

Orinta Z. ROETTING

Globalisation and Work



St. Steven's Green Park in the middle of Dublin is one of the most precious solitude places in the city centre. On a busy shopping Saturday Grafton street starting just by the main arch of the park is just an opposite to this tender, lazy mood of the park. The scene of street music, light shopping bags, red

colour of SALE signs and smell of beer from last evening develop into the contrastive metaphor of a fast economy city.

FAITH IN BETTER

On the street and TV this phenomenon is called the Celtic Tiger, which is many-faced and everything depends on the work a person does. The cheer of a Caribbean dancer with a fire, sadness of Chinese mistuned guitar player, Irish minority Traveller kid, pushing a pub song about the emigrants to America into the cold air - they all work with the same sincere conviction, that this work is a job. In the same way an Irish computer software specialist takes his job as a way of life and after working hours rests from it in a pub.

"Faith in better life finds its expression", remarks an elderly German tourist couple, as a Romanian, probably a studied musician, sings Italian opera artistically accompanied by an accordion. A young fellow student from Bucharest studying in an international business school says, he has nothing to do with him or any of the Roma women. These women are probably failed asylum-seekers, sewing in the same crowd by asking for a penny for their children holding to their long colourful skirts. Some of their babies have Celtic names given by the registry office. Undoubtedly the bond between all of those people is unmistakable cultural and economical world of reality, creating tensions between different people who experience new globalising Ireland.

WORK HAS BECOME ACCESSIBLE TO ALL NATIONS?

In the light of the statistics work permit grants for the foreigners in the UK, just an example, 4% of a total 1745 asking for work permits in the UK from Russia were refused in 1999-2000 as compared with

applicants from New Zealand with 11% refused from a total of 1455 are increasing. Ireland or Britain similar to Germany requires nurses and builders. All are welcome. The German government issued the "Decree on Residence Permits for Highly Qualified Foreign Information and Communications Technology Specialists" (which commenced on the 1st of August 2000 and will expire on the 31st of July 2008), which invites specialists with *high qualifications* to come to work for no longer than five years. Those street musicians together with locals, who were refused for special jobs, like computer specialists or accountants, are not touched by successful employment achievements EU is proud of. Hence major concern in the global scale is less focused on the absence of the access to jobs, but now more fight for fair work conditions, life-sustaining activity or combating against horrific practices of child labour and slavery in some African or Indian towns and wealthier cities.

LOW CLASS WORKING FORCE

There has been ever the low class working force nearly in every better situated country, similar to current times Romanians in Ireland, historically Pakistanis or Indians in Britain, Filipinos in Korea, Chinese in Indonesia or Mexicans in US, which had less moral and actual entitlement for certain quality jobs. "Do you think I like working in this geriatric hospital? They think I do not have a clue about how to calm some ladies' stomach-ache, as I pronounce a word "stomach" in an unusual way for them? I have considered giving her some camomile tea, but not milk as they do. Sometimes they just do not listen to me since I am even not an recognised nurse", speaks one care-assistant from Dublin, she worked as children paediatrician in Kiev. Most of her colleagues are from Philippines. "Nice people", she says, "but sad. They only talk about their families at home and how to earn money. Men are often talking about the cock-fights. I find hard to understand them. But they like working."

Europe needs less paid workers and not everyone who comes receives the joy of working what she or he loves. Eastern Europeans or Africans do the job not every local would do. The European labour market are widening through immigration and through the successful European business abroad. Despite that fact, there are less people satisfied about their work achievements and contributions, as some labour surveys show, either because there is a need for special work counselling in different work places, or because less people want to share their jobs with others.



CHANGING CHARACTER OF WORK

The current phenomenon of *xenophobia* on the one side and *ignorance* on the other explains why it is so difficult to plan fare labour market for everyone in these times of great movement and migration. Western society experiences consumerism that works according to the rules of exclusionary economic liberalism. *Economic liberalism* suggests that the individual's successful employment and fulfilment of a need to work is a matter of individual's decision. The individual is torn between the success of international businessman carrier and lovely underpaid local jobs. Both choices have positive and negative sides. A businessperson enjoys one's global success and may lose the feeling for production one makes; one becomes a citizen of the world but irresponsible for local matters. Local worker may fight with a big corporation for survival of one's small shop and may lose the importance of larger scale cooperation. Everyone encounters the risk of losing identity and the feeling that one does a good, significant for humanity in a broader sense, and essential for life job.



BAUMAN AND THE WELFARE STATE

Sociologist Zygmunt BAUMAN in his book "Work Ethics" writes, about western society where the axis has changed from the producers to the consumers. Bauman speaks of the process of rise and fall of welfare state (which means these with collective guarantees of individual dignified survival) in these words: "The pressure of organised labour, incapable to ensuring itself, again on its own and without political help, against the vagaries of 'economic cycles'; the urge to protect and reassert the principle of social inequality through mitigating its most iniquitous and least-endurable manifestations; the desire to stimulate acceptance of inequality by marginalising those who failed to participate in its reproduction; and the pressing need to help the membership of policy to weather the eroding impact of a political uncontrolled economy."

