



PRECARIAT AWARENESS AND THE SENSE OF SECURITY IN THE LABOUR MARKET

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Abstract. The dynamism and the changing modern labour market are also reflected in the area of security. A variety of changes or changes in employment patterns can lead to instability, including in terms of work, employment and income. The weakening of individual areas of occupational safety not only has a dysfunctional effect on individuals but can also contribute to weakening ties and relationships among entire populations. Precarious employment is seen as a social group with a low-paid, unstable employment structure that is not covered by social benefits. Knowledge of unstable employment relationships, flexibility in pay, ease of dismissal or change of job functions should be seen as unequal treatment of people in the labour market. Precariousness limits the ability to develop one's own potential, and directly affects one's subjectivity and the sense of security in the labour market.

ŚWIADOMOŚĆ PREKARIATU A POCZUCIE BEZPIECZEŃSTWA NA RYNKU PRACY

Słowa kluczowe: prekariat, poczucie bezpieczeństwa, rynek pracy

Streszczenie. Zmieniający się współczesny rynek pracy ma swoje odzwierciedlenie również w sferze bezpieczeństwa. Różnorodność zmian i przeobrażeń w modelach zatrudnienia mogą wprowadzać brak stabilizacji w zakresie m.in.: pracy, zatrudnienia czy dochodów. Osłabienie poszczególnych obszarów bezpieczeństwa pracy nie tylko wpływa dysfunkcyjnie na jednostkę, lecz może przyczynić się do osłabienia więzi czy stosunków całych grup społecznych. Prekariat bowiem postrzegany jest jako grupa społeczna, która zajmuje pozycję

nisko płatną, niestabilną i nieobjętą systemem świadczeń socjalnych w strukturach zatrudnienia. Świadomość niestabilnych relacji pracy, elastyczność względem płacy, łatwość zwalniania czy zmieniania funkcji pracownika traktowane winno być w kategorii nierównego traktowania ludzi na rynku pracy. Prekariat bowiem ogranicza zdolność rozwijania własnego potencjału, bezpośrednio wpływa na podmiotowość i poczucie bezpieczeństwa na rynku pracy.

Introduction

Economic development presents both opportunities and threats. Globalization, the third wave, the information society, rapid technological progress, terrorism, environmental hazards, global warming, the increase in social exclusion and marginalization, and unequal distribution of resources are the characteristics that define the contemporary world. A distinctive feature of the current phase of globalization in the global economy is the pursuit of short-term interests and profit maximization. According to a report prepared by the international humanitarian organization Oxfam, the wealthiest one percent of the world's population possesses twice as much wealth as the entire global population combined.

Globalization completely transforms social space. As indicated by Jan A. Scholte, “social geography is being reconfigured with simultaneous growth of transplanetary connections among people” (2006, p. 17).

In the midst of these developments, human beings occupy a significant position, where their natural aspirations often shift from “being” to “having.” This is also where the phenomenon of the one-dimensional person emerges, whose entire life is confined to work and consumption.

Precariat – an attempt to define the concept

The concept of the precariat first emerged in the social sciences in the 1980s, primarily to describe the situation of temporary and seasonal workers; however, it gained more popularity in the first decade of the 21st century. The precariat entered scholarly discourse through the works of thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Antonio Negri, Michel Hardt, and Herbert Marcuse. They analysed a range of mechanisms responsible for social transformations in the 20th century, which contributed to further considerations of the issue of precarity, as indicated by Marcin Wlazło (2014, p. 38). Etymologically, this term is commonly recognized as a neologism derived from the combination of two nouns: “precariety” (French: *précarité*) meaning

an uncertain, unstable situation, and “proletariat” (Latin: *proletarius*) which referred to the poorest social class in ancient Rome and, since the industrial revolution, to the working class, as described by Ryszard Szarfenberg (2016, p. 17).

As noted by Wojciech Jarecki (2014, pp. 53-64), from the turn of the 20th to the 21st century, this concept gained popularity and draws on the aforementioned two words: “proletariat”, with its Marxist connotations or associations with the period of the People’s Republic of Poland (in Poland), denoting people who worked but did not possess the means of production and were exploited, and the English adjective *precarious*, meaning uncertain, doubtful, accidental, dangerous, or risky.

According to Jan Sowa, “The precariat is characterized by a lack of certainty, stability, and permanence, chronic inability to foresee the future, and constant fear that it will only bring worsening conditions. It is a condition of fragile and uncertain existence that a significant portion of the global population is condemned to, including in the capitalist core countries. [...] It signifies a life full of uncertainty and difficult to plan” (2010, p. 108). For Sowa, precarity is a situation in which someone requires care, as the word is etymologically linked to the word “Caritas”, which means “charity”, “care”, or “love for one’s neighbour”. The precariat refers to all people who have to support themselves and their families through low-paying, insecure, temporary, poorly qualified, unprotected, and informal work.

