

DECENT WORK AND HUMAN DIGNITY

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Abstract: *The concept of decent work (dignified, honourable work) is relatively new to the human history. It is the legacy of human awareness (and effort) of the need for reflecting on human work not only in terms of efficiency (especially profitability), but also from the standpoint of human dignity, considering that the content of human work is not in contradiction to human dignity.*

This paper provides a review of the term of decent work, as well as its complexity and significance for making man's work more humane.

Keywords: *decent, dignified, honourable, equity, social justice.*

Introduction

1. Decent work is a global objective for modern (globalizing) society. It is well defined and realized in the process of uniting mankind since the 1920's. The demands for its achievement are imposed (and realized) to the extent mankind is being globalized (i.e. the level of globalization of society), showing a tendency of becoming a global mega-society.⁹ Demands for decent work are inevitable and run along the process of accomplishing human rights and freedom universals within the framework of the increasing globalization and the need for suppressing its negative impacts on the world of work and human position.¹⁰ Indeed, *the achievement of decent work is inseparable from the achievement of social conditions of respecting human dignity.* These demands were and still are parts of the efforts of making globalization fair. That is why decent work should be considered in the context of historical changes in the content and nature of work and socio-economic relations in

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⁹ Чумаков, А. Н.: *Глобализация, контуры делосного мира*, "Проспект", Москва, 2009, pp. 69-80.

¹⁰ Марковић, Ж. Д. : *Актуелни проблеми света рада у условима глобалне економске кризе*, "Пословне студије", Бања Лука, 7-8/2012, pp. 201-216.

which the human work activity is being realized. This approach provides the ability of reflecting on decent work, as well as the causes of its emergence and realization, in a dynamic manner, specifically in the process of intellectualization of human working / productive activities.

Making fundamental freedom and human rights universal implies codification of specific freedom and right possessed by all human beings, regardless of where they live, the observance and implementation of which is guaranteed by the international community which has been accomplished after the World War II through the establishment of the United Nations (UN). Thus, in the first article of the Charter of the United Nations it is declared that the UN are *committed to promoting and encouraging respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion*. Based on the commitment stated in the *Charter*, on 10 December 1948 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which proclaims the following: freedom and equality of human beings in dignity and rights, the right to life, liberty and security, the right to social insurance and the right to just and favourable conditions of work, as well as the right to insurance in the event of incapacity. In short, the *following universal human rights were proclaimed: the right to life, liberty and equality, security and dignity and favourable conditions of work*.¹¹ Thus, universal human rights can be summarized as the man's right of having his integrity protected to the degree that corresponds to his human dignity. In order to specify and create opportunities for the legal and factual realization of these universal rights and freedoms, on 16 December 1964 the United Nations General Assembly adopted two additional covenants: the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. These covenants came into effect upon the ratification by the required number of countries.

In order to create conditions for the realization of universal rights and freedoms a number of significant scientific, technical and political events were organized, the results of which were facilitating the realization of these rights. In this sense, efforts were invested for finding solutions to avoid the confrontation between the *international protection of universal rights and freedoms* and the *right of countries to sovereignty*. In searching for such relationship models, the need was pointed out that international cooperation should be based on respecting cultural identity, independence and national sovereignty, and non-interference. Therefore, cooperation between nations

¹¹ Марковић, Ж. Д. *Универзализација људских права и заштита интегритета човека*, Ниш, Зборник радова „Универзализација људских права и остваривање права на здраву животну и радну средину, 1998. р. 5-20

should be without any form of oppression or replacing one culture by another.¹²

Globalization of society and making human rights and freedom universal

1. Contemporary reflections on universal freedom and rights and their realization need to be based also on globalization-induced changes *marking a new stage in the evolution of capitalism, both regarding the scale and the content and nature of human work*, with far-reaching changes in the position of man and realization of his dignity. The process of globalization has been studied in many fields of science. Studying the complexity of the planetary-scale issue of globalization an emerging academic discipline of Globalistics¹³ has been created. While studying sociologic aspects of globalization the following basic processes of globalization have been considered: *the process of emergence of a global system of development of economic relationships reflecting the transformation and integration in the global economy* (based on transnational cooperation operating worldwide without any control by the state) and *the process of cultural globalization*, through which local cultural needs are being replaced. These are actually the basic processes describing the system of globalization. These processes occur independently from the national (state) policies and national societies, representing a self-contained international phenomenon and a process of transnational, supranational existence.

