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Work and Social Justice*

Abstract: In advanced societies, the sphere of work is subject to far-reaching changes which erode the system of gainful employment achieved in the second half of the last century, called 'typical work', i.e. full-time employment for an indefinite period with collectively negotiated wages and working conditions. This development has lead to a proliferation of various kinds of 'atypical work', most of which amount to poorly rewarded and insecure jobs with bad labour standards, and it has also weakened the traditional systems of social security. As a result, most advanced societies have experienced a significant increase in social inequality and poverty in recent decades, even though their overall social wealth has constantly grown, a state of affairs which may be deemed to be not merely undesirable, but also unjust. This judgment, however, presupposes a particular conception of social justice that submits the economic order and the working world to certain normative demands. The paper aims to illuminate these demands by proceeding in three steps. First of all, it starts with recapitulating the conditions of the rise of typical work and the features of its decay. Secondly, it seeks to sketch a conception of social justice and its requirements on the working world, on the basis of which the present situation may be considered as unjust. Finally, it will deal with the question of how to reform the present working world in a way that, as far as possible, meets the requirements of justice.

0. Introduction

At present, the sphere of work in advanced societies is subject to far-reaching changes which deeply affect people's way of life. These changes manifest themselves in the persistence of a high rate of unemployment, a decreasing continuity of professional careers, a rapid growth of part-time jobs, an increase of actual working hours for full-time workers, a rising work pressure in most professions and a loss of bargaining power for workers. All these facts are undermining the arrangement of gainful employment which has been achieved in the second half of the last century, namely the arrangement of 'typical work', meaning full-time

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employment for an indefinite period with collectively negotiated wages and working conditions that guarantee the worker a decent income and a sufficient level of social security. The progressive erosion of typical work has lead to a proliferation of various kinds of 'atypical work', most of which consists of poorly rewarded and insecure jobs with bad working conditions, and it has also weakened the traditional systems of social security, especially those based on a national insurance financed through compulsory levies from wages. As a result, most advanced societies have experienced a significant increase in social inequality and poverty in recent decades, even though their overall social wealth has constantly grown. Many people deem this state of affairs not merely undesirable, but also unjust, and I think they are right.

This assessment, however, presupposes a particular conception of social justice that submits the economic order in general and the working world in particular to certain normative demands. In order to illuminate these demands, I will proceed in three steps. First of all, I am going to recap the conditions of the rise of typical work and the features of its present crisis. Secondly, I will present a conception of social justice and point out its requirements on the working world of a market economy. Finally, I will deal with the question of how to reform the present working world according to the requirements of social justice.

1. The Rise and Decline of Typical Work

1.1 The Emergence of Typical Work

In the course of history, the social organisation of the working world has been subject to constant change and taken manifold forms. A major type, which developed hand in hand with the spreading of markets and eventually became common in modern societies, is employed work based on voluntary contracts between employers and workers. In many cases, the parties were not entirely free to determine the terms of employment, such as salaries, working hours and working conditions, but constrained by legal rules, such as guild orders or labour laws. In general, however, workers were almost always in a much weaker position than employers. At any rate, the situation of workers became particularly miserable in the 19th century in the course of industrialisation. Their misery resulted from a number of causes which I would like to recount briefly, since they cast some light on the present situation (cf. Dobb 1963; Landes 1968; Van der Ven 1972; Kocka 1983).

The rise of *industrial capitalism* came about through a fast growth of industrial production and rapidly increasing trade, while traditional subsistence farming, workshop production and small-scale trade were rapidly shrinking. This process was accompanied by wide-ranging changes of the whole economy, including the property situation and the working world: The small units of economic cooperation in farming and trade were successively superseded by larger enterprises, and the rigidly regulated forms of communal work were progressively replaced by employer-worker relationships based on *free labour contracts*. In consequence, gainful employment became for most people the only basis of their livelihood

and participation in social life. At the same time, there was an enormous rise in population because of decreasing death rates that lead to a doubling of Europe's population in the course of a century. Most states not only reduced the received privileges of traditional professions through a gradual transition to freedom of trade, but also denied the rapidly growing number of manual workers any protection. Since these workers, whose only way of earning a living was to sell their labour, were also excluded from political participation and even prevented from uniting to form collective associations in order to pursue their economic interests, they were forced to accept any possible opportunities to work, however bad their payment and working conditions.

The result was an extremely suppressive and exploitative working life: miserable wages, hard work up to 80 hours per week (which was also usual for children, ill and elderly people), dangerous and unhealthy working conditions, no paid holiday, no provision for accidents at work, illness and invalidity, no unemployment benefits. All this involved many further hardships for workers, such as insufficient nourishment, miserable housing conditions and a lack of educational and professional opportunities for their children. So the majority of workers were exposed to gross impoverishment, whereas the propertied classes could constantly increase their wealth. Since this situation not only caused growing social protest of workers, but was also widely deemed to be unbearable on the part of well-off groups, it became a pivotal issue of political debate in the decades around 1900, i.e. the 'Social Question'. This debate, in which the notion of *social justice* in its modern, distributive sense gained increasing dissemination, gave rise to growing criticism of laissez-faire capitalism and the call for its change, reaching from radical socialist positions to more or less moderate proposals of reform. And as the workers were successively able to form a growing labour movement through uniting in collective associations, such as trade unions and political parties, they actually succeeded in achieving better wages and working conditions, democratic participation and social recognition step by step (see Thompson 1980; Hofmann 1974; Abendroth 1975).

