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Main Points of the Session on Labour

Labour and Labour Relations

- Globalisation of economy or market-oriented reorganisation of the social and economic institutions in the nation state implies, at first, the re-commodification of labour. The labour employed in the capitalist production system bares originally the nature of commodity which can be sold and bought on the market as a commodity in general. However, various social institutions and norms, which aimed to de-commodify human labour, have developed through a long history of labour movement and social policies of the state. Neo-liberal ideology and the deregulation policies led by it are aiming to dismantle such social institutions and norms which have protected human labour from the market mechanism and to re-commodify labour as a commodity in general.
- Neo-liberal argument asserts that the free market would liberalize the free will of workers and bring about the most efficient allocation of resources. On the contrary, they argue, the trade union and the collective bargaining distort the normal function of markets and produce inefficiency and inappropriate resource allocation, including unemployment. Milton Freedman, for example, criticise from such a view point the collective bargaining by labour organizations and the statutory minimum wage.
- Whereas are there many discussions about the actual effect of the neo-liberal ideology and politics, we have experienced certain change in general feature of political economy in these decades. So called Keynesian welfare state has been criticized and retrenched in various ways, although its fundamental scheme is still viable. The union density has dropped sharply in many countries and the power of the management has been strengthened in the firm and in the politics. Of course, there happens resurgence of the "neo-corporatist" arrangements in some countries and of leftist social democratic governments in Europe, but all regions and all countries are exposed the pressure of international competition.
- Re-commodification of labour means to separate the value of labour as commodity in the market from the need of human life and the value of human activities in society. Labour will be sold at the market price which is determined by the demand and supply of labour in the market; wages fixed by the market will not have, at least theoretically, any relations with the need of workers. Hence, emerge low-paid workers, particularly among female and atypical workers, who cannot afford their own living incomes.
- Major questions are how to consider the meaning of work from the view-point of human activities and human needs in society, how to analyse the causes and conditions of the rise of the neo-liberal ideology and policies, and how to construct the alternative strategies to realize the human value, such as liberty and human dignity of workers in the workplace, society and world-wide human communities.

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30-08-2003 00:Aug

