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Modernisation and Transformation of the Social

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Modernisation and Transformation of the Social

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Introduction

Today we hear everywhere about the need to modernise. It is not only the public sector and the whole welfare state that are to be extensively modernised, but also the labour market and the society of employment in general. Our lifestyles and all of our values and attitudes are to undergo a deep modernising transformation.

The expression “modernisation” is so powerful that it has become an argument in itself, with no need to justify its usage. It is enough to label any proposal for change as a ‘modernising reform’ and the change is automatically considered to be correct and desirable. If we declare that something is modern, we substantially restrict the possibility of doubts or even criticism, which is very perplexing – all the more so because the expression “modernisation” is by far one of the most nebulous terms that practical politics have taken over from the social sciences. Even after half a century of fierce discussion, there is no unity in scientific circles as to exactly what “modernisation” means, and this vagueness actually seems to be quite welcome with many a professional “moderniser”. (1)

In fact, we are already going through the second wave of modernisation. The first one came shortly after World War II and culminated in the 1950s and at the beginning of the 1960s. After that, it lost its influence and for the next two decades the theories of modernisation remained almost forgotten. The renaissance of modernising theories came as late as in the 1980s and this trend remains today. The necessity to modernise is emphasised today with the same passion as it was fifty years ago. However, what totally escapes attention is how radically the very vision of what modernised society represents has changed over the years.

After the Second World War, the pinnacle of modernisation was seen as the construction of a strong welfare state with which strong middle classes were to live in perfect harmony making use of all the benefits of a widely accessible public sector. Market forces were supposed to be regulated consistently, according to the social needs of people and in harmony with the main imperative, which was a further extension of social rights. This was to be a society of employment which was supposed to guarantee a continual and irreversible increase of income (however sedate) and a secured future to its members. The components of this idea were everyone’s access to standard mass consump-

tion, full coverage of all social risks and the certainty of an old-age pension at the end of one's career. As a whole, society was supposed to be managed more and more efficiently using the results of scientific knowledge and the latest techniques of organisation. Modernising theories themselves were to be the evidence and proof that it is possible to use knowledge from the social sciences to intervene into the development of whole societies.

The content of modernising slogans at the end of the 20th century is in absolute contradiction of this. The aim of modernising efforts becomes the disintegration of everything which, until recently, was considered to be its culmination. Now it is absolutely necessary to radically slim down and extensively reduce the welfare state. The market has to undergo absolute deregulation and the only-recently-introduced social rights must be restricted step by step as they have a negative impact on the world-wide competitive strength of the economy. Interventions into the managing of society are completely off-limits and in overcoming any problems, the market must be given a free hand. The economy must be radically deregulated, large employment organisations must be broken up in order to be replaced by flexible networks. The preferred instruments of the second wave of modernisation become the flexibilisation of work and "rationalisation" of the public sector, i.e. mainly the extensive slimming down of social security and its transfer from public institutions to private service providers and funds. So it is not cumulative knowledge represented by science but the predominant forces of the market which are to take care of the optimisation of the society's structure and provide dynamics for its development.

As we can see, the recipe for modernisation is exactly the opposite of the original one, even though the results are to be absolutely the same as the ones promised in the first stage. They are faster economic growth, more freedom for everyone and improved wellbeing.

This, of course, raises the question of why the first type of modernisation actually stopped being modern enough, why it had to be replaced by another type of modernisation and why this all has been happening since the last quarter of the 20th century. There will probably be several reasons. One of them is that the modernising theory itself has a totally different task to solve at the end of the 20th century than the theories bearing the same name in the middle of that century.

Shortly after World War II, the main task was seen in exporting the structures of the developed industrial countries to the agrarian countries of the world's South. (2) At that time, theories of modernisation recommended ways in which the elite in Third-world countries were to elevate its passive agrarian masses to the level of progressive industry. Today these theories describe how the elite in all the countries of the world are to take their passive industrial population to the level of flexible networks in the economy of services. The first wave of modernisation promotes industrialisation as a solution to the problems of the countries of the world's South, the second wave, just as decisively, promotes deregulation, privatisation and liberalisation as solutions to the problems of absolutely any country on the Planet. Integration of the world's East and South into the western model still remains the central objective; the western model itself, however, is undergoing considerable changes. While in the first wave, this paradigm of all modernising efforts had the form of organised modernity on the rise, in the second wave, this model already reflects the crisis of organised modernity. (3)

It is relatively easy to imagine modernisation in the area of scientific knowledge. There, it has the form of better instruments, better research methods and better theories. In the area of economics, it means more effective production, less raw material and energy used in production, higher profits and higher revenues. In health care, it means more effective treatment, and in transport, faster, more comfortable and safer travelling. In the area of administration, it means more clearly organised, faster and at the same time less expensive administration of the affairs for which the administration is responsible.