In the course of the 20th century, the situation of workers improved progressively due to a number of interlinked processes two of which were of particular importance: the shift of social power and the rise of the welfare state. The *shift of social power* ensued from the democratisation of the political system on the one hand and the collectivisation of the industrial dispute on the other. The democratisation of the political system, which eventually resulted in universal suffrage, brought legal and political equality which enabled the workers' parties to gain influence over the legislative decision making process. And the collectivisation of the industrial dispute, which was based on the permission of trade unions and the legal recognition of collective agreements among the associations of employers and workers, amounted to a significant strengthening of the position of workers in employer-worker relationships (see Marshall 1981; Van der Ven 1972; Nutzinger 1998). Closely connected with this shift of social power is the second process, the *rise of the welfare state* which improved the situation of disadvantaged classes through a great variety of measures, including the following: first of all, the legal regulation of employer-worker relationships aiming at the

protection of employees, such as, for instance, the prohibition of child labour, the restriction of working times, the liability of employers for industrial accidents, the maintenance of industrial health and safety standards, the right to paid holiday and so on; furthermore, the successive extension of the systems of social security, particularly social transfer payments in cases of sickness, old age and unemployment; moreover, the provision of public utilities to the particular benefit of lower classes, such as schools and educational institutions, hospitals, public transport and the like; and, last but not least, an interventionist economic policy aiming at economic growth and full employment (see Esping-Andersen 1990; Ritter 1991; Lessenich/Ostner 1998).

Both processes, the shift of social power and the rise of the welfare state, brought about a far-reaching transformation of the working world to the effect that, in the second half of the 20th century, the common arrangement of employment took the form of a full-time job for an indefinite time-period with collectively negotiated wages and working conditions that guaranteed a decent income and sufficient social security, or in short, *typical work*. This arrangement of work, which emerged from long-lasting social struggles, was certainly a great social achievement, at least under the fortunate condition of approximate full employment that was reached in most developed countries for several decades in the second half of the last century. For, typical work, together with its connected social and welfare rights, not only provided most working people an unprecedented level of income, labour standards and social security, but also contributed to a more or less equitable social distribution of the benefits of economic growth. At any rate, social and economic inequalities were slowly decreasing rather than growing in those decades (cf. Alber 2001). Unfortunately, however, in recent time typical work has undergone a severe crisis which may even get worse in the future.

1.2 The Present Crisis of Typical Work

At the current point in time, the working world of advanced societies is again in a phase of rapid change which is increasingly undermining the arrangement of typical work and causing significant social conflicts and problems. I just want to sketch the symptoms, causes and social consequences of this change briefly.

The crisis of normal work particularly manifests itself in two facts which reflect fundamental structural changes of the working world: a persistently high rate of unemployment on the one hand and the enormous proliferation of so-called 'atypical jobs' on the other hand. As for *unemployment*, I just want to mention the fact that, in the European Union, it affects about a tenth of people capable to work. About half of them are long-term unemployed, particularly people with minor educational and professional qualifications, elderly people and women. The most severe problem, however, is the increasing rate of youth unemployment, which indicates that a growing number of youngsters are permanently excluded from beneficial economic cooperation and social participation (cf. Friedrich/Wiedemeyer 1998, 34ff.). Furthermore, in the past three decades, there has been a rapidly growing proliferation of *atypical jobs*, such as part-time

work, casual work, temporary agency work, economically dependent work, fixed-term work, seasonal work and undeclared work. All these forms of atypical work have one thing in common: that their standards of employment, including wages, working conditions and social security, are significantly worse than in the case of typical work (cf. Offe 1984; Lessenich/Ostner 1998; Kocka/Offe 2000).

Although exact information about the extent of atypical jobs is hardly available, experts assume that, at the time being, their overall proportion already amounts to a third of all employment. Even though a proportion of these jobs may suit the interests of the employees, such as some sorts of part-time jobs for women with children, most of them, probably at least two thirds, have a precarious character in the sense that they are badly paid, linked with miserable working conditions and provide poor social benefits, like pensions, unemployment payments and medical coverage. So a large proportion of people who have such atypical employment belong to the group of the 'working poor'. And it should be noted that a large majority of precarious workers are women. All the facts available indicate that the traditional type of typical work or standard employment has already shrunk to about two thirds of all employment, and it is highly probable that they will shrink even more in future (see Schmid 2000; Fink 2003; Lorenz/Schneider 2007).

