

Book review

Rafał Woś, *To nie jest kraj dla pracowników (No country for workers)*, Warszawa 2017: Wydawnictwo W.A.B: 327, e-book version, ISBN-13: 978-83-280-4771-6

To nie jest kraj dla pracowników (No country for workers) is the second book about capitalism in Poland by Rafał Woś. The previous one, *Dziecięca choroba liberalizmu (Liberalism: An Infantile Disorder)* exposed deficits and pathologies of Polish economic life. *To nie jest kraj...* continues the story about capitalism's sins and mistakes. Rafał Woś describes history of labour and workers worldwide and as well as in Poland regarding past, present and future perspective. The question opening each chapter is also used as a title: *What's happened to our work – the World, What's happened with our work – Poland, What's happening with our work – the World, What's happening with our work – Poland* and in the end *What will be happen with our work – the World, What will be happen with our work – Poland*. In the introduction to the book the author puts forward his key postulate: *the point is that each worker gets a chance to be just a little bit like the lucky Buffet (Warren Buffet – MA), so their work is little more stable, little better paying and little more pleasurable, and at the same time it would leave them with some more spare time without jeopardizing their social status. That's what this book is about. Work will be the key to the older and newer secrets of the modern world. It will explain, among others, the genesis of the 2008 crisis, the triumph of Kaczyński and Trump or the real essence of the dispute about the future of globalization. I will try to show that by improving the position of the work, we would be able to dispel many of the fears that plague us, save the democracy, the European idea, or reduce the phenomenon of 'classism' or racism* (Woś 2017, e-book: loc. 29). Indeed, the main idea of the book is to show the features of labour and how social changes influence labour. But in the other hand I cannot see in the book the answer to these questions.

First chapter *What's happened to our work – the World* is a very brief outline of relations between capitalism and labour. The author introduces the concept of capitalism (referring to A. Maddison, G. Clark, and even K. Marx) and argues: *If the nineteenth century showed the problem of capitalism with its anti-worker original sin, the 20th century proved in practice what the consequences are. These include the profound instability in the very nature of capitalism.* (Woś 2017, e-book: loc. 268). The author records the sins of capitalism and the main obstacles to treating labour as an equal partner for business. Therefore, the myth of moving up the social ladder through work and chasing its own tail' are the key capitalism symptoms. In Woś's opinion, Keynes offered the remedy but his theory was distorted and ignored by economist. Woś repeats all left-wing mantras: neoliberalism is the worst choice, low taxes are the *final nail to the coffin*, and he accuses the mainstream economics of giving preferentiality to the financial market. The strong point of the chapters is gathering the various examples, but the weak is confusion and disorder. Woś is a pop-science author and his way of writing is essayistic rather than academic way. He is correct in his diagnoses about capitalism, neoliberalism and industrial relations, but fails to offer valid arguments and specific solutions. Anecdotes are not enough to fill the gap. His main conclusion is that despite increasing productivity, wages do not grow.

The second chapter opens with the assumption that there is more than one meaning to the term 'transformation' and *the class perspective is still in Poland an unusual way of looking at the history of our political community* (Woś 2017, e-book: loc. 701). Woś aims at comparing the relations between capital and work. He looks at the origins of capitalism in the West and in Poland. He writes that the sin of Polish story about transformation was celebrating the winners, while forgetting about all the others. The changes affected whole society, and situation Polish workers drastically worsened. Inspired by J. Sachs, the Balcerowicz Plan (also known as the 'shock-therapy') of 1990 was aimed at combating inflation and accelerating marketization of Polish economy. Woś is very critical about economic decisions made in the early 1990s, he cites A. Kapriński who described the "shock therapy" as deindustrialisation. Woś even calls it the *Hecatomb 1990* and lists errors and omissions: no dialogue, no social consultations, the speed of reforms was too fast. He mentions J. Gardawski's survey on blue-collar workers' economic consciousness. *Here, it was easy to see two phenomena. On the one hand, there was general acceptance of the introduction of a market economy and some idealization of Western capitalism (with which very few Poles had previously any contact), and on the other, discouragement of the workers' self-management (pol. 'samorząd pracowniczy'). Between 1982 and 1983 General Jaruzelski*

was trying to break social apathy, and unblocked that channel of employee activity. Initially, workers were involved in the work of local governments, but it soon turned out that they did not meet their high expectations when it comes to obtaining revenues for the management of factories. (Woś 2017, e-book: loc. 1007). He refers to academic debates on employee-owned companies between T. Kowalik and J. Tittenbrun, and mentions H. de Soto and his *proto-capitalist* theory, in the context of which he discusses the phenomenon of “*prywaciarz*”. “*Prywaciarz*” is a term denoting a small business owner in a pejorative way. At the same time, *prywaciarz* is also a symbol of free market. Woś also recalls the growing importance of big stores and changes in retail, describes difficult situation of farmers and tragedy of closing down the state-owned farms (PGR). The subsequent parts of the book are devoted to labour. The 2008 crisis was a turning point, after that the employer’s market was over. In the chapter about global situation, Woś focuses on politicians and economists. He blames the former for populism and the latter to short-sightedness. The author cites H. Kitschelt and his study about political preference formation. N. Klein, D. Rodrik, J.Y. Lin all criticize the so-called *Washington Consensus* Woś suggests *wage-led growth* i.e. a growth based on wages. According to M. Lavoie and E. Stockhammer an equitable strategy for economic recovery is wage-led growth. The same opinion had M. Kalecki, one of the most distinguished economists of the 20th century. The new idea is Global Keynesian New Deal which should rest on three pillars: 1) re-regulation of the financial sector, 2) reorientation of macroeconomic policies along (post) Keynesian lines (functional finance), and 3) reconstruction of international macroeconomic policy coordination, in particular, on the European level, and a new world financial order. The assumptions are bold, Woś sees hope in them for a better economy. The added value of Woś’s book is a diverse range of problems it covers, for example, he does not forget about inequalities. T. Piketty is a huge inspiration for Woś, he often mentions the French economist. He is certainly aware that Piketty has as much followers as opponents, so he deliberately overlooks the opponents’ arguments, in my opinion, without much success, because he only repeats well-known clichés and stereotypes instead of building a reliable argumentation. Some of the issues he discusses too briefly, for instance, discrimination of women, especially in the Polish market. In my opinion, Woś focuses on the big picture so much that he often loses sight on what is just in front of him.

