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Social minima in Europe: the risks of cumulating income-sources^{*1}

“Absolute and generalized security of all incomes conducts inevitably towards the abolition of the market order”

F. Von Hayek

Stephen BOUQUIN**

1 - Introduction

“Social minima and wage labor: Europe viewed from below” is the title of a research program conducted between 1998 and 2001 in France, Germany, United Kingdom and Belgium. Together with Catherine Lévy, Anne Gray, Estelle Krzeslo and Martin Gück, I studied the benefit recipients of social minima, as well as low wage workers, poor and unemployed people. The general overview of the evolution of social minima can be resumed as follows a three-fold tendency towards:

- a reduction of the amount, the availability (access to) and the duration of entitlement;
- the generalization of minimal benefits with universalistic access on the one hand and higher conditionality on the other;
- The possibility of drawing several incomes from benefits and from works (not necessary wage-labor).

These tendencies take place in a context whereas we face a fragmentation of the post-war “employment standard”, i.e. full time work with unlimited contracts, and the equivalent “income-standard” being a well-paid (household) wage assumed in the first place (but not uniquely) by “male breadwinners”.

This fragmentation encompass:

- an important, although unequal, mass unemployment with a growing part of longterm unemployed people;
- an increase of poverty both among unemployed, retired and working (active) people
- a growing layer of “casual”, precarious, workers, with uncertain work and income, part-time and temporary contracts (see table 1 & 2)
- the dissociation of a layer “stable” (well qualified or knowledge) workers around firm-centered solidarity (complementary insurance schemes based on capitalization and pension funds)

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Table 1 - Proportion of women in unemployment quitting unemployment for a part-time job

	1990	1994	1998
Belgium	49	48	54,5
France	36	55	53
United Kingdom	54	56	60
Germany	47	45	40
Netherlands	57	78	75,6
Spain	14	23	27
EU	30	42	40

Table 2 - Proportion of unemployed population quitting unemployment for a temporary job

	Men	Women		
	1994	1998	1994	1998
Belgium	50	52	30	53
France	52	60	58	62
United Kingdom	22	20	23	19
Germany	36	43	40	48
Netherlands	37	48	41	47,5
Spain	92	89	89	83
EU	23	20	50	55

As we can observe, the evolution since the early nineties is basically oriented towards segmentation of the workforce. In some countries (Spain & UK) both masculine and female unemployed found less temporary work than before, while in other countries the increase of it concerns essentially women.

Transformation of social security systems tends to reduce the distinctions between the Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian and continental models. The general dynamic goes towards segmented labor market. A dualistic social security system has been created with a basic minimal public funded “solidarity” (more and more taxes and lesser contributions based on wages) in case of unemployment, sickness and retirement on the one hand and private or mixed new saving funds or insurance schemes for additional income guaranties.

The evolution of higher conditionally social rights and the use of workfare-treatments are a secondary aspect that appears in response to different elements:

- as a response towards the “individualist revolt” of the active and higher qualified population for whom the fiscal burden seems to be as high as ineffective regarding the longterm unemployment; the imposition of conditions and compliance makes the fiscal burden more political “acceptable”
- as an answer towards “benefit-traps”, unemployed people are obliged to accept work beyond their social and professional expectations by the risk of losing their benefits

- As a response towards labor-market dysfunction's, by forcing an increased availability of reserve workers on the supply-side.

Since the late nineties, we're also facing the implementation of "active policies" from which the possibility of cumulating work-incomes and benefits are the most important. These active policies were justified by a two-fold argument:

- "making work pay", i.e. stimulate by financial incentives the presence of (unemployed) reserve-workers on the labor-market (supply-side)
- Making less qualified workers attractive for recruitment by employers by reducing the labor-cost (offer-side).

Sometimes, these active policies are combined with compliance (workfare). The semantically use of active/passive distinction makes it possible to stigmatize the traditional (insurance) benefit system as holding unemployed away from the labor-market, being paid for inactivity and producing rigidities in the functioning of the labor-market. Of course, there may be a correlation between these qualitative characteristics of the social protection and the level of poverty, but, it is important to strike the fact that recent research (Gallie & Paugam, 2001) comparing social security systems has demonstrated that there is no causal link of any kind between the amount of benefits nor the length of their grants and the level of unemployment.