The ongoing change of the working world is obviously the result of a variety of causes which cannot easily be summarized. For the sake of brevity, I want to point out the most important causes with the help of the following keywords: rationalisation, feminisation, tertiarisation, globalisation, and flexibilisation (see Offe 1984; Bosch 1998; Bonß 2000; Kocka/Offe 2000; Rifkin 2004).

Rationalisation means that the economy presently undergoes a fast increase in productivity of labour resulting from technical innovations, such as information technology and microelectronics. This process leads to a significant decrease in the demand for labour, particularly in the sector of industry, but also in some areas of the service sector (cf. Rifkin 2004, 109ff.). The notion of *feminisation* refers to the influx of new groups of people, particularly women, to the labour market. This influx, which, in most rich countries, has been highly increased by immigrants, has created a constantly growing demand for jobs which the labour market has not been able to satisfy, even though the absolute number of jobs has actually risen rather than decreased in almost all developed societies (Rubery 1998). The concept of *tertiarisation* denotes the ongoing growth of the tertiary sector of economy, i.e. the service sector, in proportion to agriculture and industry, the primary and secondary sectors. At the moment, in most developed societies, the service sector already amounts to 70%. A great proportion of jobs in the service sector are expected to adapt quickly to changing order situations and to be employed according to demand, like the jobs in just-in-time-businesses. Since many of these jobs are relatively simple and characterized by low productivity, there is a growing demand for a flexible and cheap work force (Heinze/Streeck 2000).

Globalisation is a highly complex process with many facets, one of which is of interest here: this is the enormous growth of international trade which is presently taking place due to the liberalisation of global markets. This process

has lead to an ongoing relocation of jobs to regions with lower wage costs, and also induced a process of social and tax dumping which has not only forced individual countries to reduce their social standards, but also diminished their financial means for social benefits (Beck 1997; Döring 1999; Kirchgässner 2006). In addition, there is the *flexibilisation* of labour markets, namely the deregulation of employment and working standards, which is usually justified by the need for maintaining the competitiveness of the national economy. This process generally leads to a progressive replacement of typical work through atypical jobs, but also to a successive deterioration of the labour standards of typical work places (Lehndorff 1998; Auer 2004; Kronauer/Linne 2005).

All these processes, which reinforce each other, amount to a far-reaching structural change of the working world which undermines the received arrangement of typical work. This change creates a variety of social problems and reasons for discontent, such as the growing insufficiency of social security systems, an increase in social exclusion and poverty, and rising socio-economic inequalities (see Schmidt 1999; Rosenberger/Talos 2003; Marterbauer 2007).

The *growing insufficiencies of social security systems* become obvious in view of two simple facts. First of all, there are more and more people who fall out of the traditional systems, because most atypical workers lack sufficient protection through appropriate working standards and social benefits. Secondly, the persistently high rate of unemployment undermines the financial basis of existing systems of social security which are faced with growing claims, while their revenues are diminishing (Döring 1999; Zinn 1999; Butterwegge 2005). Moreover, the high unemployment rate and the proliferation of precarious jobs unavoidably lead to an *increase of social exclusion and poverty*, since a large number of the people concerned are left in a situation of permanent deprivation and need, a situation which also affects their descendants. As a matter of fact, poverty, including absolute poverty, has significantly grown in most rich countries during the past few decades (Huster 1996; Adamy/Steffen 1998; Zilian 2004).

A further consequence is *rising socio-economic inequalities*, which not only include differentials in income and property, but also unequal social opportunities depending on education, professional training, access to social networks and so on. Interestingly, there is little information about the true extent of these inequalities, apart from the official statistics on income differentials based on the data related to income tax payments, which are not really representative, since they reveal nothing more than the tip of the iceberg. However, even these meagre statistics indicate clearly that, in almost all rich countries, the income differentials have constantly grown in recent decades. And since there are good reasons to assume that the inequalities in the distribution of wealth have increased to a much higher extent, one may conclude that our societies are on the way to progressive social polarisation which reminds one of the class structure of the 19th century (Bosch 1998, 217ff.; Rifkin 2004, 165ff.; Marterbauer 2007, 91ff.).

If one considers the social problems just mentioned in the light of the fact that the overall social net product of our societies has successively grown rather than decreased, then it will be hard to refrain from making the judgment that these problems represent blatant injustices. This judgement, however, presupposes an

idea of social justice, providing us with some normative standards or principles that tell us how a just economy and its working world ought to be arranged. This leads me to the question of the demands on a just economic order in general and on working life in particular.

2. Social Justice and the Sphere of Work

2.1 Social Justice and Economic Order

Every societal order is subject to a number of normative demands, which it must meet at least to a certain extent in order to be legitimate. These demands, most of which are more or less contested, can be divided into three general sorts: demands of efficiency, demands for the common good and demands of morality and justice. In the present context, I will only focus on the demands of justice, which apply to modern societies in general and their economic order in particular, demands which are usually addressed as those of *social justice* (see Koller 2001).