*As the process of an emerging global-level business and economic system, globalization is reflected through expanding the area of economic power, conquering new territories (sources of raw materials and markets) by using money rather than war (in contrast to earlier conquests). When constricted by spatial boundaries, money is prevented from being multiplied outside these boundaries – it suffocates and eventually dies. Globalization is a meaningful way of providing money with momentum and making profits through peaceful means.*¹⁴ This process has been enabled by the development of high technology (which has allowed the "compression" of space and time) and the market forces as reflected through market competition, as well as by the prevailing profit-making form of capital movement in form of money-money; thus the formation of a global-level financial and information

¹² Марковић, Ж. Д., *Глобализација и проблеми очувања националног културног интегритета*, Ниш, "Теме" 1-2/2000, p. 37-45

¹³ Чумаков, А. Н. (2009): *Глобализација – контури целог мира*, Москва, "Проспект" p.60-89

¹⁴ Глигоријевић, С.И.: *Глобална система*, Словарь виталистической социологии, Москва, Гордарики, 2006, p. 60-61.

technology has been enabled.¹⁵ The idea of globalization came from the western (developed) capitalist countries in an attempt to take a dominant position on the planet and "to organize the whole of mankind for serving their specific interests, rather than the interests of some abstract humanity."¹⁶

The *global system* that is formed through the process of globalization as new information, technical, economical, environmental, scientific, political and socio-cultural reality is not always seen as a social reality, with its specific structures and processes, developing within the limits of humanity. The reason for not being understood and accepted is probably in the fact that humanity (as permeated by the complex relations governing the worldwide economy and international relations) alters as the function of changes of natural and social environment of man, creating material and spiritual culture, creating a persona-individual interests and values as well as objectives of development.¹⁷ This system is composed of interrelated and mutually dependent subsystems.

2. The global economy appears as a subsystem of the global system. It is the sum of national economies. *It is a unique contradictory system of rich and poor countries. It was extended by unevenly developed countries; this inequality in the system has been maintained to the present day.*¹⁸ Actually, *the global economy implies that the planet is conquered by transnational corporations and states with the goal of dominating national economies.*¹⁹ *Globalization provides the neo-liberal capitalism with the attributes of a global scale system – it becomes global capitalism.* It is dominated by transnational corporations, with the role of state being reduced, while mass culture is made widespread and information society a reality.²⁰ It has made the world network based on privatization, deregulation and liberalization, i.e. through the creation of free market and wealth with the promise "that those who are willing to be subjected to demands of the global market will be blessed with worldly wealth." However, this promise is not feasible. Between the principles of profit and the principles of humanism there is a gap resulting from "the capitalism itself in its form of development,"²¹ including the global

¹⁵ Борико, А.: *НЕНТ- мала књига о глобализацији и свету будућности*, Београд, "Народна књига Алфа", 2000, pp 25

¹⁶ Ушкин, А. И.: *Глобализација* у И.,И. Мазур, А.Н. Чумаков, *Глобализација-енциклопедија*, Москва, ЦНПП "Диалог"; издателство "Радуга", 2003, pp. 185.

¹⁷ Зиновјев, А.: *Запад-феномен западњааштва*, Београд, "Наш дом" –Ade d' home, 2002. p.306.

¹⁸ Леибин, В. М.: *Глобалнија енциклопедија*, ob.cit. pp. 57.

¹⁹ Reinet, E. G. *Globalna економија*, Beograd, Ćigoja štampa, 2006. pp. 57.

²⁰ Марковић, Ж. Д. : *Глобална економија*, Ниш, Економски факултет Универзитета у Нишу, 2008. pp. 37-90.