In this paper, we shall present some results of our research concerning the effects of tax-credit systems as well as a plural drawing of incomes upon the work-situation and the structuration of the labor-market. The underlying question of the analysis is: can we speak of a "Speenhamland" effect upon wages and segmentation of the work-force in general and more specific around gender-, ethnic and qualification-lines? As a form of disconnection between work and income, we can ask ourselves if these policies are a "good" first step towards basic income or, rather, an instrument favoring a further recommodification and flexibilization of work and a symptom of the dismissal of public (State) responsibility towards full-employment and the well-being of populations?

2 – Experiences of combined incomes

In this section, we shall present briefly some experiences of active labor market policies, opening up with the possibility of drawing several incomes. We'll concentrate ourselves upon the situations of Belgium (active policies), France (tax credit), United Kingdom (Working Tax Credit, Income Support, House Benefit, Family Credit and Germany.

2.1 – United Kingdom

After the USA, United Kingdom is one of the first country's which introduced workfare systems in social security. Programs such as New Deal or Jobseekers Agreement (JSA) or income supports (Income Support, Jobseekers Allowance) don't generate or lead to quality work but most of the time to temporary and casual jobs with part-time working hours and part-time incomes. Our fieldwork gave the elements to illustrate this phenomenon. Most of the offered jobs inside the New Deal system are paid less than £ 3,50/hour; 25% are part-time and 47% in small organizations or firms without any control on the content of the work and the possible substitution of other existing activities. Concerning the JSA, 28% of the offered jobs were temporary (less than six months), whereas this kind of jobs doesn't represent more than 10% of the labor market while 35% were part-time. Non acceptance of these kind of occupations lead tot sanctions and even if these are decreasing since 1998 (from 166000 to 90000) the effect on attitude is not less real. New Deal

system seems to work in a more compulsory way mostly because sanctions are very short (reduction of 60% of the benefit during 2, 4 or more weeks, if the unemployed person refuses an offered occupation or is quitting his job. Exception is made for lone parents for whom the program is on voluntary basis.

More significant from a quantitative standpoint are the combined forms of income. These concerns mainly of Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC), introduced during the autumn of 1999, in substitution of the older "Family Credit". WFTC is granted by the Tax center of the State and the number of recipients represents 22,4% of the households, a strong increase in comparison with the 15,4% using Family Credit (Gray et Bruegel, 2000). Even after a slight increase of the amount of tax credit, WFTC doesn't enhance the motivation to work for all of the parents. In households with only one wage-income benefiting from WFTC, the employment of the second household member implies the reduction of the amount of WFTC. This withholds many women from employment while at the same time single households are being stimulated. Economical inquiries proved that the effect of the credit system tend to reduce participation of women to the labor market whereas the official arguments raised focus on the exact opposite. In response to that fact, the government raised a supplementary benefit for childcare and modified the decrease of the tax credit system in relation to income from work (minus 55p. for each £ more). It is significant that the "New Deal" of London, offering to participants the choice between a wage and keeping their benefit with a supplement of £15,38/week, faced for 75% choices favoring the second option because of the high housing prices and the possibility to combine the housing benefit with others and not with wages. In other areas like for example Tees-side (North), the choice was exact the opposite. Recognizing the risk of benefit-traps for single persons and childless households, the government announced a reform opening the WFTC system for these categories up to 2003.

WFTC is only one of the three main measures to "make work pay". Another is the introduction of a special low tax-level of 10% in case of the normal 22%. The third concerns the increase of the wage-ceiling that one may earn before paying for national health insurance-system. The differences between the maximal weekly benefit amount and the lowest weekly wage-level has been increased from £2,54 to £7,05 for men, and from £3,82 to £4,19 for women. But this still remains very small. According to the use of low income levels, going beyond the ceiling of 612 euros monthly implies losing a tax credit/income of 360 euros (Gray, 2001 ; Delarue, 2000).