It is not the place here to give a full account of social justice, let alone to elaborate on its justification (see Koller 2003). Instead, I want to rely on the predominant conception of social justice which, in Western societies, has emerged in modern age and, at this point in time, seems to have found widespread acceptance in most developed countries, even though it has been subject to considerable disagreements with regard to specific details. The core of this conception includes the following fundamental principles, which, in general, are not only widely acknowledged, but also reasonably justified: (1) legal equality, (2) civil liberty, (3) equal political participation, (4) equality of opportunity and (5) economic equity. Regardless of the fact that all these principles are interconnected and form a unity, I will restrict myself to the last two principles, because they are the most essential standards for evaluating an economic system and its working world from the viewpoint of justice (cf. Koller 2006).

Equality of opportunity demands that social positions—namely social functions, professions and roles connected with greater or lesser income, reputation, influence and power—are equally open to all members of society so that everybody with equal qualifications has equal prospect of achieving any desired position. This principle admits that inequalities in social position may be justifiable for certain reasons, such as the provision of incentives or the respect for individual freedom, but it subjects such inequalities to the condition that the various positions are filled in a fair way according to people's merits, achievements or qualifications irrespective of their accidental social background. This condition implies three requirements: first, that no member of society is legally excluded from any social position; secondly, that widely desired social positions are assigned through fair procedures in which the best applicants or competitors succeed; and, thirdly, that all individuals of a society's younger generation are provided with an appropriate basic stock of human skills and material assets that enable them to active participation in economic cooperation and social life

according to their talents and ambitions (see Rawls 1971, 83ff.; Roemer 1998; Barry 2005, 37ff.).

Although these requirements are admittedly pretty vague and open to various interpretations, they clearly exclude certain positional inequalities as inadmissible. As to the second requirement, it seems plausible that, if social positions are assigned through the market process, this process, in order to operate in a fair way, must not be distorted by gross inequalities of social power that enable stronger parties to take advantage of the weak through urging them to contractual agreements that would not be possible under fair conditions (Koller 2008). And it appears also quite clear that the third requirement implies the right of all young members of society to a solid education and professional training that provides them with appropriate capabilities for their participation in economic cooperation and social life. If my previous description of present social changes in wealthy societies is by and large correct, then it becomes obvious that these societies are developing in a direction which brings them into increasing conflict with social justice, as far as its demand for equal opportunity is concerned (cf. Barry 2005, 169ff.).

Undoubtedly, the most contested issue of social justice is the demand of *economic equity*. While libertarians believe that this demand is automatically met by a free market economy under fair framing conditions irrespective of its distributive outcomes, social democrats think that it submits economic inequalities to more demanding constraints. Therefore, I would like to phrase the principle of economic equity for a first approximation in a very general and weak way that it is compatible with a great variety of particular positions. Accordingly, economic inequalities are acceptable, if they are a necessary feature of an efficient economic order that, in the long run, is to the benefit of all members of society, which appears to be the case, if these inequalities are requisite to provide sufficient incentives for stimulating generally desirable contributions and achievements, if they unavoidably emerge from a market economy based on private property that fosters a generally beneficial allocation of resources and economic competition, or if they result from a generally advantageous practice of supporting people in need (cf. Rawls 1971, 60ff.).

This formulation, which should be acceptable both to leftists and reasonable right-wing libertarians, is, despite its vagueness, not completely devoid of meaning. At any rate, it makes clear that economic inequalities are subject to certain constraints that reflect the common interest of all members of society. Perhaps, the following consideration proposed by Rawls, which I find highly plausible, may help to specify these constraints a bit more: If we assume that economic inequalities must be justified with reference to their general utility against the background of an equal or less unequal distribution of economic assets, then they appear justifiable only to the extent in which they go hand in hand with an increase of societal welfare which is not only to the benefit of the upper, well-off classes, but also improves the situation of the worse-off members. Consequently, a social constellation where the still growing societal wealth is only benefiting a small number of well-off members of society, while a large proportion of working people have considerable losses, is clearly unjust (cf. Koller 2006).

The principles of social justice mentioned set some limits for a just economic order rather than define its institutional structure. In principle, they admit a variety of economic systems which may take the form of a socialist or a market economy. However, as we have every reason to believe that any form of a centralised socialist economy is doomed to failure, and plausible models of market socialism are not in sight, there is actually no feasible alternative but a market economy based on private property. Yet, a capitalist market system with unconstrained and heritable private property rights is also unacceptable, because both empirical evidence and economic theory show that such a system has an inherent tendency to lead to gross social inequalities which are blatantly unjust in the light of the predominant conception of social justice (see Frank/Cook 1995; Barry 2005). So the only reasonable option appears to be a well-ordered *market economy combined with a welfare state* which aims to satisfy the demands of equal opportunity and economic equity at least to a certain degree (cf. Polanyi 1957; Hindess 1987).

2.2 Requirements of a Just Working System

In the course of the development of a modern market economy, professional work has become the most important basis for most people's economic well-being, social integration and personal self-development (see Jahoda 1982; Zilian 1999). And, as far as I see, there are no reasons to assume that this will change in the near future. Consequently, professional work which enables people to earn their living, to engage in social cooperation and to ascertain their capabilities is still a most important, fundamental social good, which in view of its increasing scarcity ought to be distributed and arranged according to the demands of social justice. This implies, I think, two demands on a societal working system as to its labour markets and employer-worker relationships: on the one hand, the demand for a just distribution of work and, on the other hand, the demand for fair employer-worker relationships.

