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REALIZATION OF LABOUR IN THE POLISH PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC

The article is an attempt to present the realization of labour in the Polish People's Republic in the years 1945 – 1989. By realization of labour, I understand performance of work for the state employer. I contrasted the assumptions of work philosophy of the period with the real picture of performance of work in enterprises. I referred to organization of labour, technical culture of the staff, quality of labour, the remuneration system as an element of motivation to work efficiently, staff turnover and labour propaganda.

Keywords: *work performance, work ethics, technical culture, organization of labour, staff turnover.*

“The one who does not work does not eat”

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After World War II Poland and other countries in Central and Eastern Europe became, against the will of the majority of the nation, a part of the Soviet sphere of a political and economic influence. In practice this

meant an imposition of the Soviet political solutions which were alien to the Polish nation. In Poland the law of 3 January 1946 to take over basic branches of national economy into the state's ownership was one of the milestones of the reconstruction of social and economic relations which was taking place at that time. The so-called nationalization of industry, trade and services soon gained a constitutional sanction. The Constitution of the Polish People's Republic of 22 July 1952 states that "A socialist economic system, based on socialized means of production and socialist production relations is the basis of the socio-economic system of Polish People's Republic"¹.

The state and the Polish United Workers' Party (the Communist Party) (which represented national authorities and usurped an exclusive right to represent workers) secured themselves full control over employees and their work as the owner of means of production who organized production and designed economic development of the country. Elimination of unemployment and the policy of the so-called full employment were supposed to be a milestone in the success of the country's modernization. However, the official lack of unemployment was achieved at the expense of transferring the problem to enterprises. Therefore, People's Poland experienced the phenomenon of unemployment in the workplace. The rate of hidden unemployment in the country, according to Paul Glikman, totalled in 1980 26.7%, 29.7 % in industry, while in 1989 it was 20.9%, 29.1% in industry ². According to other

¹ *Konstytucja Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej uchwalona przez Sejm Ustawodawczy w dniu 22 lipca 1952*, Książka i Wiedza, Warsaw 1976, p. 14. The slogan of social egalitarianism gained importance for the radical modernization project, an eradication of the exploitation of a man by a man and an introduction of the so called social justice were called for. To emphasize the significance of those conceptual categories, they were included into the constitutions of the countries of people's democracy (the so called Soviet bloc). It was stated in the constitution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which inspired the entries to the constitutions of other satellite countries: "The work of Soviet people, free from exploitation, is a source of increase in the social wealth, the prosperity of the nation and of each Soviet man", see: *The constitution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*, Książka i Wiedza, Warsaw 1977, p. 50. This aspect was presented in a slightly different form in the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic of 22 July 1952. Its preamble said that the Polish nation adopted the constitution in order to "fight for further improvement of social relations, a complete abolition of exploitation of a man by a man".

² Chumiński Jędrzej, *Mentalne bariery rozwoju gospodarczego PRL*, [in:] Chumiński Jędrzej (ed.), *Modernizacja czy pozorna modernizacja. Społeczno-ekonomiczny bilans PRL 1944-1989* [Modernisation or an illusory modernisation. A socio-economic analysis of PRL 1944-1989], Wydawnictwo Gajt 1991, Wrocław 2010, p. 112. Prof. Jędrzej Chumiński indicates that in some sectors the hidden unemployment reached disastrous numbers and in 1989

sources, the rate of hidden unemployment in enterprises was estimated at the level of 33% of the employed³. In one of the reports prepared in 1979 for Edward Gierk, he found the following note: "We are still experiencing employment growth in the whole economy although we lack full insight into the scale of the phenomenon. The increase is mainly caused by deficiencies in organization of labour and material supply frequency as well as an imperfect functioning of the employment mechanism. All of this prompts us to maintain high numbers in crews"⁴. In that situation, the regulation in the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic which stated that "Labour is a right, a duty and a matter of honour for every citizen" and "Citizens of the Polish People's Republic have a right to work, that is a right to employment paid for according to the quantity and quality of work"⁵ sounded like irony. The inability of the state employer to provide jobs for everybody. Furthermore, using the potential of employees during their working hours, led to jobs guaranteed by the state to become very unattractive for many citizens of the People's Poland. It was probably the only commodity (product) which, in an economy that suffered from a chronic lack of everything, was widely available. There were more job offers than there were people ready to accept them, so supply exceeded demand. This situation made people empirically realise that work ethics became devaluated, and workers' productivity was very low.

Due to unemployment being hidden inside factory walls, realisation of labour in a state-owned enterprise was disrupted by a natural pathology: staff turnover. All attempts to curb it were not successful throughout the period of People's Poland, since finding a job was not difficult, and it did not require putting any special effort. Therefore, individual development strategy planning, which was so common in capitalist countries, began to disappear among young people who were starting their jobs

it amounted to e.g. in the mining industry - 37,1%, petroleum industry - 37,8%, power industry - 38,2%, iron industry - 33,5%, food industry - 47,6%.