²¹ Бабаков, Ф. Д (и други): *Савремениј глобалниј капитализм*, Москва, Алма-прес, 2003, pp. 69-203.

neoliberal capitalism. *It provides money with the position of the ultimate ruler. There is a myth regarding the profit-effectiveness and maximization as absolute values.* The power of money tramples human dignity, insults his honour and destroys hope. The new trinity of *market-competition-money* appeared on the international scene with the intent to ascend to the supreme power, which will govern the planet's affairs, imposing to countries its own rules and norms of uniformity despite their cultural values and identities.²²

3. The specific questions of globalization and global capitalism (created with it) require new (scientifically based) answers. Along with traditional philosophical question about the position of man in the world and universe, *the question that also should be answered is that about man's position in the everyday life, especially in global economy and work environment.*²³ Therefore, the economic reality (globalization and global capitalism) needs to be critically considered from the theoretical point of view, as opposed to the today's standard theory that takes random assumptions trying to adjust with reality.²⁴ *This approach should be used to explore (and find answers) the global neoliberal capitalism where the market as a key mechanism of regulating trade, as well as the consequences resulting in the context of awareness that most economies are vulnerable to the modern market mechanism because it fails to account with the social (and human) factor, i.e. the market cannot exist without people, but it is included in the structure of social relations.*²⁵ What should be critically considered and rejected in this approach and reflection is the notion that people are means whose work activity (only) contributes to social progress; what should be accepted and promoted are theoretical concepts *stating that people promote social progress through their work activities, but they also express themselves as creative and free beings, realizing the conditions of securing their material existence and social status by arranging mutual relationships.*²⁶ In these relationships people express their ideological and political orientation, their

²² Векс, У: *Моћ против моћи у доба глобализације*, Загреб, "Школска књига", 2004, pp. 187.

²³ Ђорђевић, Р.: *Човек, вредност и историја*, Београд, Институт за филозофију Филозофског факултета, 2006. pp. 69

²⁴ Мајор, Ф.: *Унеско: Идеал и акција*, Београд, Завод за међународну просветну, научну, културну и техничку сарадњу и Завод за уџбенике и наставна средства, 1997. pp. 57

²⁵ Видянин, В. И., Журавлева, Г.П. (ответвени редактор), *Экономическая теория*, Москва, Инфра, 1997, p. 63.

²⁶ Reirnet, E.C.: ob.cit. pp.16

role in political organization of society, their place and attitudes towards the defined system of values.²⁷

3. The essence of globalization as a global social process and basic features of global neoliberal capitalism as a knowledge based system where knowledge is the basic developmental resource (denoting capitalism as a *knowledge capitalism*), should be considered in context of development of technical basis of work and changes in its content, along with the resulting consequences. Namely, the development of productive forces makes the basis for the stage-based development of capitalism. On the other hand, in the pursuit of *increasing rationality and productivity, and earning increased profits, capitalism was also stimulating the development of productive forces*. In such an approach, technological globalization also leads to the *replacement of human work with machines*, initially in jobs that do not require human skills; later on, humans were replaced also on jobs that require human skills, provided that these jobs can be performed by perfect machines.

In this sequence of development, *along with the globalization and its expansion, there is an increasing importance of knowledge as a developmental resource. When working, humans are operating based on their reflective capabilities rather than using their physical strength*. Thus, human work (especially manufacturing) activities are intellectualized, and therefore, intellectual capital has become the reality of economic and social life. *The third technological revolution has resulted with the emergence of computer technology*. It has changed the position of man in the man-machine system – man was previously operating machines, now he controls them. Human labour is negligible in the working environment of micro-electronic devices. Moreover, the worker-material interface has almost disappeared. In fact, with the emergence of computer-generated information technology significant changes occurred in the content of man's work²⁸ resulting with the loss of sense of relevance and corresponding sense of self-esteem and self-evaluation inherent to some extent to all human beings.²⁹

However, in addition to the negative consequences, changes in the content and character of work also have some positive effects that allow knowledge to become the primary developmental resource within the framework of global neoliberal capitalism, to the extent when it becomes also its main feature. *This type of capitalism is designed (and specified) more on intellectual capital and less on monetary and physical capital (wealth)*. This

²⁷ Гозабов, И. А.: *Социальная философия*, Москва, Академический проект, 2007, pp. 283.