It is, however, much more difficult to imagine what modernised interpersonal relationships should look like. How can you modernise friendship, neighbourly relations, partnership, marriage and at the same time not make these relationships more fragile and endangered? The picture we see rather suggests that in modernised society more than ever before, the feelings of isolation and transience are much more prevalent.

In the area of social relations, the process of modernisation shows nothing of a linear course of development by a long way and the results are often surprising.

This study offers a critical review of possible impacts of these modernising efforts. We were inspired by words which more and more often accompany the

reflections of prominent scientists about the present direction of modernity and modernisation development. The British sociologist Anthony Giddens notes that the market radicalism of the present times could result in some kind of a regression to the previous stages of development. He even speaks about the threat of introducing a certain type of “new middle ages”, i.e. refeudalisation of social relations (Giddens 1994). German scientist Christoph Butterwegge warns of the danger of “post-modern middle ages”, i.e. a society which under the pretext of never-ending innovation re-introduces conditions which remind us of the society of privileges of the estates, with unsurpassed patriarchy and a network of protective ties in the form of family or neighbourly relations (Butterwegge 2001: 16, 118; 2005: 21). Another prominent German sociologist, Claus Offe, allows for the possibility of a regression when, precisely as a result of mishandled modernisation, the society falls into rigidity and inertia, the overcoming of which actually was the main objective of all of the modernising efforts from the very beginning (Offe 1996: 29). In his book characteristically entitled “The New Middle Ages” (1993), French economist Alain Minc finds elements of refeudalisation in the area of “grey zones” in which laws issued by official institutions in power have long ago lost their validity and given way to the rules introduced by feuding mafias. And finally Ulrich Beck states, for instance in his book “In search of Politics” (1993), that the process of disintegration of simple modernity and the situation of general chaos outside as well as inside institutions facilitates the creation of networks transcending borders of the differentiated systems. Disintegrating the institutions of simple modernity makes room for the “refeudalisation of social relations” (Beck 1993: 234). (4)

We will try to explain why, in the opinion of many prominent contemporary scientists, it is possible that the process of modernisation has led to the very real danger that society, coming full circle, will return to patterns of behaviour which were until now considered to have been overcome for good with the arrival of modernity. At the same time, we will try to show that this scenario of development, i.e. the scenario of barbarisation of modernity, does not have to be accidental. On the contrary, it might be encoded directly in the internal contradictions of modernity. Unfortunately, these contradictions are not being healed by today’s mode of modernisation; on the contrary, they are becoming extremely acute and can get out of any kind of control quite easily. (5)

Notes

(1) As observed by Anton Sterling, the more fundamentally the word “modernisation” is called into question in the social sciences, the more often and with all the more ease it is used in public discussions and in politicians’ rhetoric (Sterbling 1991: 105). Other authors add that the expression “modernisation” was selected as the common denominator with the lowest measure of specificity when describing the transformations taking place in the 20th century which are so confusing and unclear that neither their direction nor their meaning can be expressed by a more concrete term. (Zaumseil, Leferink 1997).

(2) Another issue discussed within the framework of the convergence theory was whether the countries of the former socialist bloc were able to develop their own industrial society in their own way and, due to the economic growth, mature into democracies and societies of general wellbeing based on consumerism.

(3) For more details on the concept of organised modernity, its development and its present crisis see Wagner (1995).

(4) French sociologist Michel Maffesoli speaks along similar lines, albeit from the positions of post-modern thought: “Because we are blinded by the values which ruled the modern period and because we are too certain of their “modern”, i.e. invincible character, we have difficulty understanding that they might give way to forms of being and thinking that are characteristic of the pre-modern periods. We have to realise that there is precious little that is new under the sun, or even nothing at all, and that phenomena considered to have been surpassed show a tendency of returning to the fore of the social scene” (Maffesoli 2002: 165). In another of his works, the same author illustrates how tribal motifs and mentality known from the times of barbarism grow up right in the middle of the post-modern culture and resonate with it (Maffesoli 2000).

