



# Економіка. Проблеми економічного становлення

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## *Critical points of view on contemporary labor relations*

*Article focus on critics of capitalist and communist-era productivity and effectiveness concept with the regard to human labor. the new world's economy which is based on ideas, symbols and design and where production sector is shrinking, the new approach to labor force must appear which will trigger out creativity and treat work as a play. Case studies of Morning Star and Valve Corporation management structure are given at the end of article.*

**Key words:** *laborforce, creativity, work as play, new economy, critics of labor relations.*

«If the economy has been doing so well,  
why are we not becoming happier?»<sup>1</sup>

In current capitalist system but as well in communist era the most of human activity is focused on work and productivity. In this article author would like to discuss selected works and essays with critical point of view on current economic system and idea of work. In the paper also are described alternative styles of labour organization in selected companies worldwide. Topic is universal but also can be applicable in current socio-economic situation of Poland according to which the Polish work the longest hours per year in the whole Europe, amounting to 1856 hours per year.<sup>2</sup> Such situation creates many social problems including health and mental diseases, social relations deterioration, stress, lack of work-life balance.

In his famous essay «The Abolition of Work» Bob Black starts with the strong sentence «no one should ever work».<sup>3</sup> Following essay is one of the most critical work on current economic and social system obsessed with the idea of work. Black's definition of work is so-called "forced labor" which is directed by the "carrot-and-stick rule" under existing political and economic system.<sup>4</sup> He discusses the separation of worker from the effects of his work as in 95 percent of workforce in the Western societies and around 100 percent in Communistic societies people do not work for

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<sup>1</sup> Clive Hamilton, Richard Dennis "Affluenza: When Too Much is never enough"

<sup>2</sup> „Polen arbeiten am meisten”, Bild Magazine based on data of European Industrial Relations Observatory (source: <http://www.bild.de/geld/wirtschaft/polen/polen-fleissigste-arbeiter-22952732.bild.html>); secondary source: <http://www.msz.gov.pl/Bild.Polacy.pracuja.najwiecej.49612.html>

<sup>3</sup> „The Abolition of Work”, Bob Black, source: [http://theanarchistlibrary.org/HTML/Bob\\_Black\\_The\\_Abolition\\_of\\_Work.html](http://theanarchistlibrary.org/HTML/Bob_Black_The_Abolition_of_Work.html)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



themselves but for employer – private or state.<sup>5</sup> Therefore wage-labor is nothing more than selling yourself on the installment plan<sup>6</sup> Black sees the shadows of contemporary work, which he calls diminishingly «jobs» or «occupation» stressing out fragmentation and limitation of contemporary workplace in which person can be responsible for only particular part of activity, thus giving less space for innovativeness, creativity and play. He notices that work is usually done in bureaucratic environment, hierarchical, world of sexual harassment and bullying, where people work for the benefit of bosses/leaders who usually do not contribute at all to the process. A comparison of authoritarian dictatorship state and typical workplace is given in which we can find permanent surveillance, strict hierarchy, system of informers and punishment. Black calls contemporary work a part-time slave<sup>7</sup> and gives description of typical perspective of employment:

«A worker is a part-time slave. The boss says when to show up, when to leave and what to do in the meantime. He tells you how much work to do and how fast. He is free to carry his control to humiliating extremes, regulating, if he feels like it, the clothes you wear or how often you go to bathroom. With a few exceptions he can fire you for any reason, or no reason. He has spied on you by snitches and supervisors, he amasses a dossier on every employee».<sup>8</sup>

In this description he shows contemporary workplace far from democratic perspective, more like Orwell's "1984" environment. Most of human will spend almost half of their lives in institutions governed in this way. Black also criticizes idea of "free-time" which is his opinion only euphemism, as most of people in short period after work can only commute to work, refresh, eat and go to sleep – it is only the way of maintenance and repair of capital.<sup>9</sup> He also sees the idea of work as a system of subordination of mass to elites, by implementing 40-hour working week and disciplining «naughty workers» who dare to come 15 minutes later, although there might be no actual tasks to be done. Although automatization and digitalization of economy enabled us to make our work more efficient, Black states that aim of work is "taking time of employee" and social oppression giving following argument :

«They want your time, enough of it to make you theirs, even if they have no use for most of it. Otherwise why has not the average work week gone down by more than a few minutes in the past fifty years?».<sup>10</sup> In capitalistic society an imminent twinning institution to workplace is of course school and Black also describes briefly its role as «youth concentration camps aimed at teaching hierarchy, obedience and punctuality for future workplace».<sup>11</sup>

As an alternative to typical employment system, Black shows two directions of changes, quantitative and qualitative. First solution is reduction of number of workload per week, thus enabling people to live more creative and self-development life. Such goals can be done by reduction of number of working hours (for instance: 4-hour working day or work every other day) and also use of electronic and multimedia inventions for spare of human workload (however it is important to beware of dehumanization of workplace).