³Dunn Elizabeth, *Prywatyzując Polskę. O bobofrutach, wielkim biznesie i restrukturyzacji pracy*, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warsaw 2008, p. 66.

⁴*Raporty dla Edwarda Gierka*, PWE, Warsaw 1988, p. 103.

⁵*Konstytucja PRL...*, p. 17; p. 44. Art. 40 of the Soviet constitution bore resembling features: "The citizens of USSR have a right to work, that is a right to gain a guaranteed job paid for according to the quantity and quality of labour, not less than a minimum established by the state - including the right to choose an occupation, type of profession and job in accordance with vocation, abilities, vocational training and social needs".

and among those who already worked⁶. It was a job that often demanded a person, not the other way round, as “in the periods of exacerbated fights against social parasitism, evading work required more effort than finding it”⁷. The scale of this phenomenon was confirmed by the findings of the Provincial Communist Party Committee in Bydgoszcz which showed that after 1956 every fifth worker changed their job within one year, and a substantial proportion of people did it several times. Therefore, in the opinion of contemporary journalists “demand for people, not taking into consideration the new launches, is born as a result of the turnover”⁸. The basic causes of the staff turnover in enterprises included, according to a study of 1978: financial and housing reasons, discord among crew members, disagreements and arguments about the assigned jobs, workload overstatements, no prospects for promotion, arduous working conditions – excess noise, excessive dustiness standards, strenuous physical hardship, an inconvenient journey to work or ... a warm summer and a natural need to prolong the holiday by abandoning a job. This phenomenon was particularly intense in “Merinotex” Worsted Wool Spinning Mill in Toruń. In this company job abandonment in the summer season reached “150-160 people a week”. The management justified the situation by saying that the company’s crew is very young – women at the age of about 22 for whom a prolonged summer of relaxation was more important than preserving their jobs⁹.

In his research on the development of industry, John R. Hicks claims that modern industry, which People’s Poland’s authorities undoubtedly wanted to build, aimed at regularity. The postulated regularity concerned mainly staff as a stable workforce in a company that was a guarantee of an effective use of accumulated durables. “It brought results of fundamental importance, both social as well as economic”, argued the economist¹⁰. Poland of 1945 – 1989 lacked the “regularity of industry work” which was postulated by John Hicks and a lack of stabilized crews in a number of

⁶Marody Mirosława, Lewicki Mikołaj, *Przemiany ideologii pracy*, [in:] Kochanowicz Jacek i Marody Mirosława, *Kultura i gospodarka*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warsaw 2010, p.105

⁷Marody Mirosława, Lewicki Mikołaj, *Przemiany ideologii...*, p. 105

⁸See also: Kamosiński Sławomir, *Mikroekonomiczna analiza przemysłu Polski Ludowej w latach 1950 – 1980 na przykładzie regionu kujawsko-pomorskiego*, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 2007, p. 289

⁹Ibidem, p. 292 - 294

¹⁰Hicks John Richard, *Teoria historii gospodarczej*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2001, p. 179

companies was an empirical example of this. This fact resulted in a constant improvisation of production engineering, establishing of workload standards and salary amounts. The improvisation affected a reasonable cost calculation at the microeconomic level. Such a basic calculation did not exist.

A transformation into an industrial society – a sudden leap in the modernisation of the Polish post-war social and economic realities that were promised to the society by the communist authorities – meant an absolute rupture of the continuity of the society's civilization development. This phenomenon should be seen in terms of a rapid, sudden transition of the society from the agrarian to the industrial era. The then authorities confirmed the society in the belief that physical labour is the foundation of the nation's wealth. That kind of work was the only one of a productive and profitable nature. Attention was also paid to the fact that there existed categories of non-productive labour as well¹¹. Due to the established division of labour, there arose a belief that the working class, by performing physical labour only, is the leading force in the society, the avant-garde. Mental work and services were considered to be, according to those priorities, a second-rate category¹². The recognition of the workers who performed the so-called productive labour as a privileged group of the society was not reflected in the quality of the work they performed. The quality was mainly reduced because industrial workers lacked a basic technical culture. It was not possible to acquire a technical culture, which was probably expected by authorities of the People's Poland, only by breaking the historical and institutional continuity with the previous periods of history. One should note that in the course of rapid social change which was then taking place, "the farmers of yesterday - today's workers" were not prepared to change their profession and habits connected with the work in such a short time. Władysław Gomułka, First Secretary of the Central Committee in 1959 stated: "We must teach people handling a ma-

¹¹ Bałtowski Maciej, *Gospodarka socjalistyczna...*, p. 48. Mark Blaug argued that "the division of work into the productive and non-productive executed Smith is probably the most harmful theory in the history of economic doctrines".

