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TRADE UNIONS AND THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGES ON THE LABOUR MARKET

INTRODUCTION

Scientific and technological progress and the acceleration of economic processes on a global scale asymmetrically affect labour and capital. Capital is inherently more mobile than people who live – apart from economic conditions – also in the network of social relations. Processes of automation, replacing workers by more and more intelligent robots weaken the position of the working class to some extent (though they also offer significant opportunities). Our intention is to sketch a cause and effect sequence of these processes: to describe basic aspects of transformations of the labour market, their impact on trade unions and emerging prospects for change in the trade union movement (the seeds of their return).

In the text we present a few selected and in our opinion important problems currently faced by the trade union movement, and which go beyond the traditional discussion on the role and importance of trade unions in the free market economy (collective labour agreements, tripartite committees, labour code, etc.). Generally speaking, all social relations, which are included in the given management model, are also included in the cultural, political and civilizational context. Relationships, whether customary or institutional, among these spheres of life, are a complex mosaic of interests which – to make things even clearer – undergo constant changes in time and space. In this dynamic process of transformation of labour relations an important role is played today by scientific and technical development (e.g. robotics), the impact of which is global and relatively fast. The changes also affect traditional and labour relations, which influences the perception of professional activity itself.

‘More and more people in the course of their career jump from branch to branch, work according to the model of recurring orders and the autonomous negotiation of rates. The workplace also loses its meaning as the exclusive place of performance of professional duties, due to which there is no chance to create the ties of solidarity and the sense of community of interest which used to cement former union members. All attempts to create supranational union structures, which would be a sufficient counterweight to transnational corporations and employers, encounter great resistance¹. By the way, large multinationals are not necessarily the biggest enemy of trade unions, for example because of strong ties with the political environment, but also because of the similarity (obsolescence) of their own structures. It is worth noting that attempts to create international organisations of employers also fail – various conflicts of interests stand in the way.

The processes of globalisation – cultural, political, social or economic ones – force governments (if any at all are willing and able to deal with this issue) to search for solutions that would reconcile different interests (e.g. more flexible labour relations with the intention to maintain a high level of employment – often at the expense of its quality). Regardless of the decision-making role of politicians, who, however, are not deprived of needs – mechanisation, automation, computerisation, robotics or informationalisation (based on digital integration of various communication channels)²

¹ Woś, R. 2014. *Dziecięca choroba liberalizmu*. [Childhood illness of liberalism.] Warszawa: Studio Emka, p. 254.

² Generally speaking, it is a question of dependence of social relations on information, which is a process that we call informationalisation (See Kryszczuk, M. 2008. *Konceptualizacja i metody pomiaru pracowników sektora informacyjnego*. [Conceptualisation and measurement methods of the information sector employees.] Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie i Profesjonalne). With regard to the theory of stages of communication, the term *informationalisation* may be used as a synonym of the concept of *modernisation* (Cf. Goban-Klas, T. 2002. *Media i komunikowanie masowe*. [Media and mass communication.] Warszawa-Kraków: PWN, pp. 15–17 and 286–289). Castells uses this term when writing about the impact of ICTs on the socio-economic structure (See Castells, M. 2002. *The Internet galaxy*. Oxford University Press, p. 231). To avoid confusion, we can accept the following language conventions. The concept *informationalisation* is within the semantic field of the term *modernisation*. In this sense, *more modernised* society is also *more informationalised*. But the term *informationalisation* is wider than the concept of *computerisation*, because 1) it includes additionally phenomena of social sphere (i.e. a change in education leading to increased competence in information processing); 2) does not determine the type of technology (media and devices) by means of which information is handled. The process of computerisation (digitisation) is therefore one of the stages or factors (variations, elements) of the informationalisa-

have a huge impact on human labour, its organisation and labour relations, which take various forms depending on the economic model, and specific policies of the government. Such a generally outlined scheme, therefore, requires further refinement which needs to include, inter alia, the concept of re-industrialisation, regulations concerning wages and minimum rates, the innovation strategy, interventionist industrial, labour and social policy, and cultural changes: changes in the attitudes, lifestyles and the possibility of commercial emigration. Let us recall the truism that every society has its own specificity which condemns trade union or political activists to caution in the proposed recipes and undertaken actions. The mass media – including the ‘free internet’ play an important, opinion-forming role.

The liberalisation of the labour market postulated by the free market environment (with a rather vague opposition of workers themselves) stems from the belief that earlier this market has been somehow tamed/limited, which is not a typical or desirable phenomenon in the ‘liberal state of nature’, the current emanation of which is the increasingly globalised market of economic exchange. In this approach, you should try to weigh the balance of the influence of the increasing flexibility of the labour market on the level of unemployment, as well as the rationality of employees’ attitudes to ‘temporary contracts’ in the conditions of production ‘just in time’³. The below quotation focuses several problems around which a dispute takes place about the extent of state interference in the economy and the role of trade unions in their efforts to reduce market mechanisms leading, for example, to growing income inequalities: ‘Acemoglu and Robinson openly admit: yes, trade

tion process, as well as a characteristic feature of the ‘Third Wave’ of modernisation (See Cubitt, S. 2001. *Immediate consequences of the process of informationalisation*. Paper given at the Journalism and Regional Media in Europe Conference. September 2001. Volos, Thessaly, Greece.

³ It is often forgotten that the security or stability of work are the result of (or result from) a certain logic of development of capitalism, which when it was industrialising created demand for easily available workforce, gathered in one place and in large numbers. In this phase large workplaces depended on access to workforce, which contributed to the slightly more humanitarian sanctioning of this state – for instance, in the form of various labour codes, which are currently considered standard of civilisation (e.g. working time limits, protection against the loss of health or minimum hourly wage rates). Regardless of whether these regulations should be maintained or not, the changing methods of production and sales – among other factors – cause a change in the demand for workforce, which entails changes in the strategy of doing business (e.g. a general trend to a reduction of costs of human labour or more flexible forms of employment).

unions are a ballast from the economic point of view. If they were not there, companies would achieve better results, and the economy would spin faster. The truth of the economic argument does not alter the fact that excessive weakening of trade unions is a sign of bad policy of the state, because it leads to such negative consequences as economic weakening of the lower and middle class. This increases differences in income, and backfires in the sense of social justice and democracy⁴.