²⁸ Шарков, Ф.Н.: *Социология: теория и модели*, Москва, "Экзамен", 2007, p. 52.

²⁹ Козловский, П. : *Этическая экономика как синтез экономической теории*, Москва, "Вопросы философии".

model of capitalism is based on trusting the market and the individual. *The central value and importance of the individual is his delivery of knowledge rather than his muscle strength.* What is recognized in this model is the process organization, routines and directives that make the contents of explicit knowledge that is being disseminated.³⁰ In fact, *in capitalism (knowledge capitalism) knowledge and skills are the only sources of sustainable and long-term competitive advantage of corporations and broader social structures.*³¹ Therefore people – the holders of knowledge and skills, and the essence of society (and capitalism) – should be treated as human beings that think, capable of producing and improving their lives in a specific historical habitat, due to their life force.

An approach to human potential in global economy

From the standpoint of this insight, the latest research about the position of man in global economy and corporations (where they deliver their work by exercising their knowledge and skills) also included two relatively new approaches on human potentials: human resources development index (HRDI) and the human life force index (HLFI). The human resources development index consists of four paradigms: *Productivity* – growth; *rationality* – the ability of implementing the resource-using skills; *stability* – securing the approach of present and future generations to the achievements of civilization; and *expanding the opportunities* – development that is achieved not only for humans' benefit, but also to make them struggle. The following are the indicators of human resources development index: *life expectancy and the actual gross national product per capita.* Taken together, these indicators comprise *three main features: healthy life, knowledge and level of dignified life.*³² Based on the features of the global economy and the new approach on human factor it contains, we feel that the four HRDI paradigms need to be supplemented by a fifth paradigm – *the declaration about working conditions in which human integrity is not compromised.*

Indicators of human life force (HLFI) are categories of the sociology of vitality that has developed a system of indicators of life force development in man as a biology and psychosocial being expressing his capabilities of manufacturing and improving his life in specific socio-historical and socio-cultural conditions that corresponds to the needs of progressive development of society. In accordance with the tradition of implementing the HLFI and the evolution of man's life force, indicators of its level of development have been

³⁰ Марковић, Ж.Д.: *Глобална економика и људски фактор*, Соц. ИС., Москва, 11/13/2007, р. 31-79.

³¹ Фукујама, Ф.: *Крај историје и последњи човек*, Подгорица, ЦИД, 1997, р. 198.

³² Милачић, В.: *Индурја знања, нова парадигма одрживог развоја*, Нови Сад, Технички факултет, 2006, р. 220.

formulated. *First*, it is the mean value of development of physical, mental and social abilities of man. *Second*, the existence of basic set of indicators of physical, mental and social health that are best in expressing the existence and development of man's basic forces, created in all basic areas of social life – economics, politics, social, spiritual and cultural development. The integration of these factors enables the optimization of development efforts in assessing human's life force in general, particularly in spheres of social life.³³

Considerations regarding human resources development index and human life force index emerge in context of the need for increasingly productive and profitable human activity when it is smart it raises the *demand that people – the bearers of knowledge and skills (intellectual capital) in organizing the work environment and workflow – are treated as intelligent and free beings of protected integrity in all of its inter-modal and inter-related components.*³⁴ These considerations were preceded and followed by the activity of the International Labour Organization (ILO).³⁵ In this respect, on its conference in Philadelphia (1944) the ILO took the responsibility of preparing a program that would ensure the realization of working conditions in which employees feel satisfied with their work by exercising their abilities to the full extent and thus, contribute to general prosperity. Based on these and similar views and in an attempt to establish a balance between the human work content and human dignity using the ILO documents, the content of a decent (dignified) work was determined.

Decent work and human dignity

Decent work is defined as a highly effective work in good production, social and safe environment with filled capacities that makes each employee satisfied by allowing him exercise his abilities and skills to the full extent. It is a well-paid work in which the rights and dignity of workers are protected, based on which they are actively engaged in the organization's activities.³⁶ Exercising this multi-aspect decent work in conditions of the contradicting global system is discussed a number of times from different points of view, but the most comprehensive is the *Report of the Director General of the International Labour Office* (1999).³⁷ As declared by the report, *decent work is a global demand and political directive that depends on our ability to find a*

³³ Милачић, В.: цитирано дело, р. 244.