(5) This study deals with the social aspects of the process of modernisation. For the sake of brevity, chapters analysing the development of sociological theories of modernisation were excluded from the study. However, the author proceeds primarily from his knowledge of the German theories of modernisation by Wolfgang Zapf (Zapf 1979, Zapf 1987, Zapf 1990, Zapf 1994) and Ulrich Beck (Beck 1986, Beck 1991, Beck 1993, Beck 1994, Beck 1995, Beck 2001). His work is also based on the texts of critical analysts of modernisation theories (Wehler 1975, Harrison 1988, Loo, Reijen 1995, Lahusen, Stark 2000, Knöbl 2001 and others).

Chapter 1

***PROCESS OF MODERNISATION AND
TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOCIAL***

The basic starting point of our deliberation is the claim that before the rise of modernity, society did not exist. There existed a varied, locally differentiated and very confused tangle of various types of mutual protective bonds between individuals and whole groups.

To speak of a society in the real sense of the word is only possible when we speak about the modern society. In the case of pre-modern social systems which varied immensely both historically and culturally, these systems always assumed local proportions which corresponded with the personal character of relations between its members. These absolutely concrete interpersonal relations predominantly fulfilled protective functions. They protected people who could not expect to get help from anywhere else.

The question of how modern society could have evolved from this pre-modern stage, which had filled in an absolute majority of human history, has been one of the pivotal questions of sociology from the very beginning. We will try to show that modernity has developed precisely as the by-product of the clash between the various bonds of mutual protection.

1.1 The nature of modern society

In principle, sociological theory identifies four basic qualities which determine the nature of modernity. Modern society differs from all of the traditional types of social systems, especially in the high degree of generalisation of relations essential for its functioning. All social relations are generalised, which means that they are less and less tied to concrete people and concrete situations. Generalisation of social relations gradually increases the exchangeability of those entering into such relations which is especially obvious in big, modern organisations. Their highly formalised structure enables them to co-ordinate actions of large numbers of people regardless of the replacement of any one of them.

The process of generalisation of social relations has had ambivalent impacts on the life of modern society. Generalised and formalised decision-making structures enable the increase of efficiency in any area of social life. At the same time, however, this type of co-ordination contributes to a considerable increase in impersonality, making identification with the system more and more difficult for the participants and leading to feelings of alienation; and in a sector specialising in the performing of social support and social help functions, this contradiction is per-

Chapter 2

THE CONSEQUENCES OF MODERNITY

In his analysis of the process of globalisation, Ulrich Beck distinguishes between globality and globalism. Globalism is a pure ideology describing the world the way neoliberals would like to have it. In the world according to these neoliberal wishes, all of society's problems are solved by the world market rendering any political decision-making useless. In this vision, the whole society is managed on the pattern of an entrepreneurial entity. The entrepreneurial sphere determines the conditions for the operation of all of the other areas of society's life; however, it is doing so only with regard to the optimisation of its own objectives. (Beck 1997: 27).

On the other hand, globality is the reflection of the real world in which all places and all groups of people are becoming more and more interdependent. In this real world, there is no one area which would be closed off to external influence. All ways and forms of living (including the western one) are starting to lose their previous naturalness and learning to live together with the other ones, respect their multiplicity, diversity and dissimilarity. In globality, ecological, cultural, economic, political and many other processes coexist, each of them having their own importance and following their own logic which may not be reduced to the logic of increasing profits.

Ulrich Beck's differentiation suggests a cardinal question indeed. Is the subordination of all areas of society's life to the needs of the economy a real process or are we only dealing with the wishful thinking of neoliberals? This essential problem is present in many discussions and it is particularly audible in polemics about the welfare state's chances of survival in the conditions of the globalised world. Sceptics believe that as a result of the pressures from the globalised economy, the welfare state is going to lose its footing. Optimists, on the other hand, insist that the pressures being spoken about are more or less virtual in their essence. It is enough for the welfare state not to accept this vision, go its own way and perhaps, with some minor adjustments, it will be able to work just as well as it did in the past.

We believe that such reassuring views are grossly misplaced. Neoliberal ideology does not run against the course of history. The reverse is the case, it passively adjusts and conforms to the logic of the media of money which is gaining ever more independence and colonising everything standing in its way. Neolib-

eral economists are not pioneering new and bold trends. They are just those who obediently follow, having recognised very well where the winds of modernity are blowing from. We can fully agree with their stance that in the modern world, money always comes as late as in the first place and that this tendency will only be gaining strength until the moment when the rule of the economy has colonised all of the other subsystems of society.

