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EXPERIENCED VOICE FOR THE HUMAN FACE (IN THE NETWORK)

“Can social workers achieve a return to critical, effective and sustainable in the political arena over issues of “enabling justice”.... for all disadvantaged groups?”

We try to meditate on the question, posed for this conference. On one side we see authors in the last two decade whose position is marked by fear of the “neoliberal” market-modeled welfare culture, where the identities of social workers and social managers are becoming narrowed by managerialistic restrictions (Aronson, Smith, 2011). Some authors warn anticipating the end of Social Work as they see Social Work “as an functional answer on structural changes...bound to modern industrial society” (Chytil, 2007, p.66) and therefore “it might not be financed” as this historical period is over.

Still others try to shift from the analysis of social structures and politics of “social justice for all” and try to find positive values in the postmodern discourse in studying social meanings and the way these meanings are represented in different discourses, cultures and groups. They encourage the focus on reflexivity, reciprocity, warmth and trust in social relations and value of respect for difference. The focus on ‘the individual in context’ is formulated (Powell, 2001). Social work can be seen even “as a methodology of individual reflective life projects” (Navratil, 2009, Ferguson, 2004).

This turn in focus has been criticized from others for being related to neo-conservative attitudes, and to legitimization of individualism which „leaves unattended the global economic inequalities and exploitative capitalist practices“. (Noble, 2004).

Many authors agree that Social work should combine both, its ability for micro-deconstruction offered by the postmodern discourse as well as its role to expose global inequalities and oppressive relations across the globe. However the insecurity and lack of ability to understand where the development might direct creates fear in those, who think about it.

For the Czech ear the radical neo-Marxist jargon of some authors reminds the communistic ideological rhetoric. Therefore it provokes a rather disapproving reaction in this country. On the other hand, if we look at the contemporary social scene being a discourse with many voices, it seems to be meaningful and fair that poor, old, weak and disadvantaged people have their voice in the society, what ever it will be. Where they are not able to speak for themselves, it is a matter of solidarity, resp. role of Social workers, to support them to be heard or even to become their voice. This voice should be heard on all levels- individual, social, organizational and political. (Some contemporary examples from the Czech Republic will be presented here.)

On the fundamental premise, that the real meaning of Social work is still “to build and consolidate solidarity...”(Lorenz, 2007, p.63), the Autonomy of the Social Work field we suppose, can be build in the close cooperation with other helping professions and members from the civil society. We do not see Social Work or Social workers as those who “can save the world” and who should feel responsible for stopping the criticized ever more developing globalized strategies of managerial agendas which “colonize the free democratic society”. However Social workers, we think, should be visible members of networks, which are aware of the danger, that many global economic “pirates” (Bělohradsky, 2009) have different nature than traditional capitalists. Those were connected with the locality of the State and paid “solidarity” taxes (often also in the form of private philanthropy). The new global “pirates” have no face and no where land (Baumann, 1999 - absenting landlords). Some authors fear they can destroy the original role of State, which has been the main source of guarantee of contracts between citizens and the State (Bělohradsky, 2009), ergo also guarantee of

democratic negotiation about fulfillment of human rights, solidarity and responsibility for disadvantaged citizens. So this is an issue of enormous importance for our future.

As Bělohradsky argues, probably no one can stop the global economic development. That does not mean that Social workers should succumb the “syndrome of outsider” (Šafr, Sedláčková, 2006), who should resign on the fight with reducing Human Being to a functional unit in any private or public “Good Beneficial Project”.

In tune with the post-modern discourse, we do not believe in one Big Strategy or New Theory, with the awareness that it has always brought in the history some own “shadow” or reversal unintended impact, replacing and overwhelming after all the intended “actualization” of the proposed GOOD (Bělohradsky, 2009). Rather we would like to believe in the once and again re-lived and re-constructed reflective understanding of Face of the vulnerable Other (Levinas, 1997) and supporting networks - in the situations of decision making about their/our lives, with the help of professional discretion (task of life-long education), “attentive heart” (Kříšťan, Musil , 2008) but also political vision on all levels where social workers engage (e.g. as reflective social managers, researchers, politicians).

In our presentation we would like to challenge the Fear of Total annihilation of Social Work as a profession, the fear, that Social Work will end its existence in case the Welfare State (or even State as such) has reached the top of its existence and will exhaust its capacity to contain emerging social problems with justice and necessary solidarity. We will argue, that Social work and Social support was always provided by those, who had the highest political and economic power, position and authority. We shall analyze the eventual future sources of power, the reasons why Social Work will be “wanted” even with the change of the Taskmaster and what other roles of Social Work might emerge as important in eventual shift from the role of State. We see the **revolutionary** role of radical social work as a blind alley. We prefer to see the space of Social Work as “**evolutionary**”, as a “foster-mother” or catalyst of political visions and ideas in the future discourse, on the background of values and experience (theories, methods), which it bears. Social Work should not construct its Identity as an egalitarian profession but as an experienced Voice in the network with all people and subjects who will share the same values.