³⁴ Григорев, С. И.: *Индикаторы жизненны сил человека*, Москва, Словарь виталиской социологии, цит. изд., 2006, р. 95-96

³⁵ Ибид.

³⁶ Жуков, В.И.: *Људски ресурси – индекс социјалног развитака становништва*, Београд, ЦУРО, 1996, р. 9-11.

³⁷ *Report of the Director – General*, International Labor Conference, 1987, Geneva, 1999.

solution to this problem, i.e. achieving decent work. As stated by the Report, decent work is rather a landmark than an achieved goal, pointing to the possibility of its transformation into a global goal. Moreover, four strategic tasks were highlighted as the prerequisites for achieving the conversion of decent work into a global goal. These tasks are the following: increasing the employment opportunities; establishing a system of employment and developing and strengthening the system of social development dialogue and the right to equality.

Discussions on "decent" work often suggest that it is rather an orientation for achieving that goal ("decent work") than accomplished objective. However, both from methodological and practical (directing) reasons, it is necessary to present (in a more or less systematic way) the basic contents (elements) the implementation of which should be pursued. *In a specific way, this contributes to the definition of decent work, facilitating its achievement index.* According to this approach, "decent" ("dignified") work can be defined as follows: it is a highly qualified work; it reaches its full capacity in good production and social conditions; it allows for the expression of the participants' knowledge and skills; it is organised in safe working conditions; it protects human rights and dignity; it is paid adequately by hiring workers for doing organizational jobs and satisfied participants of the work activity. *Human activity in conditions of "decent work" is a sufficiently large "space" for the people to express themselves as creative, free and valuable beings contributing not only to higher productivity, but also to the self-realization of man as a generic entity.* Contributing to economic growth through higher productivity, "decent work" is a significant element of harmonization of economic growth and social progress.

Economic activities are unfolding within the global economy, in a global system with a unified market, but with differences between countries in terms of the level of their economic development and organizational patterns. In this sense, we need to note the problems in the EU countries where the necessary structural reforms have not been realized, which affect the achievement of the "decent work" concept as a global process. The achievement, more precisely poor or difficult achievement of this concept is significantly influenced by two global problems of modern society: *employment* (unemployment) and *poverty*. These two problems are interdependent and interrelated, and the need for solving them globally (in global terms) is recognized as a prerequisite of "decent work". In this respect, we should understand the views of the *United Nations General Assembly* (2000) on social development and support, the ILO's "decent work" program and the stances declared on its 1970 session on the *willingness to support the provision of equitable globalization, achieve the goals of the full and productive employment and decent work, and ensure the fundamental*

principles and rights in labour. Since the real accomplishment of "decent work" has become a global issue, *it is possible to formulate a theory of new perception of society management by combining the statements on human resources development index, human life force index and content of "decent work" that is characterized by increasing dynamics and complexity of social relations, the solution of which requires "imagination" for reorganization which includes changing the concept, a shift from the society of manufacturers the society of creators.*³⁸ This kind of imagination should be directed towards overcoming confrontational relations in the sphere of work by creating forms of social partnership and joint responsibility of employers in order to achieve economic growth and social progress expressed in human development of society.

Conclusion

The problems of achieving the conditions of "decent work" are considered at the global level, i.e. at the level of narrow fields of social organization and institutional forms of work organisation (companies, corporations, etc.). In this respect it is necessary to critically reconsider the institutional forms of human labour activity, especially in economic sciences,³⁹ in finding new forms of organization that correspond with the changes in the content and character of the work and thus, promote knowledge (and skills) as the most important resource, as intellectual capital and intellectual property.⁴⁰ *The new institutional forms of organizing work activities are required to ensure that these activities comply with the possibilities offered by intellectual capital in terms of achieving "decent work" and corresponding high work productivity and main competitive advantage in market conditions.* In this regard, highlighting the need for the participation of employees in managing the affairs of institutional forms of work organization seems to be of particular importance. Based on this approach, in forms of organization of work activity, the economic determinism gives way to the socio-cultural determinism.⁴¹

In some countries, "decent work" is realized through particularities that require serious considerations by respecting the relations in globalizing society that may affect the achievement of "decent work". In this regard, it is necessary to account with the *transfer of economic power from West to East, as well as the increasing role of the state in creating policies (economic policy in particular) and market regulation.* Moreover, it is increasingly difficult to find

³⁸ Мајор, Ф.: *Сутра је увек касно*

³⁹ Марковић, Ж.Д.: *Прилог социолошком промишљању глобалне економије*, Ниш, "Економске теме", 1-2/2008.

