his. Mannheim calls that “viewing angle” (Aspektstruktur). Viewing angle (point of view) depends on where somebody is located. Therefore the concept of precariat mystifies reality instead of explaining it. However, as every ideological concept it precisely designates problems, which are mystified, what designates their class.

The name „precariat” comes from the Latin word precarious³, which means „at the mercy”. The concept of „precocity” has been recently updated by Guy Standing- a British professor of economic security. Precariat, in his opinion, it is primarily the people suspended between prosperity and poverty, people in a precarious situation, ever-changing temporary job.

3. Precariat – social implications

Precariat and precarization of work are the results of globalization, and more specifically of several factors (including the effects of globalization), which had a significant impact on the social-economic life of recent decades.

These are, first of all, the collapse of the Soviet Union, China's way to capitalism, dynamic changes in the economy of India and a huge influx of migrants, who are ready to

² Mannheim K.: *Ideologia i utopia*, Lublin 1992, p. 53.

³ Another origin of this word can be also given. The feudal era in Europe there was such a phenomenon as “precarium”. It was a way of free of charge lending of a material thing, which had to be right away given back once the lender demanded so.

work for lower remuneration than local unemployed, which resulted in tripling of the reserve army of labor.

Second of all, a huge impact on the appearance of precarity had a group of economists, who in the 70s were able to convince Western politicians to the neo-liberal economic model. Its main assumption is based on a strong belief that only maximum market competitiveness can guarantee economic growth and development. According to this concept, everything should be subordinated to increased competition and market rules should permeate all aspects of life.

Governments that adopted the neo-liberal model made their job markets more flexible; also, under the pressure of employers, they decided to shift the job related risks to the employees and their families. This caused a great sense of insecurity among employees, and nowadays, in times of crisis, the risk they have to bear has been getting bigger. All over the world the number of employees with either temporary and part-time contracts has been growing. In 2012 27,6% of young Europeans were working part-time, as they could not find full-time positions⁴.

Additionally, it has to be mentioned that salaries of the young generation is generally lower. For example Spanish employees between 16 and 19 years old receive 45,5% of the salary of the adults, and employees between 20 and 24 years old 60,7% of their older colleagues. Low salaries are the reason why percentage of so called working poor has been growing. These are people, who despite being employed, cannot afford everyday living. The highest rate can be noted in Romania (17,9%) and Greece (13,8%), then in Spain (11,4%), Latvia (11,1%) and Poland (11%)⁵.

From the very beginning of the emerging global movement, the question has been raised whether precariat is able to understand itself and if it is able to “evolve from theatre and imaginative ideas of liberation to the set of demands, which will rather engage the state rather than irritate and surprise”⁶. The class struggle, because in such precariat seems to be involved, is always about access to the means of production and the method of distribution. However, in the very beginning it seemed that precariat had no idea of what these means could be. To the intellectual resource of precarity we can include Pierre Bourdieu, who articulated the problem of precarity, Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas and Michael Hardt and Toni Negri, whose “Empire” has become a fundamental text. On the other hand 1968 revolution links precariat with the Frankfurt School and Herbert Marcuse’s “One-dimensional man”⁷.

Precariat has been crystallizing since 1970s, however, only Euro May Day 2001 in Milano was a real turning point. Thousands of young people organized contra 1st May march.

⁴ Smoczyński W.: Prekariat: młodzi, bez perspektyw. Nowa klasa społeczna. Prekariusze wszystkich krajów [online]. [accessed: 30.10.2012]. World Wide Web: <http://archiwum.polityka.pl/art/prekariusze-wszystkich-krajow,432571.html>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Standing G.: Prekariat. Nowa niebezpieczna klasa, [online]. [accessed: 12.10.2012]. World Wide Web: <http://www.praktykateoretyczna.pl/index.php/projekty/prekariat-2/>

⁷ Ibid.