Woś puts forward number proposals: job guarantee, living wage and minimal universal inheritance as solution to many problems like inflation and unemployment, securing a living and reduce inequality. He sees discrimination against minorities and disadvantaged groups on workplace.

The research of J. Gardawski, already mentioned was the impulse for Woś to describe the situation on the labour market in Poland. Polish society is characterised by , syndrome of abandonment and relative deprivation. *At the beginning of the 21st century Polish workers have a little sense of common destiny or common of interest, and Polish labour looks rather like shapeless mass unaware of its own identity and strength. One thing is certain: labour definitely exists, which means that Polish society is based on citizens who make living out of work, and work usually sets the horizon of their world, both economic and social. So – work is like a bubble in which we sit, only we do not know it.* (Woś 2017, e-book: loc. 2711). Woś makes trips to Wałbrzych and Poznań and shows in a close up how the lowest strata of Polish society work.

Woś describes jobs whose holders tstruggle with everyday problems. He sketches the picture of unfair, low paid work in Poland. The weakness of the argument is that he derives it from from articles or books, not field studies. On the other hand, examination of single cases, allows to him to draw multi-coloured : self-employment, task-specific contract, contract of mandate, internship, all kinds of non-standard employment can be found performed by among Polish employees. Lives that working poor, migrants, contractual/seasonal workers live are precarious (G. Standing), but Woś throws into one bin various types of employees: artists, NGO workers, journalists. Such a broad analysis is little shallow, as it misses many significant factors,, related, for example, to the nature of work in different types of workplaces Woś also take on structural problems di: education system (no vocational training), pensions system, and even social policy.

The last part of the book is devoted to future of labour. Woś brings in A. Kessler's theory on how technology is eating jobs. There are two types of workers in our the economy: *creators* and *servers*. The first ones are productivity driving force, the other - hold unproductive jobs that will disappear. Kessler breaks down the service economy further into: *sloppers* and *supersloppers* (moving things from one side of a store or factory to another), *sponges* (working people whose incomes fall below the poverty line) and *thieves* (who have a government mandate to make money and a franchise). Woś also mentions people working in the financial sector. That division shows that the future of work is more complicated than it seems, so robotization and automation are not the only problems.

Woś also touches the phenomenon of gig economy which relies on temporary, flexible jobs, as well as hiring independent contractors and freelancers instead of full-time employees. Uberisation is a negative example of sharing economy, because it messes the relation between workers and employers, e.g. social security. Woś makes a prediction that: *uberised labour market will probably break into two parts. On the*

one hand, there will be the old, well protected labour market. On the other hand, the new one, comprising employees, who are formally free but no one will invest in them or train them. No one will bother with providing them holiday or employment law cover. (Woś 2017, e-book: loc. 4081). The vision is terrifying, but at the same time very likely considering that in Polish Uber, for instance, vast part of the workers are migrants, working in substandard conditions and without employment protection. Woś presents three scenarios for the future of capitalism, developed by I. Wallerstein, R. Collins, and M. Mann, respectively. And cites also M. Mazzucato, author of *The Entrepreneurial State: debunking public vs. private sector myths* about entrepreneurial state and innovation in the public sector.

Woś is looking for a recipe how to enhance the power of labour. Universal basic dividend (reference to the social dividend concept) is one of them, but Woś also claims that basic income should not only be universal but also high, unconditional and a mechanisms complementary to welfare state, not its replacement. Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams argue for reduction in working hours coupled with a universal basic income with a view of minimizing social fallout of automatization.

Woś tells us that in the end even not redistribution, but pre-distribution (idea to prevent inequalities), strong trade unions and cooperatives could help capitalism. Woś tries to transpose these proposals onto local ground, as a part of his analysis of the Polish economy. He stresses out that trade unions and social dialogue are the pillars of a healthy labour market. The conclusions he comes up with are unfortunately incomplete, lacking deeper perspective.

To sum up, *No country for workers* is a collection of essays, quoting variety of writings, concepts and theories rather than a coherent story about the labour market. Woś refers to countless string authors, cites numerous eminent economists, sociologists and other researchers. The result is an interesting package of ideas, which, however, lacks originality. In my opinion, Woś, by giving voice to others, denies himself a chance to speak with his own voice. Thus, the book lacks a critical assessment of the theories and concepts quoted. Yet, on the other hand it is still a respectable effort of writing about complex issues of labour, work and capitalism in a digestible form.

Magdalena Andrejczuk, Warsaw School of Economics (SGH), magdalena.andrejczuk@doktorant.sgh.waw.pl