The *demand for a just distribution of work* results from the principles of equal opportunity and economic equity, which together imply a *right to work* in the sense of a moral claim of all members of society to a salaried occupation which provides them with a sufficient basis for their livelihood, enables them to participate in social, political and cultural life, and gives them the opportunity for individual self-development too. Surely, this demand cannot easily be met in a market economy, whose dynamics cause not only a permanent tendency to frictional unemployment in the process of entrepreneurial competition, but also the threat of more severe forms of structural unemployment in the course of business cycles and in cases of severe crises (cf. Rothschild 1988). So a market order needs appropriate second best measures in order to satisfy everybody's claim to work as far as possible (cf. Elster 1988). To this end, it requires two institutional arrangements, apart from a well-endowed public education system that ensures an equal opportunity to participate in economic cooperation: first, a well-tuned labour market policy that gives top priority to the task of full employment; and,

secondly, a suitable social security system that provides equitable compensation to those who fall victim to unemployment.

A *well-tuned labour-market policy* certainly requires much more than measures that are directed at stimulating economic growth; rather, it must make use of all feasible devices that may contribute to the greatest possible extent of employment, including appropriate framing conditions of the labour market that may increase the number of jobs or reduce the overall offer of work force, such as the limitation of working hours, the restriction of multiple incomes, the prohibition of unpaid regular work, etc. Since not even the most effective labour market policy will always succeed in providing acceptable jobs to all people who are able and willing to work, these individuals have a claim to *equitable compensation*, because their right to work is violated through the fact that they cannot get an acceptable job.

This requirement, however, creates a number of problems. A fundamental problem concerns the appropriate size of that compensation for unemployed individuals who actually want to work, but do not find a job suitable to their qualification and ambition. Although it may appear plausible at first glance that they should get an equivalent of the usual salary for a job under consideration in order to be awarded full compensation for their loss, this is obviously not feasible, because, in this case, they would have little incentive to accept a job with a salary equal or below the compensation. This suggests that the compensation for involuntary unemployment, in general, must be less than the average salary for the respective kind of work. Since, on the other hand, such compensation is due only to people who are actually willing to work and, thereby, participate in the production of societal wealth, it would certainly not be fair to reduce it to the minimum level of social support that a just society ought to render to its members who, for whatever reasons, do not gain a sufficient income through which they could make their living. So the compensation for involuntary unemployment should be significantly higher than the social minimum (cf. White 2003).

This result, however, raises the question of how to distinguish individuals who are unemployed through no fault of their own from those who prefer not to work or miss the required qualifications for a job that suits their wishes. Although such differentiation may be possible in some particular cases in full knowledge of the situation of the individuals under consideration, it seems to be hardly feasible as a general practice. In order to carry out the differentiation in a proper way, it would require extensive investigations into the traits, prospects and opportunities of the individuals concerned, which would not only be very expensive, but also highly degrading. Furthermore, any procedure to make such differentiation would confront the general problem that, in many cases, it would still remain difficult to decide whether individuals are unemployed through no fault of their own or because they are not willing to work. This dilemma calls for a second best solution, which could take the form of a *basic income* whose size had to be fixed somewhat below the level of an average compensation for involuntary unemployment so that it will give unemployed people who are willing

and able to work sufficient incentive to take a job in order to supplement the basic income with a gained wage from more or less regular work.

The *demand for fair employer-worker relationships*, which also follows from the principle of economic equity, entails that every employee has a moral *right to appropriate terms of employment*, such as wages, working conditions, working hours, health and safety standards and work related social benefits. This right certainly admits considerable differentials between employers and employees as well as between workers in different jobs, if these differentials appear to be based on acceptable reasons, such as the relative skills and achievements of individual employees. Yet, whatever differentials in incomes and working conditions may appear justified, it is certainly not defensible that, when a society's net product constantly grows, the increasing wealth only benefits a small group of rich and well-off, while the situation of the majority of employed workers gets successively worse, as it happened in the 19th century and is again happening at the moment. In order to counteract such injustices, the societal order ought to provide an equitable arrangement of employer-worker relationships, which do not emerge from the market itself, but must be guaranteed through the means of *labour law*. In addition to a system of basic welfare provision that protects everybody against poverty and exploitation, such an arrangement requires two sorts of regulatory devices: first, a set of binding *regulations for the protection of workers* that guarantee sufficient standards as to wages and working conditions, such as working hours, industrial health and safety, paid holiday and the like; and, secondly, a *collective bargaining procedure* that equalises the actual power differentials between individual employers and workers by negotiations among enterprises and their associations on the one hand and workers' organisations on the other.

