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## 3. WORK

### THE MODERN MEANING OF WORK

Together with the arrival of the industrial society, within so-called 'modernity', what has been called the civilization of work was built. This way, work will change from being considered as a curse or punishment to being a source of pleasure, pride and meaning. Therefore, the work factor will become the centre of social and individual life, in a factor of social integration and construction of the personal identity. Both in the political doctrines situated on the left and the right, work is established in the cardinal value of the human person and social life, in a basic principle in the cultural universe of industrial societies. Arizmendiarieta is an heir to this thought: he raised work to an essential and nuclear value of a more human and more cooperative social order.

### ARIZMENDIARRIETA'S MEANING OF WORK

In Arizmendiarieta's opinion cooperative members should be exemplary workers, as a sign of their maturity as men and as citizens. The pride of a job well done and the embellishment of the idea of work are integral elements of his thought. Work is the citizen's form of solidarity with others, the transforming agent of society, enriching the person. The abolition of the capitalist way of servitude to the force of work, is necessary in the path towards human dignity. The concept of work constructed by the bourgeois social order, i.e. work as a mere instrument, as buyable and sellable merchandise, will be considered incompatible with forming a cooperative and individualist order that establishes the person's dignity as a basic guide of performance. Arizmendiarieta rejected reducing work to a mere instrument for production. He dignified it until he conceived it as a fundamental experience of self-realization, an act of noble cooperation and solidarity, and he declared work as the capital instrumental factor. It is man's primacy as the first factor in the social order, and the economic aspect's servitude to it. Work is the greatest thing that a man can give to others. In this sense, work is the attribute that grants man with the maximum honour of being a co-operator of God in the transformation and fecundation of nature and the resulting promotion of human welfare.

Arizmendiarieta's concept of work, strongly linked to the cultural order that is characteristic of industrial societies, sinks its roots into several

thought currents: the Christian social doctrine, the individualist philosophy, Basque social tradition and socialism.

In Arizmendiarieta's opinion work has a true human meaning when it is cooperative. The fact that the person is realized in and by work harmonizes the efforts and drives them to the term of the common good. Here we find the central nucleus that Arizmendiarieta condensed in his concept of work: **work is, above all, a service to the community.** And at the same time, as it has been pointed out, it is the means of fundamental self-realization: in so far as he transforms with work, creates the world which he is part of, man is his own creator through work. Work is, therefore, a way to both **solidarity-orientated and personal self-realization**, individual improvement and collective improvement. Work is the thread that joins the human being in its triple relationship, with nature, with its current fellows, and with the last and future generations. From the individualist point of view, work is taken in its full extension and wealth, human work at its three levels: production, education and creation.

Our Experience has always started from this deep work ethics. The development and application of this conception has been and still is one of the most characteristic features in our collective personality and an indispensable factor that has made the path we have travelled possible. Deeply rooted in a town whose cultural universe has been strongly impregnated by this spirit, we have built a relationship with work that is especially positive, and it is evident that this attitude in favour of the personal work effort, inserted in a common project and in cooperation with others, has been and still is the orientating pillar of the Experience.

## WORK ETHICS AT THE PRESENT TIME

In the opinion of many thinkers and social scientists, in recent times the deep meaning of work as a social and moral value, so intensely taken and developed by the Arizmendiarieta experience, has lost strength in western societies. A certain **indifference with regard to the value and ethics of work** seems to be being consolidated, which is, on the other hand, quite comprehensible in a context of an employment crisis (high unemployment, precariousness of existing employment) that make a relationship with work difficult in terms of self-realization and implication. According to these reflections, the satisfaction of the need for self-construction of the individual's modern societies would be gradually moved from the environment of production and work to other environments of life (consumption, lifestyles, etc.) in which the construction of personal identity would slowly but surely find favourable ground. From this point of view, work acquires a fully instrumental meaning, which means it is understood as a mere source of income that will be used in acts of consumption that aim to found the individual identity. In this respect, work moves away from Arizmendiarieta's view, it dehumanises and produces alienation, and it would find itself in the antipodes of the responsible and participative attitude that is characteristic of the cooperative tradition.

However, other reflections show that in western societies there seems to be a slow but unstoppable cultural movement from so-called materialistic values (concern for economic achievement, material welfare, economic growth and satisfaction of physiologic needs) towards values qualified as post-materialistic (concern for the quality of life, social needs and self-realization needs, social and aesthetic aspects of life, free time and leisure, enjoyment of life, cultivation of oneself, etc.). These post-materialistic values would be in critical relationship with the functional imperatives demanded by an industrial pro-production society. This means, the post-materialistic values would have more to do with the emergence of a post-industrial society. However, on the other hand, from this less mechanical and instrumental view of the world, the individual would centre more of its energy on giving meaning to its existence. This way, as regards work, from these evaluative positions many people today would give more importance to an interesting job, with meaning and good relationships in the work place than to secure jobs and the high incomes. Therefore, it is a conception of work as an option of self-realization, in accordance with Arizmendiarieta's outlook.