To be realistic, even radical economic liberals (*laissez-faire*) must recognise – though not necessarily accept – the direct (i.e. industrial policy) or indirect (i.e. fiscal policy) impact of the government on the sphere of human labour. Starting from extreme cases in which the authoritarian political system ‘has liquidated unemployment’ through various models of social states and ending with the most free-market economic systems – nowhere will we find the pure ‘free labour’ market which is based on spontaneous (and theoretically the most effective) self-regulation. There are plenty of reasons why the introduction of total economic freedom – understood as the total lack of interference of the government (or another political instance) in the operation of the market – is not possible, and the majority of them have been thoroughly described and explained. Sorting out the comprehensive set of arguments allows for the selection of three main positions on the role of the state in the sphere of work, whose popularity depends on the political situation and economic conditions⁵. We remind you of this because these three positions – 1) the maximum liberalisation of economic activity, its opposite 2) the maximum intervention (now rarely called socialism or communism⁶) and the most commonly occurring 3) intermediate position (between the market and permanent employment⁷) which takes into account both the role

⁴ Woś, R., *op. cit.*, p. 227.

⁵ To put it simply, when the free market (capitalist) economy does not cope well with the generation of new jobs (i.e. unemployment increases) – the public willingly increases the expectations towards the government and the acceptance of interventionist policies.

⁶ In the history of these political movements the attitude towards state institutions varied: from the vision of the state subjected to capital (an element of the superstructure of the system) to the practice of the authoritarian state with the leading role of the Communist Party. From our point of view it is important how decision-making centres on the line: the individual – society – the state are shaped in the practice of domination. Hence, socialism or communism will always be on the opposite axis to the individualistic sense of economic or moral freedom.

⁷ This is the title of a book edited by Mirosława Marody, in which certain aspects of political transformation are discussed from the market and statism perspective (See Marody, M. ed. 2000. *Między rynkiem a etatem. Społeczne negocjowania polskiej rzeczy-*

of the free market, and the ‘hand of the state’, depending on the specific socio-economic and cultural circumstances – are still the axis of the debate on the causes of unemployment, the role of trade unions or economic growth⁸.

Touching cultural issues – reinforced today by global mass media – we should mention the phenomenon of fashion, which – in the language of business psychologists – replaces needs with desires. At the time of the first waves of industrialisation – relatively permanent basic needs and groundbreaking inventions that satisfied them at that time corresponded to the model of large, stable companies with available and permanently employed staff. Currently, when the majority of consumer markets are increasingly variable, liquid and chimerical – it is not only profitable, but also necessary to produce not only ‘just in time’ or ‘on-demand’, but to commission parts of orders or even entire production processes outside (outsourcing) to small specialised companies. American business practitioners claim that a new ‘big thing’ will be ‘smart personal electronic machines’ that will eliminate the whole host of service professions⁹. Needless to say that this has an impact also on the organisation of work, and consequently, on the possibility and willingness of workers to unionise¹⁰.

1. SELECTED PROBLEMS OF THE LABOUR MARKET IN THE LIGHT OF TECHNOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES

A number of factors contribute to the crisis of trade unions, such as ‘professional flexibility’, i.e. the need for relatively frequent retraining, conflicts of interest between countries, sectors, industries, companies. Paradoxically, technological progress itself plus the globalisation of economic processes

wistości. [Between the market and permanent employment. Social negotiations of Polish reality.] Warszawa: Scholar). At the high level of generality the alternative – statism versus market corresponds to the dispute of liberals with socialists and conservatives about the interference of the state in the sphere of work.

⁸ For the part of the liberal radicals (*laissez-faire*) any form of interventionism which limits freedom – be it German ordoliberalism (originally it was an attempt to reconcile the rules of the free market economy with the Catholic social doctrine and moral conservatism) or other attempts to find a ‘third way’ between efficient capitalism and just socialism – must necessarily lead to degeneration; while Communists see this as a betrayal of the ideals and an attempt to ‘smuggle’ basic principles of free-market capitalism.

⁹ Available at: <http://www.businessinsider.com/robots-are-the-next-wave-of-computing-2016-1> [Accessed: 20 February 2016].

¹⁰ See Kessler, A. 2012. *Eat people. And other unapologetic rules for game-changing entrepreneurs*. London: Penguin Books.

bring another threat – or we should say – the need to reflect and change the existing solutions (also for white-collar workers representing so-called liberal professions). Long-term dominance of the so-called employer market (oversupply of workers in relation to the demand), the effect of which is the growing competition for jobs can lead to a situation in which human labour will not even protect against poverty and the employed will be forced to use social aid or family support¹¹.

Traditionally, in such a situation, trade unions and advocates of strengthening the domestic demand in unison postulate to legislatively regulate minimum wages, reduce working time or set minimum hourly rates (which in some countries is also connected with the acquisition of rights to additional social benefits). The traditional answer of ‘free market’ defenders to this is the argument about the potential and real redundancies caused by the increase of competitiveness in the given sector of the economy (higher labour costs – the wage bill increase). Besides the fundamental dispute about the extent of government interference in economic affairs (and the resulting rights and obligations towards citizens), there are numerous minor, even technical controversies that affect the success of fiscal and industrial policy of the country. For example, the multiplicity and complexity of labour markets – in the country, region or the world – differentiate workers’ wage situation, at the same time breaking professional or branch solidarity, and also greatly complicating the situation of the national legislature, which must ‘fairly’ take into account the interests of individual social groups. Privileges obtained by one labour market (an employment segment) can cause quite opposite effects in another. In an ideal model of the national economy, individual labour markets – as a system of communicating vessels connected by one law – rather *do not compete* with each other for legislation favourable for them, which would be an implicit element of redistribution policy.

Turning to the transnational or global scale, in which different segments of the national labour market participate, the ‘legislator’s’ situation, becomes even more complicated: different labour markets yield to autonomy and diversity of professional or branch interests to varying degrees (e.g. renewable energy labour markets versus traditional coal mining). In addition, depending on income, and also on life styles and cultural patterns, employees of different labour markets have – as consumers – different preferences and attitudes, which affects the size of the internal market, i.e. products manufactured and purchased in increasingly blurred ‘borders’ of the national economy.