¹²Such understanding of social awareness is documented in empirical data, according to which in the eighties the service sector in People's Poland hardly amounted to a third of all the employed while, according to prof. Janusz Żarnowski, in western Europe, where free market was a basis for development, "the service sector increased its share by approximately 7-8% each decade until it reached two thirds of all the people who were professionally active". See: Żarnowski Janusz, *Spółczeństwa XX wieku*, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1999, p. 101.

chine and tools like a living organism”¹³. The problem in state-owned enterprises was not resolved for the entire duration of the People’s Poland. In 1975 it was reported that in “Elana” Artificial Fibres Plants in Torun “low technical culture, a dreadful habit of using methods in a production plant where an almost military, or rather Prussian, discipline is required, turned out to be the highest barrier which Elana encountered during the production and investment growing”¹⁴. In the Rolling Stock Repair Plant in Bydgoszcz a low technical culture of workers resulted in cranes imported from western countries breaking down due to improper operation. As a consequence, after a year they were not fit for further use”¹⁵. It was a mental barrier that was underlying the phenomenon. The rural population which migrated to towns still remained a peasant population, despite the change of their residence. The people, in addition to their deficiencies in technical culture, had difficulty in adapting to the rhythm of factory work and lacked an ability to work in a team (gang).

The technical facilities with which a work stand was equipped corresponded to workers’ low technical culture. According to data from an industrial census which was carried out in People’s Poland in 1965, 44.8% of workers were employed at non-mechanized work stands, 32.1% at partially mechanized work stands, 21.1% at fully mechanized ones and 2% of the workers were employed at automated workplaces¹⁶. Despite these objective facts, 50.1% of industrial workers commented positively on the technical equipment of their workplaces. Statistical data collected in 1983 showed that the technical equipment of workplaces in Polish enterprises only slightly changed, compared to the year 1965. Up to 31% of factory employees still worked at non-mechanized work stands, 32% worked at partly mechanized work stands, 28% performed their work at fully mechanized work stands, 8% at partially automated workplaces, 1% at fully automated ones¹⁷. For these reasons, among other things, even in the 1960s, according to those employed, the most onerous elements of work in Polish industry included the so-called dirty work (20 – 47% of the re-

¹³ Gomułka Władysław, *Przemówienia 1959*, Książka i Wiedza, Warsaw 1960, p. 14-15

¹⁴ Wiśniewska Barbara, *Stawanie się Elany wielką, Innowacje*. Przegląd Techniczny, 1975, Nr 46, p. 6-7

¹⁵ Kamosiński Sławomir, *Kultura techniczna pracowników przemysłu w okresie PRL na przykładzie regionu kujawsko-pomorskiego*, Zapiski Historyczne 2009, vol. LXXIV, iss. 4, p. 43

¹⁶ *Masowe Badania Statystyczne. E – Przemysł*, Nr 38 (E – 1). Spis przemysłowy przeprowadzony w 1966 roku według stanu w dniu 31.12.1965, p. 119-120.

¹⁷ Karpiński Andrzej, Paradyż Stanisław, *Przemysły wysokiej techniki w gospodarce polskiej*, Gospodarka Planowa, 1984, Nr 2, p. 53

sponses), avoiding an accident at work (26 – 46% of the respondents) and excessive physical activity (22 – 32% of the respondents)¹⁸. This picture explains why Polish enterprises primarily reported a demand for manual workers, usually without qualifications, able to perform so-called simple operations or ready to work at workplaces with a small degree of technical equipment.

It therefore appears that the key to understanding the principles of labour in communist Poland after 1945 lies in the Marxist labour cost calculation. Ludwig von Mises presents it in the following way: “from the standpoint of economics, all work is homogenous because it meant always a productive use of the human brain, muscles, nerves, hands, etc. Complex work is merely an intensification or multiplication of simple operations; thus a smaller amount of complex work equals a greater amount of simple work. Experience proves that such a reduction is true. A product may be a result of complex work, but it levels its value with the value of a product of simple work and thus it constitutes only a specific amount of simple work”¹⁹. In consequence, the equalization of value, that is regarding simple work as equal to technically equipped work or intellectual work, led to a deceleration of a social need to improve the quality of education. For that reason, among other things, a vast part of the society restricted themselves to gaining qualifications only on the level of vocational training.