In relation to work and its cultural meaning, there are different and even opposed readings. The evaluative universe that is characteristic of modern societies today contains paradoxical elements, and an unequivocal and unidirectional reading is not enough. The cooperative experience is not resistant to the social and cultural reality that surrounds it. In these cultural processes that leave their stamp on us there seem to be changes that converge with the cooperative idea of work and others that move away from it.

## THE ORGANIZATION OF WORK

In spite of the complexity and the paradoxical nature of these changes, the consensus on a loss of centrality of work in social and individual life seems to stand out. In the light of this process, activating a conception of work that emphasizes its dimension of self-realization, dignity, humanization and solidarity, and how to carry out this activation, should constitute unavoidable concerns.

The possibility of developing new ways of organizing work that promote a more participative and responsible attitude, is not unconnected with this work. Making the cooperative social philosophy compatible with a less rigid and authoritarian organization of work could be an interesting terrain to develop. This way a greater technical-economic efficiency could be conjugated, with work methods that offer a greater social bonus, greater quality in working life, greater significance of work and a potentiation of the worker's autonomy, responsibility and self-esteem. The idea of self-managed work groups and an organization of work based on the product and not on the function, seem like ideas that clearly converge with the principle of the humanization of work, the dignifying of work and optimisation of the participation in the productive processes. Work will be humanized in so far as it is transformed into a source of greater satisfactions for the human being.

## THE REALITY OF WORK

The possible loss of centrality of work in social and individual life, and the supposed weakening of work ethics, cannot breakaway from the transformations in socio-economic structures and the place that human work currently occupies in production. The creation of new jobs and the humanization of already existing ones constitute high-priority objectives in the Arizmendiarieta cooperative experience, where this task is understood as a service and duty towards the community. At present, this task must be carried out in a certain context, marked by a deep employment crisis. Nowadays, the labour market relegates a great part of the citizens to a state that makes the development of a project of self-realization and human dignity difficult, as they are excluded from it or are inserted in indecent conditions that do not help this project. Unemployment and precariousness are widely recognised phenomenon that are raised to the category of maximum concern in the political and social debate.

## UNEMPLOYMENT AS A CONSEQUENCE OF TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

Indeed, the labour market is crossed by unemployment rates whose dimensions consign to the past debates on the character of the market, about whether it was due to the situation or it was structural. A great part of this unemployment rate is explained as a logical consequence of technological development, based on labour-saving techniques. Keynes already predicted this in 1930: "We are being punished with a new illness, some of those who are reading this may not have heard its name, but they will hear it a lot in the coming years: technological unemployment. This is unemployment due to our discovery of means to economize the use of the work factor surpassing the rate with which we can find new jobs for the work available".

By the middle of the seventies many specialists on technological change began to publish different prospective studies which showed the potential of destruction of employment that characterized what was then being called the "computer revolution". This way, the Nora-Minc report, which ventured the possibility of removing up to 30% of the staff from banks and insurance companies; or the Stanford Research Institute study, which stated that 80% of the manual tasks in the USA could be automated before the end of the century. Many analysts state that "we are witnessing the gradual decrease of the employment society" (Handy), or that we are witnessing the "end of the society of work" (Habermas), or that "work in the traditional sense of the word will gradually disappear, which will lead to the disappearance of the workers and, therefore, to the disappearance of the working class as they represent the whole group" (Schaff).

The statistics relating to the Spanish State (Juan N. García-Nieto) are overwhelming: at the beginning of this century work represented 25% of every hour in the entire human life cycle. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is estimated that it will only occupy 11%. In other words: according to these estimates, the time spent on paid active work will be twelve years, accumulated throughout life, whilst the rest of the working years that are not spent by working in its traditional sense will be nineteen. However, something must be done to use up this empty time, and that something should not be, like it is today for many millions of people, unemployment, without any type of occupational content or activity that offers personal development and social welfare.

A well-known specialist on the subject such as Schaff summarizes the matter as follows: "It is necessary to discuss the proportions and rate of intensity of the decrease in demand of live manpower due to automation and the introduction of robotics. The compensation of losses through the creation of new jobs as a result of technological innovations and the new demand in the production and services sphere is debatable. However, in the light of the facts and predictions related to technological development during the current industrial revolution it is impossible to deny, without running the risk of being called ignorant, that new technologies are notably reducing the demand of manpower, leading to an increasingly greater number of fields with zero demand, that is to say, total, full automation".

In summary: **socially necessary work is falling**, more and more things are being produced in a better way with less and less human work. According to Jeremy Rifkin, in last century the same problem occurred in the agricultural sector as a consequence of the technological development this sector experienced: productivity increased unceasingly whilst human work moved massively to urban areas where industry demanded great quantities of manpower. The great difference between this great historical transformation and the current one would reside in that nowadays there is no economic sector in sight, like the flourishing industry sector of that time, that is capable of absorbing the human work displaced from the industrial sector.