ECONOMIC AND INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY

The second side of the problem within the Western society lies in people's experience of tension between economic and individual identity. For example, a person working in a business call centre in Glasgow has nothing to do with problems with a shower in your hotel room in Florida similar to his colleague, who also has never seen that hotel too and takes over the phone calls in Sydney after the working hours in Europe are finished. Statistically the highest rotation in staff is recognised in those call-centres. "Your salary increase if you receive more calls. It means you

should talk less and sell more. You cannot work long in such alienating environment", tells a student from Germany.

Attempt of self-protection as a nation (similar to personal identity) across geopolitical boundaries is the counteraction to the opening of global possibilities and entitlement to work wherever you like, want to live and have to live (Doty Roxanne LYNN, *Racism, Desire, and the Politics of Immigration*. Millennium 1999/3.). Refugees, guest workers or migrant worker fall into these conditions of consumerism, mechanisation and become victims of protectionism as a reaction to consumerism. The process of global movement of workers and difficulties those receiving communities have in findings quite a challenge to notice how many unhappy working hours of their lives they, nationals, spend themselves.



HOW DO WE WANT TO WORK?

The conclusions of the Nice summit say: "Quality of work includes better jobs and more balanced ways of combining working life with personal life. Good employment and social policies are needed to underpin productivity and to facilitate the adaptation to change. They will also play an essential role towards the full transition to the knowledge-based economy." It makes clear that everyone should get a quality job in knowledge-based economy. This is a wish made into a law. Laws express consensus of the society as it is and expresses mostly just a vision, at least in current EU, but not a practice.

Let us return to the musicians playing on pedestrian streets in European cities, doctors working as care assistants or call-centre operators. It is quite a difficult task to evaluate street musician's knowledge about the music, as he or she is not good technically, but they sincere and earn for life in the same way as Roma women for their gift of persistence. The call-centre person produces happy numbers for the hotels and give an impression to a customers, that someone takes care about him or her. All get money in different ways and levels of personal satisfaction or illusion of it. The musician comes home and dreams of singing on national TV. The call centre person or computer programmer comes home and takes lessons of guitar forgetting about anything what was happening during the day.

MULTITASK ONENESS

Some psychologists suggest that we are capable of living more lives and capable of multitask activities more than any generation before. Our children apparently will be by all means able to listen to music and learn at the same time fully. There are others who still believe in oneness of work, the relationship between the maker and the receiver, believe in rest from work but not from the wish to work for the sake of work but not the benefit from it. In the same way, the Nice treaty describes our wish to have "quality work" in a knowledge based society, but at the same time expresses the dualism. The politicians sign their documents and go to their home countries. Nothing changes, if there is no affection to work the decision out.

LOVE TO WORK

The famous film-maker and poet Jonas MEKAS in his writings talks about the lost love to work talking about his father's attention while sewing the seeds into a field slowly, step by step with a concentration and meditation of a monk. Miles away from his home country Lithuania, Irish poet Seamus HEANEY writes about himself peeling potatoes with his grandmother and about similar relaxed concentration of doing work.

Working still makes humans happy if it's made with love. Work starts from very small things enjoying them. The universalisation of consumerism and the idea of economic benefit makes us vulnerable and losing the most human sense of freedom to work what we love. Quality is probably more than knowledge. Consume is probably less than welfare of individuals.

GLOBALISATION OF POSSIBILITIES

Globalisation makes it possible for a businessman based in North of Europe to work in his own firm in China one week and next week in Singapore. Does he really like it? Globalisation makes it possible for a Chinese woman to play in Grafton Street in Dublin. Does she really enjoy doing it so far from home? Or maybe she feeds her family and so loves her own living.

Who benefits from the fact that we can see more, can go to more places and buy different things cheaper? We make choices on our own and in our own communities. We make choices to do what we want and to love what we do. Globalisation has two sides - opening possibilities for us and opening the possibilities for others. Do we like what we earn money from? Do we like what others earn their money from and what decisions make?

Globalisation even makes possible for the working politicians to make decisions, blame the naturally inflexible international decision apparatus for their outcome and behave as it pleases local needs. Globalisation is a word, which is created for the questions about the future.

• *Orinta Z. ROETTING is Lithuanian, born in Kaunas (Lithuania), married Martin from München (Germany); working with refugees; recently graduated at the Trinity College Dublin (Irish School of Ecumenics), International Peace Studies programme (M. Phil.); a member of Lithuanian Catholic Youth Organisation "Ateitis" (Future).*