Meanwhile in the traditional march: "Ageing trade-unionists (...) could only last in wonder of this new parading mass, whose demands of free migration and universal guaranteed income had nothing in common with the traditional trade union"⁸.

Similarly to Standing precariat is described by Jan Sowa, for whom precariat is a typical condition for post-fordism in production organization model. It is characterized by cutting through traditional class divisions, no matter if we understand social classes in the Marxian way, as a relation towards means of production, or in Weberian way as a predictor of life opportunities. "If we tried, basing on the concept of precariat, build a social class, it would turn out that the dividing line cuts through all existing class configurations"⁹. And later, basing on Weber's class theory, Sowa claims: "If we take as a basis such a class concept, then we will find in precariat people of different class location. There will be those, who are in a precarious situation, and it is obvious that they do not have serious life opportunities, such as a forty years old cleaning lady, who is employed by an outsourcing company. But we will also have to include to this group a twenty five years old graphic designer working in an advertising agency, whose life opportunities, in Weber sense, are much higher"¹⁰.

People, who are affected by precarity face many significant problems, such as insecurity, instability, lack of career prospects, and general dissatisfaction. All these individual issues have a huge impact on the general state of surrounding communities. Precarity means increasing poverty, social problems and weakening of social bonds in the bigger social groups. So it can be stated that globalization has changed the "morphology" of the social fabric. The consequence of this change is the transition from a society of manufacturers to consumer society, and as a result the emergence of precariat¹¹.

Pierre Bourdieu, who was the first to articulate the problem of precariat, underlines that nowadays precariat is everywhere. Although Bourdieu is not convinced whether precariat is a result of globalization, he is absolutely sure this is a product of political decisions, which allowed enterprises to be more flexible. Corporations/capitalists' aim is to lower production costs; it is possible thanks to employees constant fear of losing job¹².

The same problem was also raised by Zygmunt Bauman. In 1991 in *Critical Theory*¹³ he warned against "colonization of public sphere by the private one". In the era of globalization, the gap between government/power (a guarantee of the implementation of actions), and politics (ability to decide, which of these actions should be pursued) has been getting bigger. In 2014 Bauman stated that this gap caused "a paradox of progressive collectivization of

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Sowa J.: *Prekariat - proletariat epoki globalizacji*, [in:] *Robotnicy opuszczają miejsca pracy*, (ed.) Joanna Sokołowska, Łódź 2011, p. 124.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 125.

¹¹ Bauman Z.: *Rozmowy o socjologii*, Warszawa 2014, p. 153.

¹² Bourdieu P.: *Prekarität ist überall*, [in:] *Gegenfeuer. Wortmeldungen im Dienste des Widerstands gegen die neoliberale Invasion*, Konstanz: UVK, 1998, p. 96-102.

¹³ Bauman Z.: *Critical Theory*, [in:] *Etzkowitz Henry, Glassman Ronald M. (ed.), The Renaissance of Sociological Theory: Classical and Contemporary*, Itasca 199.

problems and in the same time privatization of measures and ways of solving them". All these resulted in the weakening of welfare state, which no longer protects and keeps strong and healthy workforce reserve. Nowadays, as the need in the globalized world for workers decreases, welfare state is becoming less useful. The money invested in the unemployed people and precariat is lost from the business point of view, as the job market needs less, not more human resources.

In such a situation, when solutions to social problems are steeped in consumerism, "precariat" cannot become, as proletariat did, "the collective historical subject"¹⁴. Precariat is also trying to find its way to rebuild social solidarity in a different manner than proletariat. Its background does not consist of political parties and governmental plans, but rather of cities and internet. Uncertainty, lack of trust and solidarity- all that make that precariat has enough energy only for rebellion. However, most of contemporary rebels live in the on-line reality, which is easy to enter and exit anytime.

According to Jan Gagacki contemporary societies have been becoming precariat "communities", which are bound by ignorance, impotence and humiliation. In on-line reality precariat can be whoever – trust is not required. However, in the "real world" precariat is faced with the end of an era and uncertainty, what will happen next¹⁵.