There is only one thing which we and the neoliberals are not able to agree on – it is their enthusiasm for this process and their firm belief in its irreversibility. Neoliberal ideologists fail to see that economic expansion systematically disrupts and destroys relations of both primary and secondary sociability. This process does not usher in greater freedom; on the contrary, it opens the door to the arrival of a brand new form of modernity barbarisation.

2.1 Triumph of the economic mind

Jürgen Habermas provides a very vivid description of how the systemic steering media of power and money, after having gained independence and extricated themselves from their original purposes, have continued colonising the life-world (Lebenswelt) step by step. Habermas's conception started to take shape in the 1970s and it was published at the beginning of the 1980s. We have progressed much further since then and today, we have reached another stage in the development and it is becoming obvious that money, when compared to the political power of the state, works as a much more industrious colonist. The process of accelerated colonisation of the life-world by the economy which we are witnessing today introduces anew the classical question of the relationship between the economy and the social. It is not a static relationship. It has gradually gone through several developmental stages over the course of history.

In the first stage, in the archaic and traditional period, scattered elements of economic life were closely interconnected with the reproduction of the social and worked in synchronisation with it. Social anthropology in particular studied this long period of symbiosis very carefully and it primarily focused on the symbolic function of exchange (Marcel Mauss, Bronislaw Malinowski), on the non-economic behavioural patterns characteristic of the archaic societies (Marshall Sahlins, Maurice Godelier), or on the essential mental differences in the perception of economically relevant categories between the traditional and modern so-

Chapter 3

GLOBALISATION

The process of globalisation represents the world-wide result of modernisation trends. The process not only radically transforms the social in the wider sense of the word, it also intervenes in the content of the social when more narrowly understood as relations of mutual protection. It is a known and frequently emphasised fact that, due to globalisation, society ceases to work within the framework of nation states, it ceases to coalesce with the nation state within the same borders and its place is taken over by the “world society” – which, however, exists without a world state and without a world government.

Much less attention is paid to the question of how much the same process of globalisation has changed the social in the narrower sense of the word, that is when the social is understood as the bonds of security and protection. It is unfortunate that so little attention is paid to the process of gradual disintegration of these bonds, a process which has been unfolding in successive waves during the mutual interactions of the world’s North and South.

We will try to show that this is actually the right perspective to take, a perspective that makes it possible to uncover some deeper logic to the whole process of globalisation. We proceed on the assumption that this process, in its present form, had not been contemplated by anyone, that its main participants (supra-national companies) have emerged only in the course of this process and that the principle of unintended consequences actually dominates the whole story of globalisation. The sad heroes of this story are the rich countries of the North – in their effort to increase their profits, these countries set into motion processes the consequences of which now pose a fundamental threat to these countries themselves.

We will try to show that - if we take into consideration its development up to now - globalisation is nothing but an attempt to colonise the public domain by private interests on a planet-wide scale.

3.1 Disputes about the nature of globalisation

Only very few people still doubt today that the process of globalisation represents a force which in an unprecedented way interferes with conditions existing in all countries on all continents and triggers off unusually radical changes of relations existing in all the various areas of our lives. On the other hand, there does not exist even a semblance of agreement concerning the question of when

Chapter 4

BARBARIZED MODERNITY

Modernising theories usually depart from the assumption that the process of modernisation is in fact a persistent trend. It may perhaps be temporarily put on hold or slowed down, but in principle, it has a tendency to grow. Ulrich Beck's theory of reflexive modernisation is based on the thesis of modernity's deep ambiguity. This ambiguity harbours the potential both for permanent growth of society's humanisation as well as powers in absolute opposition to this through the action of which the most valuable elements of human culture and civilisation may be lost. This theory also reflects hopes that modern society will pass a crucial turning point which will make it possible to fully develop this positive potential of modernity.

Logically, there is another possible scenario. The conflicts of modernity may result in the preponderance of the negative elements which would lead to a regression and return to some kind of a new, post-modern barbarism. (1) Just as in the theories of reflexive modernisation, this scenario also works with the moment of a crucial turning point in the history of modern society. But it does not share their optimism regarding the results of this process.

When speaking about barbarisation and regression of modernity, the arguments often heard in discussions speak about experience with totalitarian regimes. These regimes reflected conditions in which public authority threatened to subordinate and colonise all of the areas belonging to people's own, private affairs. The nature of these regimes may be described as an extremely bureaucratised and etatised result of the organised stage of modernity.

The emergence and functioning of totalitarian regimes in the 20th century can be explained as a quite logical accompaniment of the process of modernisation. These regimes are the dark side of the same modernisation which gave rise to the developed western democracies.