So much for the requirements on a just working system, which, however, cannot easily be met in a rapidly changing market economy. Since a state government itself cannot provide any jobs, apart from within the public sector, its only means of pursuing a labour market policy guided by social justice is to influence the market process through appropriate framing conditions in a way that leads this process to acceptable results. But this endeavour is subject to significant impediments which result from the general dynamics of labour markets on the one hand and from particular constellations of the market process on the other.

In contrast to normal product markets, labour markets, in general, are characterised by two dilemmas of collective action which make it difficult to achieve a market equilibrium close to full employment (cf. Rothschild 1988, 118ff.). For the sake of brevity, they may be called the 'inflation dilemma' on the one hand and the 'deflation dilemma' on the other (see Vobruba 2000, 33ff.). The *inflation dilemma*, a progressive proliferation of labour in consequence of its surplus, results from the fact that a decreasing demand for labour (or a decreasing supply of jobs) usually leads to an increasing supply of labour rather than to its decrease, because growing unemployment forces people who are in search of work to accept harder work for lower wages in order to earn their livelihood. This effect may be reinforced by the *deflation dilemma*, a shrinking demand for labour

in consequence of lower incomes, because a decrease in wages, although it may improve the productivity of individual firms by reducing their production costs, tends to lead to diminished consumption on the part of workers which itself may cause a decrease in turnover and, thereby, a reduction of employment (cf. Holler 1986, 23ff.). Even though these dilemmas create significant obstacles to an effective regulation of labour markets, they in fact strengthen the need for such regulation, since otherwise these markets would lead to completely disastrous social consequences (cf. Rothschild 1990, 89ff., 133ff.).

Furthermore, there are particular constellations of economic development which make an effective regulation of labour markets even more difficult. A typical case is an expansion of markets which brings unequally developed regions with large differences in incomes and labour standards into competition. Since this constellation creates an increasing cost pressure on the enterprises involved, it may induce a dumping process as to wages and cost-sensitive labour standards through which the situation of workers in the more developed regions worsens. This may occur even in the case when the opening of markets contributes to economic growth in all regions involved, including the more developed regions, because their enterprises will be able to increase their profits at the cost of their workers, with the result that economic inequalities will grow (see Rösner 1996; Kirchgässner 2006). It is pretty obvious that a constellation of this type has emerged from the recent wave of *economic globalisation* with its rapidly progressing extension of international markets. This leads me to the question of the future prospects of the working world.

3. Future Prospects of the World of Work

3.1 Conceptions of a Future Arrangement of Work

In order to simplify the highly complex issue under discussion, I would like to distinguish between three possible conceptions of the future working world which, however, are to be understood as greatly stylised ideal types: a market-liberal, a market-alternative and a market-regulative conception.

The *market-liberal conception*, which, in essence, is the view of economic liberalism in general and its recent wave, 'neoliberalism', in particular, relies on free and open global markets (which, however, are not thought to include a right to free movement across national borders). This conception is based on the assumption that an unregulated operation of global markets, including national labour markets, will automatically lead to results which are both efficient and just. So free markets will work to the benefit of all nations involved as well as all social groups within each country. Consequently, the market-liberal conception advocates the thesis that a deregulation of markets both within and among nations will foster economic growth everywhere to such an extent that eventually all people who are capable and willing to work will find an appropriate occupation (see Giersch 1994; Siebert 1998; Weizsäcker 1999). I deem this conception greatly defective for a number of reasons, including empirical, theoretical and normative

considerations. For the sake of brevity, I shall restrict myself to briefly pointing out my main objections.

As to the empirical facts, the market-liberal assumption that continued economic growth, induced by an ongoing liberalisation of global markets, would suffice to create further jobs up to the level close to full employment is hardly plausible against the background of economic history in general and the development in recent decades in particular. In the history of modern capitalism, including its most liberal periods, it occurred pretty often that economic growth went hand in hand with lasting high rates of unemployment (cf. Dobb 1963). And in recent times, most advanced countries experienced a sort of development, known as 'jobless growth', where, despite a successive increase of their gross national product, unemployment has constantly increased, even though the absolute number of jobs has grown (see Rösner 1996; Bosch 1998; Friedrich/Wiedemeyer 1998). The reason why the market-liberal view is incapable of covering these empirical facts lies in its defective theoretical approach to labour markets which, by treating these markets like goods markets, widely neglects their peculiar dynamics, such as the dilemmas previously mentioned (cf. Holler 1986, 8ff.; Rothschild 1990, 63ff.; Kuttner 1999, 68ff.).

Eventually, the market-liberal advice to cope with unemployment through an ongoing deregulation and liberalisation of national and global markets is also problematic from a normative viewpoint. In order to reach a significant reduction in the present size of unemployment through nothing more than economic growth, the developed countries would probably need a permanent growth of about 5% per year, which appears not only completely unrealistic, but also indefensible from the viewpoints of ecological sustainability and global justice. Rather, it is much more probable that a further liberalisation of the global economy will undermine the labour markets in developed countries even more, as long as the states refrain from taking counteractive measures. As a result, the market-liberal idea of the self-regulating capacity of free markets is built on sandy ground.