¹¹ Cf. Phelps, E. 2013. *Placa za pracę. [Rewarding work.]* Warszawa: Kurhaus.

On the other hand, the need to adapt worker's organisations to new technological conditions is related to another socially important issue, namely the general redefinition of the role of human labour. Going beyond the purely economic aspect, Zygmund Bauman discussed this issue at length in a literary way: 'The apotheosis of employment as the highest vocation of man, a condition of moral decency, a law and order guarantee, and also a patented cure for poverty, was in harmony with the formerly labour-intensive industry in which the size of the product increased with the size of the crew. Today's lean, slim and slender, capital and knowledge absorbent factories and offices account the list of employees as the losses and burdens, as the negative factor in the calculation ("productivity"). In an open opposition to the concept of work as a source of wealth, the canon of political economy from the time of Smith, Ricardo, Marx, Rocardo and Mill, numerous crews today are a nightmare for both practitioners and theoreticians of economics, and all strategies of further "rationalisation" (understood as an increase in profits in proportion to the invested capital) are focused on the search for further opportunities to reduce employment. These strategies represent economic growth and employment growth as mutually contradictory concepts and technical progress is measured by the amount of "living labour" which new technology makes redundant. Under these conditions, traditional commandments and teachings of work ethic ring hollow. They no longer express "industry needs", and it is difficult to associate them with the requirements of "national wealth". Their ongoing presence or rather their recent electroplating in the rhetoric of politicians can only be explained by means of quite new tasks with the work ethic is to fulfil in consumer rather than industrial society of our times'¹².

Also Castells came to similar conclusions, according to which increasing numbers of people will remain outside the essential logic of the new system, because global informative capitalism pushes them out of the labour market, and often also out of consumption. Therefore, a significant part of the population will not have the status of economically active persons (e.g. working 'full-time' or 'permanently' in a particular profession) or working – for a long time in the same profession – on the official labour market. According to Castells, it is a common process pertaining to both poorly developed countries, as well as – to a lesser extent – highly developed ones¹³. This process is

¹² Bauman, Z. 1998. Zawrotna kariera „podklasy”. [The stunning career of the 'underclass'.] *Przegląd Społeczny* [Online] no. 1/2, pp. 2–3. Available at: <http://portal.tezeusz.pl/cms/tz/index.php?id=354> [Accessed: 20 February 2016].

¹³ Highly developed economies produce a greater range of goods and services, especially those that require large amounts of knowledge, financial capital and human resources.

also not equal to the typical phenomenon of the seasonal or cyclical increase in unemployment. The fact is that in urbanised countries most people are still gainfully employed. However, we should ask: what kind of work it is, for what amount of money and in what conditions.

Thus, a growing group of people – mainly low-skilled workers – move around in search of any employment. Millions of people sometimes have and sometimes do not have paid work (usually badly paid, seasonal and part-time), which is sometimes also connected with its illegal (i.e. ‘gray economy’), and even criminal nature (i.e. ‘black economy’). All this adds up to a phenomenon which Castells calls a ‘black hole of information capitalism’, or simply the exclusion of large groups of unskilled workforce from ‘normal’ social life. In the nineties of the twentieth century sociologists talked about the underclass, currently the term precariat is fashionable. When we add cultural changes, e.g. increased professional activity of women and persons with disabilities – according to the theory of informationalisation – we can expect an overall degeneration of the traditional labour market, with its integral part, that is trade unions. In other words, a stable employment structure, understood as having a permanent job (mainly employment) by the majority of people of working age is superseded by a new, more flexible and independent of human labour management model.

The processes of individualisation of work and the prospect of replacement of human labour by machines and the possibility of relocation of production to where it is least expensive lead to a gradual break of the remnants of class solidarity from the era of industrialism. According to Castells’s concept of network society, class struggle from the industrial era – resulting from the inherent contradictions of economic interests and based on the existence of class ties and awareness¹⁴ – will be replaced by the conflict of various groups, i.e.: associations, socio-cultural movements, industry lobby, which are organised to defend various interests: economic, political or ideological ones¹⁵. Long ago, sociologists wrote about the transition from ‘society of relations’ to network ‘society of contact’, that is to the informationalisation and networking of human life and activity, the popularisation of new types of organisations, new articulation and new types of relationships. Recalling classic studies on informationalisation of work (Castells) it should be stressed emphatically that much has changed since then in the world economy – also

¹⁴ Lier suggests that the network organisation of production undermines the ritualisation of class identity, that it *de facto* eliminates class awareness (See Lier, H. *Nowy wiek. [New age.]* Warszawa: PIW, pp. 91–95.

¹⁵ See Castells, M. 2000. *The Internet galaxy*. Oxford University Press, pp. 345–346.

due to the consolidation, and significant enhancement of the possibility of practical application of new technologies¹⁶.

Another element of economic and technological changes is the growing importance of a system of licensing, which moves a portion of profits from the owners of the means of production to the holders of patents, licenses and copyrights¹⁷. In addition, savings of those who work are invested (e.g. by investment funds or pension funds) on international stock exchanges. In this system it is difficult to talk about the conflict of class interests as workers of the information era are also a 'collective owner', who together with the 'collective capitalist' become dependent on changes on the global financial market. This does not mean, however, that new forms of exploitation and conflict of interest do not take place. Some researchers argue that important features of the capitalist economy of the industrial era undergo changes, i.e. the property right and the principle of deriving profit from labour and capital. The right to 'intellectual property' and 'cultural capital' gains in importance, and it constitutes a clear axis of class divisions, and even – as suggested by Christopher Lasch – a return to quasi status societies, as the inheritance of position resulting from education is repeated in a similar way as it was the case of the 'state of birth' in feudal times¹⁸. However, this type of inheritance no longer brings 'nobility obliges', that is the defence of such values as honour, dignity and responsibility because 'rebellious elites' are detached from the time and place in which they function (Castells would say that this happens as a result of the annihilation of time and space). The current 'aristocracy of talent' (*feudal lords of education systems*) becomes cosmopolitan in the sense that they are more interested in global networks of capital and the international labour and leisure culture than in national and local issues among which they live physically.