The impact of the application of new technologies on employment is a question that society, and we as members of it, cannot avoid. The technological advance can be by no means considered in itself as harmful, but in the light of other possibilities that this advance will benefit society as a whole, in the context we live in technology displaces from work to the citizen, which is seen to be reduced by so much work with nothing in exchange. The capitalist system and its use to the benefit of private interests of socially produced technology, tends to sacrifice the interests of citizens as a whole for the economic benefit of socially well-established sectors. From positions with greater solidarity and that are more in accordance with values that are characteristic of the cooperative Experience, it is necessary to oppose this concentration of welfare and power, a view that defends a greater social distribution of the welfare and power, promoting the technological development in a emancipating sense and to the benefit of society as a whole.

## PRECARIOUSNESS OF WORK

From this global analysis of the impact of technology on employment, and from a certain historical perspective, the idea is entering more and more social sectors (the Club of Rome reports are proof of this) that a time of full employment will never return with working days of forty hours a week, eleven months a year, over forty working years. In order to maintain this model we would have to turn to keys of the past, and this could bear the consolidation of a dual society, with privileged well-paid people with stable employment as opposed to others convicted to less and less subsidized unemployment, or to precariousness, and, therefore, unable to achieve a project of a decent life.

Indeed, besides unemployment the labour market is crossed by another great phenomenon which is the precariousness of work. In this case, the historical perspective can also help us to understand the phenomenon in its full scope.

In the early times of capitalism, the new order that was gradually imposed required the dissolving of the old feudal, union ties. The capitalist order required *free* individuals, without ties that stopped their integration in the growing industry, willing to sell the only thing that they possessed: their ability to work. The typically feudal or class social bond is being broken in a slow but constant evolution towards the consolidation of the idea of the free work contract as a social institution. From then on, the fight of the labour movement can be understood as the action dedicated to achieving the assignment of a collective statute for the workers, i.e. guarantees and rights that protect them from the isolation and abandonment that they suffer in the light of the enormous asymmetry in the allocation of power: the supposed freedom of workers in the labour market is in practice a situation that brings degradation and a lack of dignity, especially during the first few years the capitalist model of production is installed. These guarantees and rights have historically referred to working individuals (it will be regulated in favour of not recruiting women and children as labour); to the regulation of the working day (it reached up to sixteen hours a day); and in general, the rights and guarantees have historically referred to working conditions.

At the present time, many speak of the gradual dismantling of this collective statute that links guarantees and rights to the work factor. The dismantling of protections once again promotes an individual which only owns its human capital, subject to the ups and downs and exclusive needs of the market, which will have to fight in an isolated and singular way in order to create a niche in the labour market. Making the work market more **flexible**; the installation of multiple contractual figures, which, in practice, practically remove the security from employment; the **progressive non-protection** of situations of unemployment (nowadays, two out of three

unemployed people do not receive any subsidy), etc. All of this marks an evolution towards vulnerability, the individualized existence of the citizen and the breaking of the collective statute that came from the industrial conflict of this century. A great part of today's world of work, acquires hints of a past that was already considered distant, conditions (salary, duration, risks, etc.) that especially affect the young and women, and that maintain an antagonistic relationship with the idea of dignity of work as understood from the cooperative, Arizmendiarieta point of view.

## SOLUTIONS TO THE EMPLOYMENT CRISIS

Getting over the current employment crisis requires more efforts in the competitiveness of Basque companies in general, and cooperatives in particular. Together with this, in different sectors of the Basque society speeches have gained weight by defending the recognition of the limits of economic measures in the search for solutions to the social employment crisis, and evaluating another type of measures that could be better adjusted to the new concerns and conditions of the future society. These sectors defend practices (reduction of the working day and distribution of employment) that would combine the attempts to solve the employment crisis in the economic sphere, with the **social sphere**, seeing in it an attempt to recover the weight of solidarity-orientated reason.

These matters are not exempt of doubts and enigmas. However, in a social context in which certain positions acquire a considerable degree of social acceptance, it seems unavoidable that the cooperative community debates and meditates on the pros and cons, on clear and unclear points, from its peculiar form of looking at and understanding reality.

### Questions for debate:

- Does an indifference exist today in the Arizmendiarieta cooperative experience with regard to the work value and the implication within it? How do we activate work ethics in accordance with the Arizmendiarieta ideal?
- Is the work idea compatible as an option of self-realization and an expression of personal maturity and solidarity with a traditional work organization? What lines of action could be implemented in favour of the self-realizing option?
- Does cooperativism offer another model of creating employment that is different from the one that is being created by the majority (precarious, unstable, buyable and sellable merchandise, not linked to many rights and guarantees)?
- In the light of what for many is an unstoppable and general process where human work is losing weight in production, as a consequence of technological development and the resulting automation processes, are the economic prescriptions based on competitiveness and good business enough to create jobs, or does this work complementarily require structural measures and other methods of solidarity, such as the reduction of the working day and the distribution of employment?

Should the cooperative world be established in this type of measures as regards the social aspect?

- Is a reduction in the working day possible without a reduction in wages? Is it desirable?
- Is it possible to combine the Arizmendiarrieta concept of work (work ethics, self-realization, etc.) with this reduction of the working day?