Secondly, it is even more important to make qualitative changes in human activity, ending with the idea of «job» or «occupation» and going more towards «play» . It would mainly enable people to work on tasks (projects) which they enjoy for particular time, thus do not limiting their whole professional activity to one particular task (for instance: directs sales) which is often abstract and dehumanizing. In this way worklife would become a play (game) or series of games, but not like now a zero/sum game but win/win game.<sup>12</sup> He finishes his remarkable essay with the words «Workers of the world...relax»<sup>13</sup>

Other important critic of contemporary work relations is a Belgian writer and philosopher Raoul Vaneigem, one of the icons of situationist movement and icon writer of May 1968 Paris uprisings.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem



One of greatest critics of capitalistic employment relations are included in his work titled «The Book of Pleasures». Raoul Vaneigem sees economic system based on exchanged of goods as a trap in which people participate in complicated structures such as for instance schools, companies and political organization in which every step conceals pitfalls, commercial relations mean more stress, sacrifice and less freedom at every step.<sup>14</sup> Author sees commercial and employment relations as a trap in which contemporary living person cannot find way out, taking part in the nonsense rat race. He sees that the laws of the nature in the contemporary world did not change, it is still governed by the fittest and strongest, only the muscles were exchanged for the shrewd intelligence used for support of commercial exchange system.<sup>15</sup>

In his another hallmark book “The Revolution of everyday life” he points out that in the contemporary world often creativity at work is misunderstood with productivity. By giving the origins of the words *travail* and *labour*, he finds hidden meaning of work (word *labor* means suffering and word *tripalium* stands for the instrument of torture. In chapter 5 called «The Decline and Fall of Work» he picturesquely shows the everyday life of employee which kills any space for passion and creation:

«In an industrial society which confuses work and productivity, the necessity of producing has always been an enemy of the desire to create. What spark of humanity, of a possible creativity, can remain alive in a being dragged out of sleep at six every morning, jolted about in suburban trains, deafened by the racket of machinery, bleached and steamed by meaningless sounds and gestures, spun dry by statistical controls, and tossed out at the end of the day into the entrance halls of railway stations, those cathedrals of departure for the hell of weekdays and the nugatory paradise of weekends, where the crowd communes in weariness and boredom? From adolescence to retirement each 24-hour cycle repeats the same shattering bombardment, like bullets hitting a window: mechanical repetition, time-which-is-money, submission to bosses, boredom, exhaustion.»<sup>16</sup>

Vaneigem sees Taylorism and the arise of management discipline as the final blow for the mentality and implementation of capitalism in its worst depicting. He points out that most of the social revolutions and social unrest for change came from the artists, students, unemployed or privileged groups because labored workforce is too much exhausted with working week and the cage of hierarchical system that it cannot modify the system. He sees the same pattern and admiration for neverending productivity in both countries of western bloc and as well centrally-planned communism economies such as Soviet Union or China.

Ryszard Szarfenberg finds technocratic vision of cyborg-worker in global information society based in Poland's report on social development in 2002:<sup>17</sup>

*«Human will have to be prepared to change professions several times during his life, not just jobs, and in each new profession he will have to excel in order to become professional, otherwise he/she will not find employment in the competitive job market. Professional and personal life will also be much more saturated with technology, especially computers, the development of which you will need to constantly keep up «and" ... modern educational system has ... prepare people for ... innovation - to see the opportunities and risk assessment, taking new measures.»*<sup>18</sup>

*«Business will always be focused on well-educated people, dynamic, and thus efficient. People who are subject to social exclusion are not useful for business both as employees or as consumers. Business is very concerned that people should not be socially excluded and all are educated and dynamic, because it gives to the business the possibility of its development and expansion.»*<sup>19</sup>

In this report on social development Szarfenberg points out new vision of labour market in which person should be adjustable cyborg who is focused on constant innovation and «keeping up» with technology. In this modern workplace new god is business which “is concerned that

<sup>14</sup> Vaneigem, „The Book of Pleasure”, source:

<http://www.scenewash.org/lobbies/chainthinker/situationist/vaneigem/bop/bop.html>

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem

<sup>16</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, „The Revolution of Everyday Life”, source: <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/28>

<sup>17</sup> Ryszard Szarfenberg, „Marginalizacja i wykluczenie społeczne: wykłady”, Instytut Polityki Społecznej UW, 04.2006, Warszawa, p. 39

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem



people will not be socially excluded” for its own sake. However, this new vision of social development gives no answer what will happen with people who are not capable to focus on constant innovation and long-life learning. This approach becomes visible in the strategy of Ministry of Science and Education of Poland which focuses on practical and business-oriented aspects of education. In organized round tables and series of articles in nation-wide newspapers such as “Gazeta Wyborcza” the campaign is launched in order to develop new practical specializations which should replace theoretical specializations on Universities. In new technocratic vision of Ministry, humanities and social studies are not worth investment as they do not create development and growth based on technology.