The opposite extreme is the *market-alternative conception*, which manifests in the ideas of the eco-libertarian camp. It seeks to surpass the capitalist economy with its competitive pressure, wasteful consumption and social coldness through a transition to a new social arrangement of human need-satisfaction and value-production which shall free people from alienating work. Although the advocates of this conception are pretty reluctant to describe the concrete features of this arrangement, they seem to agree that it would include a much greater extent of self-sufficient work, reciprocal help and cooperative work on a small scale instead of anonymous, self-interested and competitive commercial relationships. The arguments for this view combine empirical and normative reasons. The main empirical argument is the thesis that a capitalist market economy, as we know it, is ultimately doomed to failure, because the traditional form of professional work is 'running out' in a twofold sense: it will not only actually decrease, but also lose its value within people's lives. If so, it may appear promising to subscribe the normative vision of a much better social world where all people may pursue a self-determined life-plan without being subject to the forces of economic competition and pressure. Accordingly, a well-known slogan of the market-alternative camp

proclaims the transition from the labouring society to an 'activity society' (cf. Guggenberger 1988; Gorz 1994; Kitzmüller 1997).

Although the market-alternative position, particularly its critique of contemporary capitalism, may contain some grains of truth, I find it greatly puzzling, both as to its empirical thesis and its normative vision. To my knowledge, there is actually no empirical evidence for the thesis that our societies are running out of work, whatever that may mean. Admittedly, in advanced societies, there are increasing numbers of people who have become sceptical about the blessings of an unbridled capitalist system and are seeking to rid themselves from its competitive pressure and shallow benefits through searching for more meaningful and authentic ways of life. And it may also be true that the members of those groups who suffer from long-term unemployment or precarious work are growingly inclined to cope with their situation by searching for alternative ways to earn their living through activities beyond the commercial market. But these facts apply to very small parts of the population only and do not provide any indication of a general decay of the market economy and its working world. As a matter of fact, professional work has greatly expanded in past centuries and reached an unprecedented dimension today; and plenty of empirical inquiries show that most people regard a good job of the typical kind as a most important condition for a successful life (cf. Kelvin/Jarrett 1985; Zilian 1999).

Furthermore, the normative vision of an alternative society seems to me not only much too spongy to be a feasible option, but also problematic in its substance, insofar as it has one. Even though it may appear both possible and promising to counteract the ongoing trend to the commercialization of social life through a proliferation of small-scale networks of social activity and cooperation which could deal with people's demands that large-scale markets do not meet, it is hard to imagine how the envisioned activity society could produce sufficient means for the livelihood of its members without relying on an economy that remains engaged in generating social wealth through competitive markets and efficiency-oriented work.

Eventually, there is the *market-regulative conception* which, essentially in line with the ideas of social democracy, aims at a political taming of destructive market processes following previous strategies of market regulation which, however, have to be adjusted to the conditions of the present situation (see Friedrich/Wiedemeyer 1998; Zinn 1999; Held 2004; Rifkin 2004). I am in favour of this conception, as I deem it both empirically feasible and normatively plausible. I want to substantiate this conception a bit more in the concluding section through a rough sketch of a reform policy for a better working world.

3.2 A Reform Policy for a Better World of Work

There is certainly no easy answer for how to cope with the present crisis of the working world described at the beginning. So an effective and acceptable strategy of reform will include a variety of measures which are to be combined in a reasonable way. In my view, any such combination will have to include the following elements: a reduction of labour costs, a sort of basic income, increasing

public subsidies for socially valuable activities, more investments in education and professional training, a renovation of collective labour law and an effective arrangement of international cooperation (see Rifkin 2004; Held 2004; Marterbauer 2007). I would like to briefly comment on these points.

First of all, a *reduction of labour costs*, i.e. the overall costs which employers have to bear for the workforce they employ, would stimulate the product and service markets, because many useful goods and activities which, at the moment, are not sufficiently provided on the market because of their prohibitive costs would become marketable. In this context, I should emphasise that this recommendation is not aiming at a reduction of wages, but rather at a reduction of labour costs by reducing the social welfare contributions that usually must be paid together with wages. In view of the present problems, it appears to be much more prudent to finance social welfare through general taxes than contributions connected to wages. This measure would make less productive work cheaper and, thereby, foster the demand for a low-skilled workforce. To my knowledge, a number of countries, particularly the Scandinavian countries, have already taken steps in this direction with some success (see Heinze/Streeck 2000).

Furthermore, there is a need for *a sort of basic income*, which shall guarantee all members of society a social minimum that provides them with protection against poverty and exploitation. Such a basic income is needed, because the traditional systems of basic social security which usually were dependant on regular work have become ineffective, for they increasingly fail to cover all people and to provide sufficient support. I think an appropriate form of basic income should meet, apart from its financing, at least four conditions: It should (1) guarantee all members of society a decent minimal living income irrespective of their professional work and gained income; (2) not expose people in need to degrading treatment by the administration of social security; (3) give people incentive to work rather than encourage them not to work; and (4) be fair in the way that it favours people who are eager to contribute to economic cooperation. In principle, there are various feasible models of a basic income which all have both advantages and disadvantages. These models include a *need-oriented basic security* which substitutes for a lack of income up to a certain level; a *combi-wage scheme* that supplements too low wages through benefits up to a certain level; a *negative income tax* where those people whose income falls below a certain level get the difference from the tax office; and, last but not least, a *general basic income* which, in principle, is granted to all members of society regardless of their gained income, even though, in practice, it gradually disappears with increasing income because of progressive taxation (see Van Parijs 1995; 2001; Talos 2003; Vanderborght/Van Parijs 2005).