¹⁶ In recent times, there have been numerous publications on the subject, among others: Brynjolfsson, E., McAfee, A. 2014. *The second machine age: work, progress, and prosperity in a time of brilliant technologies*. W.W.Norton & Company; Pistono, F. 2012. *Robots will steal your job but that's OK*. Lexington: Createspace; Cowen, T. 2013. *Average is over. Powering America beyond the age of the great stagnation*. USA: Dutton.

¹⁷ Repeating old arguments of Schumpeter and Galbraith, Rifkin writes that the system of licensing changes the meaning of the classical understanding of the category of an independent enterprise. Possession of tangible assets and workforce, in the absence of intangible aspects (license, patent), is here a hybrid state between petty bourgeoisie and managers (Rifkin, J. 2003. *Wiek dostępu*. [*The age of access.*] Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, pp. 67–68).

¹⁸ Lasch, Ch. 1997. *Bunt elit*. [*The revolt of the elites.*] Liszki: Platan, p. 47.

Another factor is the renaissance of small and medium-sized enterprises, possible not only thanks to ICTs and the development of the global capital market, but also thanks to anti-corporate culture and policies of many governments favourable for this form of entrepreneurship. In this sense, in addition to the change in the system of allocation of capital profits, also the category of beneficiaries profiting from employment changes. Although still money is made mainly by employers who employ own workers for this purpose, the mechanism of accumulation of surpluses is much more complex. Apart from changes in the distribution role of the state and the bargaining power of trade unions, the relationships between the employer and the employee become gradually individualised, which entails a visible differentiation of obtained benefits, for example, instead of the rigidly fixed (the hierarchy) payroll – wages are increasingly varied on the basis of work results¹⁹. The share of workers (manufacturers) who control their own work (e.g. in the form of sole proprietorship or short-term contracts) grows in the economy. They form – together with employers and co-operators – a system of specific, personalised and horizontal relations; gaining in this way independence in planning of (their) market strategies. This way of thinking is shared by large groups of young people raised already in the era of social networking. In the post-socialist countries, apart from the above trends, there is also the issue of restructuring of industrial plants whose previous organisation and management did not cope with the new economic conditions. On their ruins, a number of small and medium-sized enterprises have been established, managed by private owners, who thanks to their knowledge and entrepreneurship have been able to ensure the survival and development of these new companies. On the other hand, due to the change of work methods and organisation of production, more and more people remain outside the labour market, keeping up

¹⁹ As Pańkowska notes, this phenomenon is described in the concept of *Business Process Reengineering* (BPR) of Hammer and Chapy. This concept has become a paradigm of changes in the economic organisation necessary to maintain the flexibility and competitiveness of the company. In this context, the work environment changes involve, among others: 1) the change of employees' roles (the transition from control to empowerment); 2) the change of the preparation of tasks (the transition from training to education); 3) the change of meters of execution and the change of the remuneration system (from evaluation of activities to evaluation of results); 4) the change of the criteria for promotion (the transition from assessment of performance to evaluation of capabilities and capacities); 5) the change of the management style (from supervision to coordination) and 6) the change of organisational structures (the shift from hierarchical structures to flat – horizontal ones) (See Pańkowska, M. 2001. *Zarządzanie zasobami informatycznymi. [Management of IT resources.]* Warszawa: Difin, pp. 71–73).

from benefits from either the state or non-governmental organisations, or working outside the official – legal labour market, and finally receiving basic income from other sources such as social assistance. This does not change the general trend which still rewards education and practical knowledge. Changes in values which society – by changes in culture *in toto* – assigns to different predispositions and practical skills significantly affect the processes of restructuring of essential systems of social life, i.e. the system of division of labour.

2. EFFECTS OF CHANGES IN THE WORLD OF LABOUR FOR TRADE UNIONS

Summing up the first part – the world of work changes: it becomes more technically advanced, it moves to services, it becomes pluralistic (there are professions practised by few groups of employees), is unstable (the growing importance of atypical forms of employment), it becomes internationalised and loses its geographical features (the emergence of teleworking, the growing importance of subcontracting or the popularity of start-ups that gain access to international capital markets). The awareness of employees also changes (becomes individualised). The above-described changes in the world of labour almost without exception result in weakening of the position of trade unions in their current form and legal location. It should be noted, however, that the free market economy – by itself – does not contradict the idea of trade unions, which – taking into account other factors determining the quality of human life and the forms of workers' organisations – can be a factor stabilising labour and demand markets. A lot depends here on the competence and creativity of the persons concerned. The main factor disrupting the possibility of effective co-existence of employers and employees today is the lack of policy coordination on a global scale and difficult to standardise cultural differences. Local activists – presumably understanding the complexity of the modern world of work – often take advantage of local particularisms and political divisions. It seems that this is a tactic calculated for totally different – the nineteenth century's – political reality at the base of which authoritarian doctrines, whether right-wing or left-wing were born. Both trends tend to appeal to populist slogans, such as the 'nationalisation of capital' or 're-industrialisation of the national economy'. Their long-term effect can be easily predicted²⁰.

²⁰ Re-industrialisation policy realised without business innovations – conducted in the era of globalisation, technological and financial flows – means temporary (extensive) growth in employment and multiplier effects will be neutralised negatively in the

Traditionally speaking, there are several mechanisms of the influence of changes in the world of labour on workers' organisations. Firstly, the change in the workforce structure (and generally in the social and economic structure) eliminates professions which were previously unionised. 'We can observe a decrease in the share of classical trade unionists from the industrial era in the structure of employees – permanently (often for life), full-time employed men, the only breadwinners of families, employees with proletarian attitudes, characterised by class solidarity, and an increase in the number of employees working on temporary, part-time contracts, young people and women, people with instrumental attitudes towards work. At the same time a new level of technology and domestic and international competition leads to the deconcentration of crews of workers and the reduction of the requirements for knowledge: modern production, which in the industrial period until the seventies of the twentieth century required large companies and highly skilled working class, can now be transferred to the sector of small and medium-sized enterprises or to countries where labour costs are lower than in Western Europe, and the work is fragmented and individual operations are extremely simplified'²¹.