Due to the fact that work stands were poorly equipped, the state of industrial safety in enterprises was very bad. The situation was reported by workers themselves. We will get a broader picture of the scale of this phenomenon if we note that at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, 4 million workers who were performing the tasks assigned to them were exposed to strenuous physical activity every day and 3 million employees worked in the so-called conditions of exceeding the permissible standards²⁰. At the same time it was noted that most workers employed at those work stands accepted the situation and reconciled themselves to the fact that physical work may ruin a person's health²¹. In this situation it was understandable that the management of an enterprise presented those em-

¹⁸Jarosińska Maria, *Uciążliwości robotniczej pracy i ich społeczny kontekst*, [in:] Nowakowski Stanisław, Kulpińska J. (ed.), *Spółczeństwo i socjologia. Księga poświęcona prof. Janowi Szczepańskiemu*, Wrocław 1995, p. 94

¹⁹Mises Ludwig von, *Socjalizm*, Arkana, Kraków 2009, p. 111.

²⁰Mazurek Małgorzata, *Socjalistyczny zakład pracy. Porównanie fabrycznej codzienności w PRL i NRD u progu lat sześćdziesiątych*, Wydawnictwo TRIO, Warszawa 2005, p. 193.

²¹Jarosińska Maria, *Uciążliwości robotniczej pracy i społeczny ich kontekst*, p. 101.

ployees who were exposed to onerous working conditions as role models. The observations made in "Elana" Artificial Fibres Plants in Torun may serve as an illustration of the disastrous state of industrial safety. Above all, it was pointed out that the problem of storage of finished products in the production halls was poorly solved. Due to the lack of a finished product warehouse, the finished lot lay next to machines by the production lines. Therefore, "the bales constantly need to be carried. It happens that trucks pushing between the spools of products knock down a part of a wall or press the workers against it"²².

Shortages were a feature of the economy which was introduced in Poland after World War II. Janos Kornai noticed and defined them²³. Although the indicated feature concerned all branches of economy, industrial production was particularly plagued by it. In the first place, the shortages ruined a regularity of the work of industry and impeded the introduction of the so-called productivity revolution. Charles Taylor introduced a scientific organization of labour in the factories of Henry Ford. In the Polish plant all attempts to introduce production based on a fixed production rhythm failed. A slowdown of lines or even stoppage and then acceleration when components of production or raw materials were supplied were not to be accepted in Taylor's system of a steady flow of labour and production. The centrally planned and managed economy created, due to the shortages, a different rhythm. It was called production spurts²⁴. An enterprise and its crew needed to be prepared for this method of production engineering. Hence, besides building an excessively developed storage system and resource base in the event of shortages, overstaffing was another problem that occurred in the plants. This strategy permitted, in case of a supply of the essential materials from a co-operating party, to release the energy of the crew waiting for work in order to meet the quantitative assumptions of the production plans. In such a situation, each pair of hands capable to work was indispensable.

This strange method, from the perspective of a reasonable organization of labour and a sensible use of employees' working time and technical equipment of an enterprise, caused rumblings of discontent among employees of enterprises. In the Rolling Stock Repair Plant in Bydgoszcz the following situation was reported: "In their talks employees hearken back

²² See also: Kamosiński Sławomir, *Mikroekonomiczna analiza...*, p. 310 and further

²³ Kornai Janos, *Niedobór w gospodarce*, PWE, Warszawa 1985.

²⁴ Dunn Elizabeth, *Prywatyzując Polskę*, p. 30.

to the occupation period [1939 – 1945], emphasizing the efficient organization of labour and material supplies. One of the employees talked about how he worked on expanding the boiler forge. He claimed that *Aufseher* was hardly to be seen; he himself walked around the building site with an inch-rule, chose the material he needed, cut it to size, nailed it together, and the work went on amazingly smoothly. Nowadays, he labours to find the materials for several hours; he gets tired of looking for them more than with working the whole day. He simply can't imagine that it is possible to create such a mess within 16 years after the war, compared to the order which prevailed in the plant during the war"²⁵. Improvisation concerning the organisation of labour and production was a fixed ritual in Róża Luksemburg Industrial Plant in Warsaw²⁶. It was a result of the typical ills of the shortage economy: a shortage of production materials and tools, machines which broke down, etc. Wasting of the employees' time and, above all, energy during their working hours and the lack of a fixed rhythm of work caused frustration among the employees and provoked pathological behaviour e.g. alcohol consumption at a workplace, thefts; and in consequence, it undermined the staff's morale.