⁴⁰ Павкин, Е.П.: *Информација как научна категорија*, Москва, СоцМе, 11/2006.

⁴¹ Елгнеев, Б.Я. : *Социјална економија труди*, Санкт Петербург, 2007.

solutions to global problems with regional integrations that have become important in communication and collaboration. A strong and unbalanced development is inevitable; crisis situations can be avoided by improved business rules as well as taking risks to maintain stability of international community and responsibility by the rich and business people for social situations through respecting basic living needs of common (increasingly poorer) people. Regardless of the difficulties in the accomplishment of "decent work", it should not be left for 'better times', waiting for favourable conditions. As a strategic objective, it can be achieved in phases, accepting its importance as a strategic objective of human development of society.

The formulation and promotion of the objectives of *decent work* should be based on the statements set forth in the *Rio +20 Declarations on sustainable development*. These statements highlight the interconnection and interdependence of *decent work, poverty eradication, full productive employment* and social protection for all people at all levels. *In this Declaration, eradication of poverty was highlighted as the greatest global challenge nowadays*; therefore, there is an urgent need for releasing mankind from poverty and hunger. This objective requires a sustainable development with respect of the following three dimensions: economic, social and environmental. *Sustainable development should be focused on people having the right for development and adequate living standard. Highlighting and advocating sustainable development supplements the need of international community for its realization through internationally agreed development goals, and respect for already agreed and established objectives, which ensure the comprehensive achievement of sustainable development in order to ensure justice and fairness in society as global objective.*⁴² In short, decent work should be considered and organized in each stage of its implementation in the context of *sustainable development* as a unity of economic, social and environmental dimension in mutual interdependence and interconnection from the standpoint of fairness and social justice. Decent work is the most important component of the respect of human dignity, and dignity is a prerequisite of social justice.

Sustainable development is a global goal of realization of this concept. Declaration emphasizes the importance of international cooperation based on economic stability, sustained economic growth and promotion of social justice, respecting all human rights, particularly the right to development and social security. The importance of education for sustainable development is also

⁴² See the following works of the author: *Социально-экологический аспект устойчивого развития*, збор. трудов "Наука, образование в интересах развития", Москва, 2006, стр. 33-38 и *Экологические проблемы и общества* *спроводливот*, збор. трудов "Формирование компетентности специалистов в системе непрерывного образования", Воронеж, 2009, р. 35-105.

highlighted in this context, and it should be focused on the right to develop and provide complete and productive employment opportunity for everybody. *Commitment to the promotion and achievement of sustainable development as a global objective leads to reconsideration of the current education content, including the content of management education.* Namely, management should not be focused only on high profitability, but also on the achievement of corporate social objectives that contribute work motivation based on moral principles and sense of justice.

The achievement of sustainable development needs to address current and future challenges. Therefore, its institutional frameworks should integrate three dimensions (economic, environmental and social) in a balanced, transparent and efficient manner, finding common solutions as answers to global challenges. Sustainable development requires peace, security and respect for all human rights, particularly the right to development and decent work. The role of all the levels of authorities is essential to the achievement of sustainable development and decent work. Democracy, good governance and the rule of law (at both national and international levels) are crucial for sustainable development. The *Rio +20 Declaration* points to the importance of participation of citizens in the promotion of sustainable development, particularly of workers and unions. As representatives of workers, *"unions are important partners in facilitating the achievement of sustainable development, especially in the social dimension,"* says the *Declaration*, and we add *especially from the point of decent work*. Thus, in context of balanced relations between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of social life, decent work is an important paradigm of achieving equity and social justice as the supreme values of human labour which cultivates both society and man.