Secondly, the structural environment conducive to trade union activities vanishes. Workers' organisations have been strongest in the public sector, in industry, in large manufacturing companies, on which – as liberals rightly say – the market does not exert competitive pressure (see: the monopolisation of certain public services, which the market has successfully replaced). Shifting the centre of gravity of the economy toward the private sector has been particularly pronounced in technologically backward countries (e.g. in Poland): most jobs are now in private enterprises. A significant part of these are micro-enterprises employing up to 10 people and there are no workers' organisations there due to the insufficient number of employees. The share of the service sector in the economy grows, the share of industry declines²². It is worth noting here that such a schematic simplification of the vision of the world – resulting from the paradigm of the sectoral approach to economies in today's economics – creates the space for reactionary actions. In theory, modern agriculture – using natural resources in the given region of the world

long term by the public debt service. Moreover, the global nature of the corporation makes the concept of 'national capital' disputable (in fact we can reasonably speak of 'national fiscal policy' which aims, among others, to attract international capital).

²¹ Gardawski, J. ed. 2009. *Polacy pracujący a kryzys fordyzmu*. [*Working Poles and the crisis of Fordism*.] Warszawa: Scholar, p. 427

²² In 2013, the service sector employed 57.5% of all employees; 75% of employees were employed in the private sector (CSO 2013: 28, 97).

– does not automatically constitute an obstacle for the operation of trade union organisations.

Thirdly, the mechanisms of social dialogue, that is collective bargaining of employees and employers (sometimes with the participation of the government) at the level of the company, industry, region and state, which are well-known in developed social market economies, have not taken root in Poland. The existing institutions are often referred to as the facade, created only due to external requirements, e.g. in connection with the accession to the EU.

2.1. The decline of the unionisation level

In Poland, the political transformation has been connected with a sharp decline in union membership. In comparison with the year 1987, that is the declining period of state socialism, the unionisation of employees has fallen by more than two-thirds. In 2013, it was at the level of approximately 12% of employees. Poland, like most (though not all) post-communist countries belonging to the EU is poorly unionised. The decrease in membership is widespread in Europe, which anyway is a leader in this field – in combination with the Anglo-Saxon culture of work, not to mention other regions of the world. Trade union membership has been decreasing since the eighties of the twentieth century, which is the primary factor in determining the position of unions in collective bargaining with employers (Cf. *Industrial Relations in Europe 2012*: 24). In the countries of Central and Eastern Europe this fall is deeper than in Western European economies characterised by a well-shaped system of mediation of group interests. Let us add that the decline in unionisation has not been evenly distributed in occupational groups and various sectors of the economy. In Poland, trade unions remain relatively strong in the public sector (administration, health care, education, state-owned enterprises). They are weaker in privatised facilities, and they very rarely operate in private companies established after 1989.

The scale of the described process is evident when we compare the data from the final period of state socialism (almost all employees worked then full-time in state enterprises) and now. From a longer perspective, we can see that the loss of union protection least affected the most skilled workers: executives and specialists. In the previous regime, they were relatively poorly represented by trade unions, but now they are the best organised professional group. Unionisation of workers in manufacturing has fallen by three-quarters. A decline in the percentage of organised white-collar middle-level workers and employees in services has been even greater.

Table 1

Membership in trade unions²³

Data in %			
	1987	2013	Change
Total adult population	24	6	-75%
Men total	27	7	-74%
Women total	22	5	-77%
Total employees	38	12	-68%
Professional groups			
– Executives, clerisy, engineers	29	19	-34%
– Mid-level white-collars	46	9	-80%
– Blue-collars*	40	10	-75%
– Employees of trade and services	33	6	-82%
Ownership of the workplace			
– State or public	**	24	**
– Private and state joint venture	**	12	**
– Private (excluding agriculture)	**	4	**

* W 2013 ‘Skilled blue-collars’.

** Lack of data

The asymmetrical drop in unionisation and the strong position of workers’ organisations in the public sector and poor in the private one is the reflection of public opinion. According to the vast majority of the public, trade unions defend the interests of certain professional groups at the expense of other workers.

In the assessment of the dominant group of Poles the interests of people working in large workplaces, at least in part owned by the state, such as e.g. mines, are well-represented. Most believe, however, that trade unions cannot or do not want to represent people working in large private companies or chain stores, people working in small private companies, as well as the unemployed.

²³ Data of the Public Opinion Research Centre. In: Wenzel, M. 2009. Związki zawodowe w badaniach CBOS 1980–2008. [Trade unions in the studies of the Public Opinion Research Centre 1980–2008.] In: Gardawski, J. ed. 2009. *Polacy pracujący a kryzys fordizmu*. [Working Poles and the crisis of Fordism.] Warszawa: Scholar, pp. 533–550 and Feliksiak, M. 2013. *Opinie o związkach zawodowych i protestach górników*. [Opinions about trade unions and miners’ protests.] Research Report 66/2015. Warszawa: CBOS.

Table 2

The perceived representation of interests by trade unions

Do trade unions operating in Poland ...	
Defend the privileges of certain professional groups at the expense of other workers	69%
Fight for the interests of all those who work	14%
Hard to say	17%

Data in % of adults

Source: Public Opinion Research Centre²⁴

Table 3

Groups represented by trade unions

Do trade unions currently operating in Poland represent well or badly the interests of:	Well	Badly
– people working in large workplaces at least in part owned by the state, such as e.g. mines	48%	30%
– people working in large private companies or chain stores	17%	57%
– people working in small private companies	9%	63%
– the unemployed, job seekers	8%	68%

'Hard to say' was omitted

Data in % of adults

2.2. Decline of social dialogue

One of the basic instruments of articulating the interests of organised worker's groups are negotiations with employers through social dialogue institutions. According to some researchers describing the initial period of the political transformation, 'the third way' between capitalism and socialism was a possible direction of changes. The destination of such a transformation would be a system in which workers would co-manage enterprises and trade unions – the state; Białecki and Heyns²⁵ claim that state corporatism is

²⁴ The source of data for both tables: Pankowski, K. 2013. *Czyje interesy reprezentują związki zawodowe. [Whose interests trade unions represent.]* Research Report BS/173/2013. Warszawa: CBOS.