The features of the shortage economy was the principal, but not the only, element which affected the poor organization of labour and production in an enterprise. Attention was also drawn to mistakes made by engineers and architects who designed plants. The consequences of such mistakes were clearly seen in "Elana" Artificial Fibres Plants in Torun. In 1978 "Elana" magazine, which belonged to a group of house journals, reported that: "Already at first glance, even a layman would notice that the setting of the forming presses for metal frames is not well thought out, the ways of single elements being transported from one technological stand to another are extended and they intersect, which results in a considerable waste of time"²⁷. From the perspective of the above examples which allows one to look at the past from the angle of the daily practice of an enterprise, the clause in Art.13 of the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic of 22 July 1952 sounds like a joke: "State-owned enterprises, by reasonable

²⁵ Instytut Pamięci Narodowej w Bydgoszczy (dalej cyt. / further cit.: IPN Bydgoszcz), ref. no. IPN By 069/1283 vol. 7 „Naprawa”, Meldunek dotyczący sytuacji w zakładzie ZNTK, 3.03.1959 rok.

²⁶ Mazurek Małgorzata, *Socjalistyczny zakład pracy...*, p. 188.

²⁷ *Jak pracowaliśmy*, Elana 1978, Nr 324.

management on the part of national property entrusted to them, carry out economic and social assignments as planned”²⁸.

In the socialist economy, wages lost their motivating role in raising the productivity of employees. Following the view of Ludwig von Mises, one must note that “in the capitalist social order, employees have the right to benefit from the results of their work (...). The employees themselves are interested in ensuring that the productivity of the work performed by them is as high as possible”. Whereas “in the socialist social order, any relation between performance and remuneration cannot be created. All attempts to calculate the contribution of work and then settle the amount of remuneration on this basis had to suffer defeat because of the impossibility of calculating the productive contribution of individual factors of production”²⁹.

A calculation of the amount of payment in state-owned enterprises was essentially based on the principle of wage egalitarianism. In state-owned enterprises two systems of remuneration performed were typically used: a daily pay system combined with a bonus for the execution of the scheduled tasks or a piecework pay system based on a permanent base salary, combined with a bonus and an extra bonus for work in the piecework system. The amount of each component of the salary was additionally determined by a classifying an employee in a particular payment category, including seniority or work experience, position held and similar factors. The remuneration system was designed in such a way that it was based on central directives. Due to this fact, it was isolated from conditions of labour and production specific for each enterprise, and therefore, irrespectively of its construction, it was always conflictual. Employees felt that they were unfairly treated by the employer. In 1979 in one of the enterprises in Bydgoszcz a conflict over pay rises arose. The problem which was underlying the conflict was perfectly captured in the following note: “The fact that it [the division of money for pay rises] is done purely mechanically, without any consideration for merits and the contribution of work, causes considerable frustration. In the employees’ opinion, particularly the office workers who have a certain view on the quality of their

²⁸ *Konstytucja PRL...*, p. 15. Art.8 of the Soviet constitution said: “Workers’ collectives develop competition, promote the popularization of progressive work methods, reinforcement of labour discipline, educate their members in the atmosphere of communist morality, care for the raising of their political and cultural awareness as well as improving their professional qualifications”, cit.: *Konstytucja ZSRR...*, p. 47.

²⁹ Mises Ludwig von, *Socjalizm*, p. 138-139.

subordinates' work, pay rises for some of them should not even take place. In the judgement of a number of employees, it is simply demoralising and discouraging"³⁰. The resulting situation was a natural consequence of the fact that the burden of work in state-owned enterprises was assigned to the post which was created in the factory, and it had no connection with the valuation of individual effort, personal contribution and commitment of an employee³¹.

Conflicts concerning remuneration occurred in almost every workplace, and workers who tried to enforce wage increases used, as it turned out, a very effective weapon in the form of a strike. An announcement of a strike always forced the management of an enterprise to make concessions and agree to the staff's demands. In the Rolling Stock Repair Plant in Bydgoszcz in mid-December 1978, the threat of a strike over the amount of pay rises meant that "the Provincial Communist Party Committee settled this issue (of wages - SK) - the staff was assured that despite a lack of materials, they will not receive lower salaries"³². As a result of the repeated situations, the employees of state-owned enterprises strengthened their belief that there is no connection between an individual effort, the type of work and the amount of their monthly wages. Those factors were very distant from each other. Ludwig von Mises argued that "If there exists no link between the fruits of one's labour and the employee's remuneration, which is true for the socialist society, an individual will always work with the conviction that he is burdened with excess workload"³³. As a result, the piecework system as a method for the organization of production did not work. As Małgorzata Mazurek notes, one of the reasons for this common phenomenon in People's Poland was "getting even"; that is, calculating the efforts of employees individually so that they can achieve results which generate profit and do not risk a decline of job's standards³⁴. Empirical experiences in this case were very significant. In 1966 in Telekom-Telfa Telecommunication Equipment Production Plant in Bydgoszcz a rise of labour standards by introducing the so-called technically justified standards provoked a wave of resignations among the employees. The avalanche of those abandoning work which this triggered was so trouble-

³⁰IPN Bydgoszcz, ref. no. IPN By 044/986 „Polietylen”, Meldunek operacyjny z dnia 14.04.1979 roku.