Other interesting approach to contemporary labour market is presented by Janusz Sztumski which describes links between work and human’s dignity in globalized world.<sup>20</sup> In his work he describes how system of waged labour impacts on objectification of human dignity and social position. He points out that labour cannot be separated from the person performing the work, thus creating the situation in which unemployed and economically disadvantaged person must provide his work to “anyone” who is willing to accept his application at given rate. This creates specific control and sacrifice on the part of employee, who must follow demands of employer concerning.<sup>21</sup>

- Physical look – including his/her physical and psychological traits and as well dress code.
- Moral code – employer sets up ethical code which must be followed by all employees.
- Socio-political views – employer may demand from employee non-participation in political parties or try to discourage from joining labour unions.

We have to also add that employee as a weaker part of contract must often agree for misbehaviors of employer such as “bad mood” or mild violations of his dignity.<sup>22</sup> He also stressed out that not only business in contemporary socio-economical system tries to oppress people but as well central and local governments who parasitize on society and tries to treat people like things which can be managed or pressurized in the name of red tape and law. In given socio-economic situation Sztumski states that human’s dignity in contemporary labor market is only declared feature but does not exist in reality.

The new idea of work organization is implemented in one of the leading videogames producer in the world – Valve Corporation. This corporation since its founding in 1996 implemented flattened organizational structure without bosses, subordinates and departments.<sup>23</sup> Company follows similar model at work as famous democratic pedagogical approaches of Summerhill School. At Valve hiring and firing of new employees is decided at the democratic meeting of all the employees, moreover decisions on monthly salaries are also decided on the common meetings. There is no fixed departments, but employees are free to join new project teams in order to follow the particular project. Physical mobility is also supported by desk which are mounted on wheels, thus giving a lot of freedom to change rooms in order to conduct new projects.<sup>24</sup> As Prof. Andrzej Blikle states contemporary work hierarchy is outdated and is based on model used in XIXth century army.<sup>25</sup> He states out that nowadays management should only focus on strategy of organization and should not try to manage people in traditional style. What is interesting flattening structure is not only applicable for innovative Silicon Valley companies but as well for traditional companies which is proved by Morning Star which is the largest tomato corporation in the USA. This corporation also do not have organizational structure and all the decisions it is based on the links between provider and recipients of services. In this way employee must negotiate its salary and tasks yearly with his internal clients and put it into the document

<sup>20</sup> Janusz Sztumski, „Problem godności człowieka w czasach globalizacji”, „Wokół Polityki Społecznej”, red. Katarzyna Głąbicka, Mirosław Grewiński, Warsaw, January 2008. p 343

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, p. 345

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem

<sup>23</sup> «Who is the boss? There is not one», Rachel Emma Silvermann, The Wall Street Journal, 19.06.2012, source: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303379204577474953586383604.html?KEYWORDS=valve>

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem

<sup>25</sup> „Praca bez szefów i managerów: tak działa Valve»; [www.natemat.pl](http://www.natemat.pl) , retrieved: 9.07.2012



called «colleague letter of understanding».<sup>26</sup> Management models used in companies like Valve Corporation or Morning Star do not erase the line between proprietor and employee, however they make a step forward to experiment with new flattened organizational structures and democratic management model.

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**Критичний огляд сучасних трудових відносини.** *Стаття акцентує увагу на концепті продуктивності та ефективності трудових відносин капіталістичної та комуністичної епох, на новій світовій економіці, заснованій на тих ідеях, символах та структурах, в умовах яких зменшується продуктивний сектор. Стверджується, що новий підхід до робочої сили запустить в дію механізми ефективності праці та сприятиме розвитку творчості робітників, які будуть ставитись до роботи як до мистецтва. У кінці статті розглядається управлінська структура Morning Star та Valve Corporation.*

**Ключові слова:** робоча сила, креативність, креативність праці, нова економіка, трудові відносини

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**Критический обзор современных трудовых отношения.** *Статья акцентирует внимание на концепте производительности и эффективности трудовых отношений капиталистической и коммунистической эпох, на новой мировой экономике, основанной на тех идеях, символах и структурах, в условиях которых уменьшается продуктивный сектор. Утверждается, что новый подход к рабочей силе запустит в действие механизмы эффективности работы и будет содействовать развитию творчества рабочих, которые будут относиться к работе как к искусству. В конце статьи рассматривается управленческая структура Morning Star и Valve Corporation.*

**Ключевые слова:** рабочая сила, креативность, креативность работы, новая экономика, трудовые отношения

<sup>26</sup> „Morning Star – największy przetwyrca pomidoryw w USA”, Andrzej Jacek Blikle, [www.moznainaczrej.com.pl](http://www.moznainaczrej.com.pl), retrieved: 9.07.2012, source: <http://www.moznainaczrej.com.pl/morning-star>