²⁵ Białecki, I., Heyns, B. 1992. Democracy. Interests and corporatism in Poland. In: Adamski, W. ed. *Societal conflict and systemic change*. Warszawa: IFIS, p. 251.

a typical way of negotiating interests in post-communist societies. This kind of direction of changes seemed to be a logical consequence of the crucial role that trade unions played in the recent history of Poland. However, the first three governments after the fall of communism did not create systemic mechanisms for solving conflicting interests of employees and employers. The law on trade unions of May 1991 did not regulate many aspects of collective labour relations. Hanna Suchocka's government negotiated in 1993 the so-called Pact on State Enterprise. Its provisions guaranteed workers participation in the management of enterprises in the course of privatisation and created material incentives for employees of these companies. At the same time there was a decision to create the Tripartite Commission for Socio-Economic Issues which was to be henceforth an institutional forum for dialogue between organisations of employers, employees and the government. In 2001, its role was strengthened by a legal act, but in 2015 it was replaced by the Council for Social Dialogue.

The most far-reaching attempt to institutionalise 'state corporatism' was the so-called Draft of Civic Constitution, prepared by the Independent Self-governing Trade Union 'Solidarity' in 1996. Article 43 of the draft gave the Tripartite Commission consisting of representation of employees, employers and the government the right to decide on the minimum wage and the provisions of the Labour Code. A solution of this type would give unions the constitutional right of co-decision on economic policy of the state – omitting the parliament. This draft was not, however, put to the vote in a referendum although 'Solidarity' strived for it. Other central trade unions did not support it.

The existing social dialogue institutions should be assessed as weak. Effectiveness of the Tripartite Commission was low, according to experts in the cross-sectional audit of democracy²⁶. Collective labour agreements are usually concluded at the workplace level. Their reach is small – they cover 25% of workforce. It is not known exactly how durable the agreements are, but it is known that there are few new agreements, and it can be said that most of the agreements were concluded in the nineties of the previous century. Inter-company collective agreements cover a very small part of employees (approximately 3.5% of employees), primarily in sectors such as education, public administration, forestry, energy industry, mining, defence industry, as well as railways. Just like company agreements, most of them were concluded in the nineties²⁷.

²⁶ See Markowski, R., Kotnarowski, M., Wenzel, M., Żerkowska-Balas, M. 2015. *Democratic audit of Poland 2014*. Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang.

²⁷ See Gardawski, J., Mrozowicki, A., Czarzasty, J. 2012. *Trade unions in Poland*. Research Report. Brussels: ETUI.

The weakness of social dialogue results partly from the weakening of the number and position of trade unions – that is from internal reasons (as opposed to the phenomena described by us which have a global nature and are external to local legal regulations and customs). The decentralisation of labour relations is conducive to individual negotiations, not to collective ones. This is, however, not the only reason. Some researchers notice regional differences which are the late heritage of the differences in the culture of dialogue between the former partitions – it is better developed in the former lands under the of the Austrian and Prussian authority²⁸. According to researchers, another historical factor is the reproduction of the model of the action of early ‘Solidarity’ in the first years of the transformation. The principal strategy both before and after the turning point was extorting concessions from the unpopular, illegitimated authorities. Burawoy and Lukacs argued that socialism contributed to the weakness of social dialogue by the atomisation of social relations: ‘the working class in socialism was demobilised. It was deprived of its representation by institutions such as trade unions and political parties, and separated from intellectual elites, due to which only individual strategies of mobility were effective’²⁹.

Many observers of social dialogue perceive its superficiality. At the level of the workplace it manifests itself only in the formal functioning of workers’ councils (established in order to adjust Polish law to the EU), which is related to the reluctance of employees to participate³⁰. At the local level, social dialogue is often a tool of the legitimacy of pre-planned actions of local authorities³¹. At the central level social partners are divided by conflicts which do not reflect the interests and use negotiations for selfish purposes³².

²⁸ Cf. Wódz, K., Kulas, P. eds. 2010. *Dialog, demokracja, społeczeństwo obywatelskie.* [Dialogue, democracy, civil society.] Dąbrowa Górnicza: ESB.

²⁹ Burawoy, M., Lukacs, J. 1992. *The radiant past. Ideology and reality in Hungary’s road to capitalism.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 147.

³⁰ See Gardawski, J., Mrozowicki, A., Czarzasty, J. 2012. *Trade unions in Poland,* Research Report. Brussels: ETUI, p. 25.

³¹ See Zalewski, D. ed. 2001. *Dialog społeczny na poziomie regionalnym. Ocena szans rozwoju.* [Social dialogue at the regional level. Assessment of development opportunities.] Warszawa: IPiSS.

³² See Hausner, J., Marody, M. eds. 2001. *Polski talk show. Dialog społeczny a integracja europejska.* [Polish talk show. Social dialogue and European integration.] Kraków: Małopolska Szkoła Administracji Publicznej AE w Krakowie.

3. PERSPECTIVES

There is little doubt about the hitherto prevailing direction of changes when it comes to the position of trade unions. Experts agree³³ that they are on the falling wave, their position is weaker and – with few exceptions – they lose members almost everywhere. Our aim is to consider whether there are hypothetical scenarios for the return trade unions, where it would take place, how and in what circumstances and conditions. As Gardawski put it, ‘You can ask the question whether trade unions are in the long run doomed to marginalisation, just like so-called declining industry sectors? It now appears that unions of Fordist type will not disappear, but will serve these segments of the world of work which will have Fordist features in the future. (...) Basically, however, the challenge for trade unions will be new groups of workers employed in enterprises where flexibility will be required to stay on the market in the long term. Thus, the question is as follows – will the trade unions formed in the Fordist era be able to represent the interests of these groups? If it turns out impossible, trade unions are threatened with the decline, especially in new economies based on knowledge’³⁴.