Filip Vostal from the Czech Academy of Sciences defines the concept of precariat as a state that is neither certain, safe, nor stable (2014, p. 39).

Guy Standing, who initiated a wide-ranging debate on the precariat with his book “The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class” states that the essence of the precariat does not necessarily lie in the level of income or current earnings but in the lack of social support in times of need. According to him, precarity arises from a lack of care. From our perspective, this phenomenon is more closely related to the concept known as the “welfare state crisis”. Standing also describes the precariat as “people suffering from the lack of seven forms of job-related security [...] that post-World War II social democracy, labour parties, and trade unions demanded for the industrial working class or proletariat, treating them as the program of citizenship in the industrial age” (Standing, 2014, p. 10). According to Mariusz Baranowski, these seven forms of security include:

1. Employment market security - suitable job opportunities.

2. Employment security – protection against dismissal, regulations concerning employment and dismissal, and penalties for employers who deviate from these rules.
3. Job security – the preservation of niches in employment and the possibility of social advancement in terms of income and status.
4. Safety at work – protection against accidents and occupational diseases.
5. Guarantee of skill reproduction – the opportunity to acquire skills through vocational training or education.
6. Income security – ensuring a protected, adequate, and stable income.
7. Representation guarantee – the opportunity to have a voice in the labour market, for example, through trade unions (Baranowski, 2015, pp. 148-149).

These guarantees should be the standard in the labour market, but this is not the case in many countries. It is worth noting that Standing does not limit the state of “insecurity” solely to low-paid, uncertain, and precarious work but also draws attention to other equally significant issues that distinguish the precariat from other social classes, as emphasized by Wiesława Kozek. Alongside the lack of certainty, stability, or job security and the provision of minimal work protection (which applies to people temporarily unemployed, engaged in casual work, employed on short-term contracts, and engaged in labour migration for income), there is a much more important issue concerning the lack of opportunities for career development – precariats are deprived of a sense of professional identity (Kozek, 2013, p. 145).

Another uncertainty regarding employment is being observed, namely the precarization of the work process. It is indicated that this precarization is primarily associated with technological advancements, the increasing significance of immaterial labour, and the decreasing availability and scope of legal protections for workers. Meanwhile, the precariat itself is presented as a new and distinct socio-economic group that has emerged in response to an unstable job market, lack of suitable employment opportunities, and frequent instances of individuals undertaking work below the aspirations associated with their acquired education.

Security and Flexibility in the Labour Markets

Security is a multifaceted concept, and its essence can be examined within the realms of pedagogy, social policy, social work, and psychological theories

of needs. It can refer to individuals, social groups, local communities, and even the international arena as a paramount value in the contemporary world. From a psychological perspective, attention is drawn to the fulfilment of the need for security, as highlighted by Janusz Reykowski (1964, pp. 143–147). The ongoing process of transformations and the dynamics of the labour market are reflected in the sphere of security. The diversity of changes or transformations in employment models can introduce a lack of stability in various aspects of security, including the labour market, employment, workplace, and income. The weakening of individual areas of work security not only detrimentally affects the individual but can also contribute to the erosion of bonds or relationships within entire social groups. Consequently, the lack of stability in the labour market can give rise to numerous problems, dysfunctions, or social exclusion. It should be noted that this phenomenon occurs when individuals do not find their place in society and are marginalized from social life. As noted by Szarfenberg, three states can be distinguished through which individuals become socially excluded:

- “lack of means for sustenance and participation in social groups, which can be addressed through minimizing poverty and improving social security systems;
- vocational inactivity of individuals in the working age group – the unemployed. They are often perceived as inferior due to their inability to sustain a decent standard of living.
- as a result of social pathologies” (2003, p. 4).

According to Michał Boni, flexibility in the labour market is perceived as a result of market deregulation, characterized by “increased freedom of economic entities and reduced state intervention in collective labour relations” (2004, p. 7). It can be examined from both micro – and macroeconomic perspectives. In the case of the former, it pertains to the adaptive capabilities of labour market participants in response to changing internal and external conditions. As Alina Gładzicka-Jankowska suggests, in such a market, individuals can successfully change their place of employment or find new employees. From a macroeconomic standpoint, flexibility is considered as “a way to achieve equilibrium in the labour market, which can be disrupted by demand, supply, and structural shocks” (2013, p. 69). In this perspective, maintaining stability in the labour market depends on employment flexibility (adjusting the number of employees to changing economic conditions), working time flexibility (the length of working hours regulated by the needs of the enterprise), and functional flexibility (tasks and skills of employees). This flexibility encompasses:

- “Wages - there are no fixed monthly salaries for work performed; an agreement can be reached between the employee and the employer that the employee will receive payment after completing a specific task - such cases are encountered, for example, in contracts for specific work; different accounting periods can also be established, which do not necessarily have to be monthly (as commonly accepted);
- Employment, which is a significant advantage for employers as it provides an easy and cost-free possibility to change the level of employment. However, it has a negative impact on employees as it reduces their security;
- Job positions, involving the movement of employees between departments or within the company’s structure, with minimal cost (if any) associated with changes in employment structure;
- Employee skills - employees have a broad knowledge that they can utilize not only in their current positions” (Standing, 2014, p. 7).