Standing, in the introduction to his book „The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class” asks the following question: “Where does precariat take us to?”. This question is essential, because what will happen if precariat is not understood? Can it lead society to the politics of inferno?

It can be avoided only if, according to Standing, precariat becomes a class "for itself". When it creates a framework for "moderately Utopian program and possible strategies that will be implemented by politicians and by what is euphemistically called "civil society", including a multitude of non-governmental organizations that too often try to transform into the quasi-governmental organizations"¹⁶.

4. Conclusions

Globalization has created a consumer civilization oriented on "rush of civilization" (in the form of uneven modernization). Emergence of precariat, precarious work, and wandering capital¹⁷, are significant factors affecting sustainable development; however the influence is

¹⁴ Bauman Z.: *Rozmowy o socjologii*, Warszawa 2014, p. 153.

¹⁵ Gagacki J.: *Kapitał społeczny i kultura zaufania*, [in:] *Ekonomia społeczna* nr 1/2013, Kraków 2013, p. 71

¹⁶ Standing G.: *op.cit.*

¹⁷ The most effective example of action, which make work precarious are „wandering factories”, which were described by Wallerstein, while he was explaining how capitalist world-economy works: “After the period of significant capital accumulation by so called leading industries (what takes approximately 25 years) the level of

so far negative. The wandering capital rushes after 15%-30% profitability in order to pay economically unjustified rent to the global super class, who is in charge of all strategic economic decisions irrespectively from local legislations of voters' will¹⁸.

Although the concept of sustainable development is not only based on social aspect, it requires balance between all its parts: also ecological and economic. However, precariat with its attitude "everybody takes care of his/her own" can only ruin this balance. The only solution is to give up this attitude, as it cannot be base for solidarity, the only, as Bauman states, hope for suffering alone to become subjects of history"¹⁹.

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incomes was declining, both because of violation of quasi-monopoles of these industrial branches, and as well increasing costs of work caused by trade unions activity". In such situation, the best solution is "escaping" to the regions, where are big resources of workers from rural areas. For them it is an improvement of incomes, which are lower than salaries in a previous location. Of course, ex-workers become unemployed and they search for another job. If they find such, it will be of precarious character. The workers are constantly uncertain of their professional situation, because the new job can always "escape".

Wallerstein I.: Koniec uciekających fabryk, [online]. [accessed: 12.01.2014]. World Wide Web: <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/ekonomia/20130430/wallerstein-koniec-uciekajacych-fabryk>.

¹⁸ Rorty R.: Filozofia a nadzieja na lepsze społeczeństwo, Toruń 2013, p. 293.

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¹⁹ Bauman Z.: Rozmowy o socjologii, Warszawa 2014, p. 153.

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Omówienie

Każda współczesna refleksja na temat zrównoważonego rozwoju powinna odnosić się do aktualnych warunków, wpływających nań pozytywnie lub negatywnie. Mogą to być: głód, konflikty społeczne, bezrefleksyjny konsumpcjonizm z jednej strony i świadoma konsumpcja lub działania związane z „CSR” z drugiej. Wszystkie te czynniki można sprowadzić do neoliberalnej globalizacji i prekaryzacji pracy.

Prekariat i prekaryzacja pracy, pomimo lokalnych specyfik, to zjawiska globalne, powiązane z ponowoczesnym systemem społeczno-gospodarczym. Wiedza o wymiarze lokalnym jest niezbędna, aby dokonać analizy na poziomie globalnym. Istotne jest także uchwycenie zmian, jakie neoliberalna gospodarka (a tym samym sprekaryzowane stosunki pracy) wprowadziła zarówno w funkcjonowaniu przedsiębiorstw, jak i w życiu społeczności lokalnych i podmiotów indywidualnych; a są to zmiany negatywnie warunkujące zrównoważony rozwój.