

## **Report on the Conference "The Value of Work"**

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This challenging title was chosen for the international conference held in Oxford this September. The aim of the conference was to discuss within international and interdisciplinary context different aspects of work, its importance for the society, recent changes in understanding and estimation of work. Reporters represented European, Australian, North American Universities, and also institutions basing in India and the Philippines. The scope of involved sciences was very wide: law, philosophy, psychology, sociology.

Between the discussed topics we can distinguish an issue of "real work". Tom Baker, representing the University of Cambridge, made a presentation on the topic "The Contested Meaning of "Real Work". This report has attempted to set out some of the most prominent competing understandings of real work. Real work was opposed to the so-called 'non-jobs'. "Non-jobs" were defined as typically public sector posts which "appear to serve no clear or sensible purpose and are hence deemed a waste of tax-payers' money". Real job in its turn is work that creates some value. Tom Barker concluded that basing on the views of Tressell and historian R. H. Tawney the Real work is a truly "useful" work aimed at the production of the "necessaries of life or the benefits of civilization". The critics of contemporary British economy and the current decline of UK manufacturing as well as a desire of 'rebalancing' of the economy back towards manufacturing was expressed in the end of the presentation.

Another understanding of work was presented by Pritika Nehra from the Department of Humanities & Social Sciences of the Indian Institute of Technology. The speaker analyzed the concept of "Work" in Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* and concluded that the aim of work is to preserve freedom of individuals in a social matrix. According to Hannah Arendt's philosophy it is the process of work that makes work good. If the process and the normative character of mechanical work are unjust then work cannot be considered to have any worth in it. Work as forced labour or compulsory production is antagonistic to work which is wrongly understood in terms of use as opposed to artistic and creative work. In Arendt's understanding of work, ethical commitment, natural and sustainable limits of work, collective deliberation, political and aesthetic dimensions of work are the key elements for judging products of work.

David Webb, Andrew Hill and Kelvin Clayton - philosophers from the Staffordshire University (UK) made presentations on the correlation of values relevant to working environment and those relevant to

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overall human flourishing, or in other words of moral rules and corporate culture. These presentations were conceived as a philosophic response to the situation in the Stafford hospital, where due to substandard care between 400 and 1200 more patients died between 2005 and 2008. Poor care given to the patients was a part of “corporate culture” and in some way employees had to behave in this “substandard” way for not being treated as backslider.

David Webb stated that the casualization of work has had damaging consequences for the values associated with the workplace. “Staff with low job security may show less loyalty to their employer, be less supportive of colleagues, and, in the case of the mentioned hospital, show less concern to patients. A natural response is to introduce tighter procedures of governance. But this may in turn further undermine the ‘culture’ for the loss of which they are intended to compensate. As this process unfolds, a division deepens between management who aim to enforce a culture, and staff who are expected not only to conform to that culture, but to express it” – said David. The author concluded that strict codes of conduct tend to reinforce the division between work and the rest of life, discouraging the expression at work of values that remain strong outside of work and underlines the importance of weakening the division between work and life outside of work that may bring real advantages both to the employee and to the organization for which he or she works.

The problem of crisis influence upon labour market and social security systems in Europe was discussed in the presentation of Carla Valadas from the University of Coimbra, Portugal . The author analyzed current changes within European labour markets such as growing unemployment, precarious work and insecurity and concluded that they are closely inter-related to new trends in welfare states and constitute European challenge. These trends have a political dimension related to stability, order and regarding the development and sustainability of democracy itself. Exploring the works of sociologist Arne Kalleberg and Michel Crozier the author concludes that individual and collective actors (employees and trade-unions) can never be reduced to abstract, disembodied functions and their activity can be a strategic point for overcoming economical and social problems caused by crisis. The author analyzed the peculiarities of crisis effects in southern European countries and criticized severe cuts in welfare provisions. Carla Valadas underlined the necessity of reshaping the European Social Model, that meant a redesign of welfare systems avoiding either retrenching them to its minimums or deregulating labour markets to its maximums.

Another actual problem of work-family balance was discussed in several presentations. Vânia Carvalho from the Faculty of Psychology, University of Lisbon, introduced a new psychological approach to the correlation of work and life: the concept of work-family enrichment. The data received by this researcher from polling 1885 employees showed that is possible to combine different forms of positive and negative relationship between work and family. The author concluded that work-family enrichment

contributes much to the quality of work and depends much on the sensation of engagement of the employee, conviction of importance of fulfilled work.

Dominika Polkowska from the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin, Poland, presented a particular interesting research on work-family balance for male employees. Using the data of Eurostat the author stated that men in Spain, Italy and in Sweden more often than women would like to reduce the number of hours of work for increasing the number of hours allocated on care. Current trend can be seen in increase of the quantity of men using parental leave: though in countries such as Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, the United Kingdom and Norway - women more likely than men have remained in with a baby, in Denmark, Finland and in Sweden there are more men than women on the parental leave (lasting less than 3 months). In Sweden the situation was extraordinary because there were four times more men than women on this leave. The research showed that males have more flexible working opportunities, but women more often use these solutions. Dominika Polkowska concluded that the most important factor, obstructing work-family balance for male workers is the common social understanding of a man as a bread-winner. As a result, most of the men planned and executed his professional career at a very stressful schedule. Thus the identity of the man is built on the basis of his professional career and the family remains on the background.

Estimating the conference I would say that this was a very encouraging and enriching experience that helped me to have a broader view of current Labour law issues.