³¹Marody Mirosława, Lewicki Mikołaj, *Przemiany ideologii pracy...*, p.108.

³²IPN Bydgoszcz, ref. no. IPN By 069/1283, t. 1 „Naprawa”, Uzupełnienia analiz.

³³Mises von Ludwig, *Socjalizm*, p. 138.

³⁴Mazurek Małgorzata, *Socjalistyczny zakład pracy*, p. 205.

some that the press at that time called that phenomenon “a catastrophe matching a long-term strike in its force”³⁵. This expression was appropriate as, according to sources, 50 to 70% of the staff quit. The people who resigned from their work gave excessive standards which were to be met during a working day as the reason for their decision.

Subjective feelings of workers concerning employee satisfaction with their job and pay are different in capitalist and socialist societies. In capitalism, “the fact that through their efficient work, laborers are able to provide for themselves and their families a source of pleasure with work - employee satisfaction. (...) An employee is satisfied because thanks to the possibility of performing work and thanks to their skills, they can secure their standard of living and their social positions”³⁶. That sense of pleasure and satisfaction cannot be attributed to employees of the state-owned enterprises in People’s Poland. In May 1971 during a meeting of PZPR (the Communist Party), yielding power on behalf of workers, staff members of one of the enterprises expressed their dissatisfaction as follows: “why was a man able to provide for his family before the war in capitalist Poland and he cannot do the same in People’s Poland?”³⁷. For these reasons, among other things, as many as 96.8% of women – female workers, employed in state-owned enterprises, mentioned wages while asking what values they would lose in the event of job loss. Thus, the primary motivating factor for working women in People’s Poland was an economic necessity, not a matter of, for example, professional self-fulfilment or personal development. This is confirmed by the fact that in sociological surveys, women placed the amount of wages far down the list of positive features of their work³⁸.

In Article 19 point 3 of the Constitution of the PRL states that “Polish People’s Republic ever more fully implements the principle: from everyone according to his ability, to everyone according to his work”³⁹. While expanding the interpretation of the term “to everyone according to his

³⁵ Rem Jan (Urban Jerzy), *Zapotrzebowanie na pomysły*, *Życie Gospodarcze* 1966, nr 25.

³⁶ Mises von Ludwig, *Socjalizm*, p. 137.

³⁷ IPN Bydgoszcz, ref. no. IPN By 069/1283, t. 8 „Naprawa”, Informacja dotycząca nieprawidłowości występujących w ZNTK w Bydgoszczy.

³⁸ Mazurek Małgorzata, *Socjalistyczny zakład pracy*, p. 204.

³⁹ *Konstytucja PRL...*, p. 17. Wage egalitarianism had a deeper meaning in the Soviet constitution. Art. 14 said: “The work of Soviet people, free from exploitation, is a source of increase in the social wealth, the prosperity of the nation and of each Soviet man. The state has control over the scale of labour and consumption, according to the principle: ‘from everyone according to his abilities, for everyone according to his work’. It determines the amount of tax on taxable income”.

work", Maciej Bałtowski stresses that "the principle, implicitly and in practice, meant - to each according to the amount of labour, not to everyone according to its results"⁴⁰. As a result, "the amount of labour" meant a performance of the amount of labour which was included in the plans for production in an enterprise. The quality of production, in the face of a constant threat of failure to meet the amounts adopted in the production plans, was not taken into consideration. In consequence, products of lower quality standards were manufactured. They were often assembled with substitute materials that were to be found in the plant's warehouse at that moment instead of the ones required by technical standards. This vicious circle was complemented by the following fact: low quality products of a cooperating party automatically affected the quality of the finished products in another enterprise. In Agricultural Machinery Plant "Agromet-Union" in Grudziądz in 1979, a journalist from "Technical Review" reported the following picture: "at the first work stand - a pile of long, wide flat bars. The product of Zawiercie steelworks. Every second one is lopsided. It is put into a press which cuts rectangular landslide shares. Every second or third [one] needs to be thrown out. Can't that scrap be returned to the steelworks? It can. You can appoint a committee, write letters, etc. Just nothing comes out of it. Upset by the television images of the successes of the steelworks, factory workers came to the party committee: If they are so good, why do we get such lousy materials? They follow the schedule - we have downtime and do not earn"⁴¹. The reality at that time did not motivate employees to get emotionally involved in their work, since the shortages in the economy guaranteed that there will always be buyers of products of low quality. The management of Furniture Accessories Plant in Chełmno reported: "The problem of quality in the enterprise is difficult to assess due to a considerable shortage of fittings which means that products of reduced standard are sold off to co-operatives and off-road industry"⁴². In "Zachem" Chemical Plants in Bydgoszcz in 1977 in a department which produced foil it was noted that: "the manufacturing quality is deteriorating and, in principle, 50-60% of total production is spoilage. However, the position of the management forces the quality controller to overlook it in the hope that they will manage to foist the products on buyers or that the

⁴⁰ Bałtowski Maciej, *Gospodarka socjalistyczna w Polsce*, p. 49.