In our opinion, there are three, not mutually exclusive, possible return paths for trade unions. Firstly, a strategy which can be called ‘reactionary’. The returning wave of nationalism can mean a retreat from globalisation and international free trade. It is connected with the postulate of re-industrialisation of Europe, the restoration of borders and increased state intervention, and therefore seeks to restore relations existing since in the eighties of the twentieth century. Secondly, internationalisation of labour relations and thus trade unions is possible, which would require the creation of appropriately strong supranational institutions. Currently, the most important manifestation of this phenomenon is the activity of European Works Councils. Thirdly, ‘trade unions’ can work out new, decentralised forms of action corresponding to the work situation of telecommuters, people without permanent contracts, freelancer, etc. Probably these will not be typical trade unions, but they can retain one of their basic functions, which is to represent the interests of employee groups.

³³ See Ebbinghaus, B., Visser, J. 2000. *Trade unions in Western Europe since 1945*. Oxford: Macmillan.

³⁴ Gardawski, J. ed. 2009. *Polacy pracujący a kryzys fordyzmu*. [Working Poles and the crisis of Fordism.] Warszawa: Scholar, p. 437–438.

3.1. 'Reaction': renationalisation and reindustrialisation

The first of the mentioned strategies is associated with global political changes. The years after the global financial crisis in 2008 were characterised by progressive weakening of faith in globalisation and the return of the fashion for political populism, whether left-wing or right-wing (communism versus nationalism in simplified and radical versions). This trend is particularly evident on the example of on the polarisation of the political scene in the United States (the case of 'Tea Party') and the European Union. After losing the French and Dutch referenda on the Constitution for Europe, scepticism about the European project deepens. It is deepened by the euro zone crisis and the rapid influx of immigrants from Africa and the Middle East. These phenomena reinforce the populist tendencies in politics. A common feature of many populist parties is a combination of policy aimed at increasing public expenditure (anti-austerity) with nationalism: euroscepticism, the postulate to restore internal borders, opposition to social assistance for immigrants from other EU countries. These proposals appear in various configurations: in southern Europe redistribution accents are stronger (also in terms of redistribution between EU countries – from the rich to the poor). Greek Syriza or Spanish Podemos present such a programme. Anti-immigrant slogans are stronger in the north (the National Front in France, the Sweden Democrats, the True Finns, etc.), usually combined with the strong state demand. A common feature of these various groups is opposition to contemporary global capitalism, as well as to economic freedom within the EU (issues such as the movement of workers, freedom to provide services outside the country of origin).

A manifestation of the retreat from globalisation is increasing scepticism about projects liberalising international trade. Protests against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) are an example of resistance and fears aroused by building free trade zones. These concerns relate, among others, to job losses and the deteriorated quality of goods (i.e. the reluctance of Europeans to GMOs). This issue was raised previously by Western trade unions on the occasion of the EU enlargement by the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (then they expressed fears of social dumping³⁵, that is, reducing labour standards and social protection in developed economies). Concerns of this kind appear not only in the EU, but also in the USA. Opposition to a similar agreement TPP (Trans Pacific Partnership) connects main

³⁵ Cf. Bernaciak, M. 2012. *Social dumping: political catchphrase or threat to labour standards?* Brussels: ETUI.

candidates in the US presidential election in 2016: Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump.

Such changes of social awareness and changes on the political party scene are accompanied by political moves. In 2012, the European Commission set itself the objective of increasing the share of industrial production in the European economy from 16% to 20% by 2020. This action was a reaction to the diminishing role of industrial production in the last decade. The added value of industrial production decreased in the years 2000–2012 in almost all EU countries (although in Poland it increased slightly)³⁶. The decrease in the importance of industry can also be seen in the labour market: the share of industrial workers in employment fell in all Member States of the EU, although in Poland it was relatively small – a smaller decrease was recorded only in Austria and Germany³⁷. So far, the effects of this policy have not been clear. It seems that the relocation of industrial production outside the EU has slowed down, but we must remember that production from Western Europe has been normally transferred to Central and Eastern Europe³⁸. The ambition of the European Commission is to repeat the success of the US economy, where the process of reindustrialisation has started³⁹.

An argument which is most frequently cited in favour of reindustrialisation of economy in the twenty-first century – also in Poland – is the stability and security of employment and relatively high incomes of workers in conjunction with the efficiency of production (and profit). Innovativeness is also mentioned together with the apologetics of the restoration of industry. Jerzy Cieślik, a researcher of entrepreneurship at Koźmiński University, says: ‘We live with the belief that the biggest number of innovations are in the hi-tech industry, and we should concentrate our modest means on it. And that all the rest of the economy does not count. Meanwhile, nothing could be more wrong. There are also great opportunities in traditional sectors, e.g. in the food industry. Most of old industries are much more important for the economy than the Internet technology. Because there is a greater chance for a combination of sales growth, profits with employment. And hi-tech is such a domain which hardly generates jobs’⁴⁰. It is probably a regularity, although difficult to

³⁶ Heymann, E. 2013. *Europe’s re-industrialisation. The gulf between aspiration and reality*. Deutsche Bank Research Report. Frankfurt a.M., p. 4.

³⁷ Heymann, E. *op. cit.*, p. 5.

³⁸ Heymann, E. *op. cit.*, p. 15.

³⁹ Boston Consulting Group. 2011. *Made in America, again. Why manufacturing will return to the U.S.*

⁴⁰ Cited in *Polityka*, no. 14 (3003), p. 51.

capture empirically for many reasons, that new industries (not only services) do not generate mass employment, but one of the characteristics of most of business innovations, regardless of industry, has been employment reduction. New methods of production and work organisation have resulted in the diminution of agriculture and industry, but without a drop in their productivity, on the contrary – there is much more of everything, and industrial goods are cheaper and therefore more accessible (at least for those who have income).

3.2. Internationalisation of labour relations

The inverse of the reactive strategy is an attempt to adapt the operation model of workers' organisations to capital. The opposite of renationalisation of the economy (and labour relationships) is, therefore, the internationalisation of activities of trade unions. It is difficult because the legal bases of unions' operation differ greatly and their harmonisation is a matter of the future. In Europe, European Works Councils are a way of moving trade unions to the supranational level. Pursuant to Directive 94/45/EC they can be established in all enterprises employing more than 1,000 employees, of which at least 150 employees are in two or more EU member states. Their goal is to select the representation of employees from all countries where the company operates in order to obtain information and express their views on the strategies and decisions that affect the company and its employees. Of the 2,264 companies covered by the Directive, 828 (34%) have a Council, but the percentage of eligible employees covered by their representation is higher: 64% out of 14.5 million have this form of representation. The difference comes from the fact that Councils are established in many large international corporations⁴¹.