As a matter of principle, the totalitarian outcome of the modernising processes may be interpreted in two ways. It is possible to see it as the unexpected consequence of the independence gained by the modernising medium in the form of power, i.e. in the form of the all-powerful state with its coercive machinery. Or the totalitarian form of modernity may be explained as the accompaniment and consequence of the independence gained by the modernising medium in the form of money, respectively in the form of the omnipotent imperative to appreci

ate capital in the process of goods production. The first explanation is offered in Zygmunt Bauman's book *Modernity and the Holocaust* (2003), the second explanation is described in the work *The Collapse of Modernisation* (1994) by Robert Kurz.

Confronted by these two approaches, we would like to express our conviction that the grim visions fearing the arrival of new totalitarianism do not have to come true. They correspond to the conditions of organised modernity the qualities of which were brought to barbaric ends. We live in different times today; these are the times of disorganised modernity. Even though we are nowhere near eliminating the threat of modernity barbarisation, it is acquiring a distinctly different form. (2).

In today's world, big formal organisations have given way to the fluid structure of highly changeable networks. Deliberations about the possible barbarisation of modernity should take this trend into consideration. Barbarised modernity then would not have the form of a highly organised totalitarian system characterised by the absolute dictate of the public over the private. Far from that, the system would disintegrate into a varied but uninviting assortment of privatised bonds of protection where private interests left, right and centre swallow up remnants of the public domain. We will term such conditions as "refeudalisation" or "post-modern feudalism".

4.1 Disorganised barbarism

What form could modernity acquire in conditions where the economic imperative gradually gains control of all of society and private interests colonise the public domain? Around what principles society could be arranged if the power and importance of the state takes a back seat and diminishes ever more and the prerogatives of state authority are transferred to private entities? What would a society look like in which erosion of the public sector is gaining momentum and services which this sector formerly provided are conscientiously privatised one after another? Undoubtedly, demand for the provision of security and safety would increase in such a society, reflecting the decline of the state's monopoly on their guaranteeing. Population would be more and more divided into those who are able to pay for above-standard, individually provided services and those who would be left to their own devices using various forms of self-help.

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At present, modern society has been undergoing sharp changes comparable perhaps only to those which had occurred at the time of its emergence. The measure of uncertainty which has been accompanying these changes is as high today as it was at the beginning of modernity.

It is a well known fact that modern society gradually succeeded in developing institutions which substantially helped to reduce the measure of uncertainty in life. The Welfare State undoubtedly played an important role among these institutions as it managed to stabilise the balance between the private and the public spheres, contributed to the solving of the Social Question of the 19th century and introduced new mechanisms of insuring against social risks.

It was in this environment facilitated by the development of the Welfare State that social work developed as a more or less systematic and more or less prudent way of intervening into the area of the social. For it turned out that in the social area, the process of modernisation does not automatically bring effects as beneficial as is the case, for instance, in the economic area, or in the area of science and technology development. Social work thus evolved into a discipline which was used to rectify or amend some of the problematic impacts of these modernising changes.

We must keep in mind, however, that the efforts to establish social work as an independent scientific discipline at a practical level, as well as the efforts for its delimitation at a theoretical level, occurred during the period of relative equanimity and stabilisation which followed only after the initial shocks accompanying the arrival of modernity.

This logically raises the question of which of these efforts are still valid at a time when modern society has been radically transforming itself before our very eyes while many of the things which were taken for granted in the last century are now being called into question. In order to search for answers to this question, we must first understand the nature of the changes modernity has been going through. Do they occur at random or are the impulses which set them in motion deeply rooted in the foundations of modernity itself?

Asking the aforementioned question, however, only gives rise to a whole number of further questions and these are related to the very essence of the sociological theory. What actually is the social when understood in the narrow sense of this word, i.e. the social which social work deals with? Where is the place of the social area in the structure of modern society? What consequences for the social area may today's stage of modernisation have? And how are all of these processes linked to the relationship between the public and the private, a relationship which had established during the process of building the Welfare State and which for a long period of time guaranteed the stability of the whole society?

These are the questions raised in this study. Its aim is to analyse those transformations of the present-day society which have a direct impact upon both the theoretical delimitation as well as the practical operation of the activities for which we use the umbrella term Social Work. Of course this discipline does not develop in some kind of a social vacuum and this is the reason why, for its self-understanding, it is so important to try to understand the deep changes which modern society has been going through and the numerous risks which (not only in the area of social work) have been triggered by them.