I myself tend to favour the last model, a *general basic income*, because it easily meets the first two conditions and should also be realisable in a way that satisfies the latter two conditions, provided that its size will be fixed in a proper way. On the one hand, it must be high enough to provide people without a sufficient gained wage with a decent living income that should not only protect them against poverty and exploitation, but also compensate the victims of unemployment to a certain degree. So, I think, it should be significantly higher than the

usual size of welfare aid in most advanced societies, which appears to be hardly sufficient for a minimally decent life. On the other hand, it must be lower than an average earnings-related compensation for involuntarily unemployed, because otherwise it would be neither fair to individuals who are actually willing to work in comparison those who are not, nor sustainable, since it would encourage unemployed people to abstain from working and, thereby, increasingly erode the tax revenue for its financing. So a basic income must not exceed the extent to which it can be financed through taxation in the long run, which would be not the case if it were to undermine too many people's willingness to work. But if it is set in a way that leaves the incentive to work intact, it could also be regarded as sufficiently fair towards those who really want to work, because it would enable them to accept less attractive jobs in order to supplement it gradually through a gained income up to the extent of an overall income where it would be absorbed by the income tax. Consequently, such a basic income could also contribute to a reduction of the labour costs of various kinds of work, particularly less qualified work, and, thereby, stimulate the overall demand for labour (cf. Netzwerk Grundeinkommen 2006; Exner et al. 2007).

In addition, an increase of *public subsidies for socially valuable activities* would also promote the demand for a variety of services which presently have no market. What I have in mind are particularly charitable, social and cultural activities by non-profit and civil society associations, such as self-help groups, social initiatives, youth centres and NGOs, whose achievements can be regarded as public goods and, therefore, deserve public support. Surely, there are already plenty of associations of that sort, many of which, however, are endangered through permanent cuts in public subsidies for their work (Beck 2000; Heinze/Streeck 2000; Rifkin 2004, 249ff.).

Moreover, it is widely accepted that our societies ought to increase their *investments in education, professional training and retraining*, in order to achieve two goals: improve their standing amidst international competition, on the one hand, and, on the other, promote equal opportunity, which is even more important in view of rapidly growing social inequalities (see Heinze/Streeck 2000).

Last but not least, there is an urgent need for a *renovation of collective labour law* in order to strengthen the rights and bargaining powers of atypical workers. Such a reform ought to include three sorts of measures: first, a significant improvement of the labour standards for all kinds of atypical employment, particularly those that usually have a precarious character; secondly, a renewed regulation of typical work which particularly has to pursue an effective reduction of a person's working hours (e.g. through shortening working times and prohibiting arbitrary schemes of working hours) and binding minimum wages; and, thirdly, an arrangement of employer-worker relations that empowers workers to collective action by fostering their communication and self-organisation within enterprises, across industries and on an international level (see Blanke 2004; Marterbauer 2007, 49ff.).

It is pretty clear that all the proposals made so far are not neutral to the existing national budgets, since they need more expenditure than states are spending at the time being. Even though this fact certainly makes it difficult

to realise these proposals in practice, it does not shatter them in theory. For, in view of rapidly growing social and economic inequalities, I think it greatly required to take appropriate steps towards a far-reaching *redistribution of social wealth and power* in order to promote social justice. In consideration of the fact that, in the past few decades, our societies have increased their overall wealth to a considerable extent from which only the well-off have derived benefit, while the middle classes have got nothing and the lower classes have even lost out, it appears reasonable to assume that actually plenty of economic resources are at disposal for redistributive measures from the top to bottom. Admittedly, such measures will be possible only if our countries effectively counteract the ongoing process of tax dumping and tax evasion in order to consolidate their financial revenues. This, however, cannot be done by a single country alone, but requires *effective international cooperation*. Incidentally, such cooperation is also requisite for the implementation of most reform policies mentioned before. This is particularly true of minimum standards concerning wages, labour conditions and social benefits, which require international policies in order to break the vicious cycle of international wage and social dumping (Zürn 1998; Walwei 1999; Held 2004).

I admit that some or even most of my proposals for a reform of the present working world may be unrealistic in the sense that, for the time being, they will hardly find sufficient political acceptance in order to have a prospect of becoming actually realised. Yet, I do not deem them unrealistic in the sense that they would not be realisable in principle, if they were to find wide-spread political support. Anyway, it does not appear to be reasonable to adjust a normative conception of a better social world to a miserable state of affairs in social reality.

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