Polish workers had an opportunity to work in the Councils before their formal sanctioning in 2002. Employee representatives in the Councils are usually elected by trade unions, with the exception of the situation when unions cannot reach an agreement or when they do not exist. Studies show that their activities have a positive impact on labour relations in Poland – they are positively evaluated both by employers and employees. They disseminate good practices and a culture of dialogue⁴².

⁴¹ See Gardawski, J., Mrozowicki, A., Czarzasty, J. 2012. *Trade unions in Poland*. Research report. Brussels: ETUI.

⁴² See Gardawski, J. 2007. *Korporacje transnarodowe a Europejskie Rady Zakładowe w Polsce*. [Transnational corporations and European Works Councils in Poland.] Warszawa: SGH.

3.3. Unionisation of workers in atypical forms of employment

The third direction of the restoration of trade unions is the extension of their activities to workers in atypical forms of employment. In the Polish context, it concerns primarily covering workers on special purpose contracts with the union protection. The Constitutional Court ruled that it was unconstitutional to deprive people working on special purpose contracts and the self-employed of the right of association in trade unions. There are first attempts to unionise such workers: an inter-company union organisation was founded in the Gdansk shipyard. It associates totally approximately 150 self-employed persons and approximately 50 people on special purpose contracts. However, changing the law is not sufficient to enable the representation of these employees. There are cultural and even communication barriers. Trade unions were historically formed in clusters of workers in a similar situation and with similar interests. In the case of employees on special purpose contracts these conditions are rarely fulfilled.

At the end, let us add that we have to consider yet another scenario that goes beyond the traditional concept of labour relations, and which – quite likely – we are already observing *in statu nascendi*. It concerns the use by workers of new social media for the grassroots and informal – at this stage – realisation (organisation and protection) of their interests. All sorts of ‘employee internet forums’ perform now various functions: inform, advise, warn (i.e. black lists of employers) or provide free support through the popularisation of workers’ problems on the virtual public forum. The informal nature, loose and mobile ‘structures’ and supra-professionalism, supra-industry or supra-nationality are more suitable for many of today’s employees, as characteristics clearly distinguishing this type of activity from typical trade unions. Obviously, in such a situation it is much more difficult to achieve a ‘community of group interests’, though – when the role of the profession and the entire organisation of work change – the old organisational structures of employees are also no longer sufficient in bargaining processes and negotiations with employers. The strength of the collective impact of individualised media is evidenced, for example, by clients’ organised grassroots actions against financial institutions or large corporations⁴³. We can imagine that such methods or measures will be used by people to fight for

⁴³ Available at: <http://www.bankier.pl/wiadomosc/Czarne-listy-pracodawcow-hitem-internetu-7233707.html> [Accessed: 20 February 2016].

their workers' interests, and traditional trade unions – just like factory workers who will be replaced by robots – will disappear from the stage of history.

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TRADE UNIONS AND THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGES ON THE LABOUR MARKET

Summary

The scientific and technological revolution, as well as rapid acceleration in business processes on a global scale, affect labour and capital in an asymmetric manner. Capital is inherently more flexible than human beings, who, in addition to economic constraints, live in the network of social relations. The position of the working class is additionally weakened by process automation, replacing workers by increasingly intelligent robots. Our intention is to sketch a sequence of cause and effect of these processes: describe the basic aspects of the transformation of the labour market, their impact on trade unions and outline the future outlook for the trade union movement.

ZWIĄZKI ZAWODOWE A WPŁYW ZMIAN TECHNOLOGICZNYCH NA RYNEK PRACY

Streszczenie

W tekście przedstawiamy kilka wybranych – naszym zdaniem ważnych – problemów, przed którymi stoi obecnie ruch związkowy, i które wybiegają poza tradycyjną dyskusję na temat roli i znaczenia związków zawodowych w gospodarce wolnorynkowej (układy zbiorowe, komisje trójstronne, kodeks pracy itp.). Najogólniej rzecz biorąc, wszystkie relacje społeczne, które są

wpisane w dany model gospodarowania, wpisane są także w pewien kontekst kulturowy, polityczny oraz cywilizacyjny. Powiązania, zwyczajowe czy też instytucjonalne, między wymienionymi sferami życia, stanowią skomplikowaną mozaikę interesów, które – aby sprawę jeszcze bardziej doprecyzować – podlegają ciągłej zmianie czasowej i przestrzennej. W tym dynamicznym procesie przekształcania stosunków pracy niebagatelną rolę odgrywa dziś rozwój naukowo-techniczny (np. robotyzacja), którego oddziaływanie obejmuje skalę globalną i przyjmuje względnie szybkie tempo. Zmiany dotyczą także tradycyjnych relacji i stosunków pracy, co wpływa na postrzeganie samej aktywności zawodowej.

ПРОФСОЮЗЫ И ОТРАЖЕНИЕ ТЕХНОЛОГИЧЕСКИХ ИЗМЕНЕНИЙ НА РЫНКЕ ТРУДА

Резюме

В тексте представлено несколько избранных, по нашему мнению, – важных проблем, которые в настоящее время стоят перед профсоюзным движением, и которые выходят за рамки традиционной дискуссии о роли и значении профсоюзов в условиях свободной рыночной экономики (ведение коллективных переговоров, трёхсторонние комитеты, трудовой кодекс и т.п.) В принципе, все социальные отношения, которые соотнесены с данной моделью управления, соотносятся также с определённым культурным, политическим или цивилизационным контекстом. Соотношения, обычные или же институциональные, между упомянутыми жизненными сферами, представляют собой сложную мозаику интересов, которые – с целью ещё большей конкретизации вопроса – подвержены непрерывным временным и пространственным изменениям. В этом динамическом процессе преобразования трудовых отношений в настоящее время немаловажную роль играет научно-технический прогресс (например, робототехника), значение которого приобретает глобальный масштаб и растёт в достаточно быстром темпе. Изменения касаются также традиционных взаимоотношений и трудовых отношений, что оказывает воздействие на восприятие самой профессиональной активности.