⁴¹ Stępowski J., *Jak UFO*, *Przegląd Techniczny* 1979, Nr 14.

⁴² Archiwum Państwowe w Toruniu (further cit.: APT), Fabryka Akcesoriów Meblowych w Chełmnie, ref. no. 250, „Analiza gospodarcza”.

buyers will not make complaints”⁴³. Those examples prove that the result of labour embodied in a high quality of products was of no importance to the producer. The producer was evaluated on the basis of the number of products manufactured in a scheduled time. In that way, the process of production became an end in itself, a kind of “art for art’s sake”.

Justification for the purpose and meaning of labour in a state-owned enterprise was difficult in the case of a complete detachment of whole product ranges from the social needs and expectations. Such a scenario was implemented in for example. “Eltra” Radio Plants in Bydgoszcz. The employees, as potential buyers of the products of their plant, absolutely knew that in the early 1970s they produced radios that were structurally obsolete. Already at that time, customers expected radios with three or even four wavelengths; whereas they only manufactured products with two wavelengths. The management justified abiding by this product range with the fact that the crew mastered the production and was reluctant to alter the range. In fact, the problem was more complex. A conflict of interests, specific for that time, was integrated into the system of socialist economy: a new range of products means more careful work which slows down the production process and impedes the accomplishment of the quantitative production plan. A shortage of essential components was a frequent threat to maintain the production in progress. As a result of the interplay of those situations, it was often decided to manufacture goods with the use of the substitutes which were currently available. Departure from the rule of classification of the product was not considered deceitful towards the customer. The producer assumed that in the event of a failure of the product, the guarantee service will remove structural defects and then the product will comply with the technical description⁴⁴.

The examples above are an illustration of the daily performance of labour in state-owned enterprises where, due to an accumulation of adverse phenomena typical of a shortage economy, a specific flexibility of workers was created. It was “a flexible response [of the workers] to the inflexible situation”⁴⁵. As a result of everyday work, employees gained a specific type of practical knowledge called *metis*. *Metis* is “knowledge combined with a number of practical skills acquired as a result of reacting to the constantly changing environment. In the socialist shortage economy, the

⁴³ IPN Bydgoszcz, ref. no. IPN By 044/879 „Folia”, Notatki służbowe.

⁴⁴ Kamosiński Sławomir, *Mikroekonomiczna analiza przemysłu...*, p. 203-204.

⁴⁵ Dunn Elizabeth, *Prywatyzując Polskę...*, p. 107.

quantity and quality of resources was changeable, and this required from employees a well-developed *metis* and relative autonomy in practising it"⁴⁶. It is also noted that it was valuable knowledge which allowed [an employee] to maintain the production process, yet no one measured nor evaluated it. In the officially presented public sphere, the so-called *metis* knowledge did not exist.

The fact that *metis* knowledge was not rewarded with higher wages intensified the feeling that work is unpleasant and unsatisfying. That point was only a step away from committing abuses at work. This phenomenon was widespread. What is more, such abuses at work were called life resourcefulness, and there were those elements of an individual's life in a workplace which were the real sources of job satisfaction. It is proven in a fragment of information from June 1979: "It is not me who judges other people's work, organization of labour and all the methods used by the management. In the opinion of many, there prevails incompetence, back scratching, interdependence and chaos. Three quarters of people make a living from other jobs – during their working hours in the plant. A lot of them do nothing. Everyone connives at the misdeeds of the others. From time to time they make an assault on work discipline and other trifles. As if the time when you come to work was more important than what you do the whole day. Some managers depend on the employees or turn a blind eye for other reasons"⁴⁷. A system of informal relations between employees was called a system of connections and dependencies which was born in the process of performing the so-called double job. This was a job for the state-owned enterprise and private business, which was constructed in every enterprise as a network of mutual services by employees to employees. On the one hand, it helped to derive individual satisfaction from a job performed "on the side", but on the other hand, it was a demoralizing factor. Elisabeth Dunn commented on this aspect in the following way: "Another example was a system of connections in a workplace which allowed a person to carry out various things for private use. Good relations between the employees of Alima and the guards at gates, which enabled people to smuggle products, raw materials and even objects which were made for private use by the employees in their working hours and with the use of the plant's materials"⁴⁸. Then, services for third parties were

⁴⁶Ibidem, p. 132.

⁴⁷IPN Bydgoszcz, ref. no. IPN By 044/986, „Polietylen”.