Employers are increasingly opting for non-standard, flexible forms of employment, which allow them to reduce labour and capital costs. The numerous transformations occurring in the realm of work within the contemporary labour market have changed the traditional employment model, introducing “uncertainty” associated with securing and maintaining employment, as well as other phenomena, including the emergence of a new social group referred to as the “precariat”. The qualitative specificity of these new transformations in the world significantly influences socio-cultural, political, and economic aspects of life. According to Zygmunt Bauman, the driving force behind these ongoing transformations can be attributed to “the priority granted to the unimpeded freedom of financial capital over all other freedoms it might come into conflict with, the tearing down of socially woven safety nets, and the devaluation of any considerations beyond economic ones, which has given new impetus to processes of relentless polarization” (2013, pp. 50-51).

Conclusions

Deepening social divisions can lead to an increase in the precariat class, with new young individuals joining it after completing their education. Therefore, this phenomenon deserves particular attention not only due to the current situation of workers but also the potential threats it poses to a stable labour market in the future. Work is considered as the “fundamental creation of human existence”, and when its creative nature fades away, the becoming of a human through

work becomes uncertain and precarious, as pointed out by Jerzy W. Gałkowski (1980, p. 69). The anger, anomie, anxiety, and alienation experienced by the precariat reveal the other face of society, where uncertainty and ‘flexibility’ are pillars of the economic system, as highlighted by Standing (2014, p. 73). The alienation of work, coupled with the resulting dehumanization, intensified job insecurity, and fear for the future, demonstrates the condition of the contemporary alienated worker – the precariat.

When considering the issue of the precariat, which reflects economic, political, and social changes, the following aspects need to be taken into account:

1. The precariat is individually shaped by each worker and is largely based on experience. For example, for individuals with disabilities, work can serve as therapy and a means to regain independence in life. However, people with disabilities must confront barriers that others do not face. They need to overcome architectural barriers to access work, obtain appropriate professional qualifications (which are not always accurately determined by medical assessors regarding the capabilities of individuals with hearing or visual impairments), and employers and colleagues should be aware of how to collaborate with individuals with disabilities (*social barriers*). Young people without experience often fall victim to employers who do not know how to integrate them into the workforce, neglect employee development, or lack the knowledge to do so. Approximately 45% of migrants in Poland perform low-skilled jobs with the lowest wages. This essentially constitutes precarity, as migrants undertake jobs that Polish nationals are unwilling to do due to the lack of security and certainty in life. Some of these individuals possess high qualifications, but there are challenges in having their qualifications recognized. Furthermore, more complex work requires a good understanding and familiarity with the local work culture (Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich, 2019).
2. The precariat is a systemic problem generated by both the market and the state. In the context of data from the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS), on one hand, we observe precarious and uncertain work, which consequently lacks guarantees of income and social security. On the other hand, as evidenced by the frequent use of civil law contracts, such as contracts for specific work or contracts for services, these types of agreements are often made with individuals in professions associated with the middle class, which tend to be well-paid. According to data from statistical institutions, in 2019, the number of individuals solely engaged in civil law

contracts or contracts for services (i.e., not employed full-time) reached 1.2 million. Since 2012, when the Central Statistical Office (GUS) began investigating this issue, the number of individuals working under civil law contracts has remained relatively stable, ranging from 1.2 to 1.4 million.

3. National social policies alone cannot solve the problems resulting from global processes.

In practical terms, addressing the issue of the precariat, which represents a new form of social inequality, requires the development of international solutions, such as legal frameworks that would civilize the actions of large multinational corporations, which is already taking place. However, it is not only private enterprises that take advantage of workers with uncertain statuses; public sector employers are also not immune to this trend. What was intended to facilitate flexibility and self-employment has been normalized as regular employment relationships. There is complete convergence in this regard, regardless of the sector, thus necessitating actions to reverse these trends. Furthermore, at the theoretical level, it requires a re-evaluation of the fundamental rights of individuals. As emphasized by Katarzyna Zamorska, “in this sense, the concept of the precariat translates into social policy, reminding us of what its essence should address” (2019, pp. 32-44).

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