⁴⁸Dunn Elisabeth, *Prywatyzując Polskę...*, p. 143

performed with the use of the stolen materials, scarce goods were sold or a rule of exchange was applied: a radio for a washing machine, etc. This attitude was named by Winicjusz Narojek as "little individualism" which, in his opinion, was based on "the maximum use of a manoeuvre which is provided by a system relying on collectivist principles to achieve personal goals"⁴⁹.

The picture presenting daily realisation of labour in socialist enterprises differed considerably from the expectations of authorities of the People's Poland's. There were efforts to change this culture with the use of persistent propaganda. For this purpose, the authorities "staged" a number of rituals connected with work: competition at work, a struggle to execute a plan, crews assuming an obligation to supply an additional output with the aim to mark another congress of the Communist Party or to exceed production plans to celebrate national holidays, for example on 22nd July. In the press of that day, the picture of community actions was presented in the following way: "A worker next to a manager, a student at the side of a professor, a ward maid with a hospital manager. Those few hours of collective work were their duty to the party".

In the 1970s the authorities imposed a propagandist vision of success and good work, e.g. the construction site of "Katowice" steelworks. A book-reportage "A Pole can do it"⁵⁰ describing the progress of the construction of the steelwork and the main characters or heroes of the construction: builders and engineers were examples of the propaganda, similarly to programmes broadcast every Monday on Polish Radio with a significant title "Katowice Steelwork is speaking" In the propaganda battle which distorted reality, a point was made of reaching for slogans which decorated factory halls and public buildings: "In our united work more depends on you than you can think of", "The future created today will be our present", "For Poland to grow in strength and for people to live prosperously", and so forth. The rituals performed by employees of enterprises on the occasion of assuming other production obligations were not, at least in most cases, acts which resulted from personal conviction. They were lined with a large dose of deception, irony and hypocrisy. "Role-playing socialism" was a play commonly staged⁵¹.

⁴⁹ Marody Mirosława, Lewicki Mikołaj, *Przemiany ideologii pracy...*, p. 107

⁵⁰ Strumff Tadeusz, *Polak potrafi*, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1977.

⁵¹ Dunn Elizabeth, *Prywatyzując Polskę...*, p. 197.

The constant emphasis of the role which a factory played in the society was to serve the purpose of creating a myth related to the cult of industrialization and the significance of industrialization as the sole source of mankind's progress. It was to be seen not only as a place where thousands of employees performed labour daily, but, above all, it was a "cathedral of the new age"⁵². "Elana" Artificial Fibres Plants in Torun were described as: "resembling sports facilities or exhibition halls full of light and air more than future manufacturing premises". Further the text suggested: "The technical design of some of the interiors is particularly interesting – the soaring features of the ceiling resemble a church nave"⁵³. The production halls of Telkom-Telfa Telecommunication Equipment Production Plant in Bydgoszcz were supposed to make a similar impression on its employees: "The hall of the mechanical department really makes an impression. Its size, spaciousness, large glazings, a modern design of current, water and air supply routes, the bright colour of the walls and the pastel colours of the machines and appliances different for each section, a breakfast area nicely separated with plant pots on racks, stands with plants, fern and ivy which decorate various nooks of the hall and surprising, for the number of automatic machines, injection moulding machines and a turnery working here, silence [...]"⁵⁴. The fragments of descriptions of production halls quoted above convey the intention to impart a sense of dignity to a factory. They were to emphasize optimism and faith in industry being the fundamental causative mechanism of reconstruction of social relations and a consolidation of changes which had taken place in the society.

The conditions of labour performance which were created in People's Poland led to an erosion of human capital and creative activity of those people. Due to the central management of production, wages and labour standards, creativity and an individual's involvement in work for the state employer were rare features. Remunerative egalitarianism was a motivation to look for jobs which did not require individual effort and responsibility. As a consequence, it led to a decline in work ethics. The so-called illegal work, "individual entrepreneurship" was the other face of labour. It was often performed during working hours in a state-owned enterprise.

⁵²Szymanski Władysław, *Globalizacja. Wyzwania i zagrożenia*, Difin, Warsaw 2001, p. 36

⁵³Bocheński Aleksander, *Wędrówki po dziejach przemysłu polskiego 1945 – 1970*, PHILED, Kraków 1997, p. 378.

⁵⁴Jaškowiak J., *W pełnym ruchu*, Kalendarz Bydgoski 1977, Bydgoszcz 1977, p. 37-38.

The ability to combine “a regular job” with “an individual job” was a fundamental indicator for assessing the value of an individual for the majority of the society. One of the most highly valued skills of employees was the ability to adapt flexibly to the conditions they found themselves in which could not be changed but could be used to reap benefits for themselves and their families.

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