In order to be entitled for the WFTC, one has to be employed during at least 5 weeks or be employed by a temporary work agency. The entitlements are given for a six-month period during which changes in social situations don't affect the tax credit, excepted divorce. Both partners may introduce a demand of WFTC, which was not the case with the older Family Credit. The first six months, the tax credit is granted directly but afterwards, the employer integrates it in the weekly or monthly pay. The next step will be the introduction of ICC (Integrated Child Credit) in 2003. This will isolate the WFTC granted for children in two parts. If the household-head is a working man, he will receive the WFTC with his wage, the ICC-part of it will be granted to the mother. Recent field-research (Bruegel & Gray, 2001) suggest the tax credit system and other forms of benefits combined with wages can facilitate the employer's recruitment of low wage-workers whereas they would have be obliged to recruit higher qualified and better paid workers. In Northern Ireland, the research on the effects of these systems confirmed this. An important union, Unison, analyzed the situation as follows: "*WFTC will result in a lesser responsibility for employers tot provide a decent living wage*". Moreover, the existence of the tax credit system will restrain wage demands among the recipients because they don't want to lose the additional income by receiving a slight wage increase. As a result of this, a kind of convergence of interests appears.

The LPU - Low Pay Unit conducted several enquiry's concerning the national Minimum Wage and the WFTC. One of the main observations was the fact women didn't experience significant wage increases despite the NMW. Even if the simple existence of a minimum wage withholds WFTC fostering a downswing of wages, it does also restrain an upswing of them. This is specially the case in poor regions of the UK. The fact NMW isn't applicable to people younger than 22 stimulated the recruitment of youngsters, which in turn provoke less job opportunities for adult women unless they engage a dynamic of wage-competition. The majority of the interviewed workers mentioned they dislike the fact employers are joining the tax credit with the wage because this gave them the possibility to pay less. Another group mentioned the fact that the informal economy of undeclared work is disturbed by the WFTC system: being obliged to declare officially all of the workers being employed, employers were actually pushed towards paying less for the first time because they have to pay taxes and national insurance contributions. This drives workers in a more separated semi-legal and totally unregulated economy while they could have been oriented towards legalizing their situation. The Grabiner report on *The informal economy for HM Treasury* (march 2000) count more than 120 000 persons combining benefits and "informal work". But how deal with this reality without a counter veiling power inside firms ? Official discourses explained effectively that credit systems such as WFTC and Family Credit were designed to hold back the wages and act as an auxiliary of the workfare system. Indeed, history of the Speenhamland system in the 18th century shows that an additional income against poverty may induce a downswing of wages.

2.2 – France

In 1970, with an unemployment rate of 1%, the insurance-based income guaranteed 80% of the latest wage and 110% in case of the unemployed engaged him/herself in a training and education program. In 1992, the unemployment rate was as high as 12% (3 million) and only 55% of them were covered by the insurance-system. The introduction of a RMI (Revenu Minimum d'Insertion, minimal integration income) in 1988 was a first step towards social help system parallel to the insurance-based one. During the following decade, the RMI provided 10 to 25% of the unemployed with fixed rate income, between 380 and 420 euros. Several benefits were created in between the RMI and the insurance-based AUD (Allocation Unitaire Dégressive): benefits for isolated parents, solidarity benefits, etc. We cannot present all of them and even if workfare policies are barely present in France, there is a link between the growing existence of social aid-oriented and fiscally funded benefits and the contractualization of social rights whereas the individual engage him/herself to follow training and acceptance to all kind of jobs. The recent introduction of "PARE" (Plan d'Aide de Retour à l'Emploi) illustrates this.

Alongside, the possibility of "cumul" between RMI (Revenu Minimum d'Existence, social help) and part-time work exists since 1998. This system "stimulates activity" by holding the benefit to the individual after s/he found work and then progressively reducing it to 50-33% according to the wage-level. In less than two years, more than 20% of the RMI-recipients used this combined system. We have no concrete longitudinal results about the specific impact of the combined income. More generally, the longitudinal analysis of unemployment shows the deep segmentation of the labor market. Out of a representative sample of 1996, only 26% went out of the RMI, 17% were still inside the RMI system and 57% were "back on the dole" after temporary employment (INSEE, 2001).

Table 3 - Short-term transitions

January 1998	September 1998	%
Employment	Employment	20,12%
Employment	Unemployment	5,34
Unemployment	Employment	9,24
Unemployment	Unemployment	45,12
- Inactivity - Employment, unemployment, inactivity	- Employment, unemployment, inactivity - inactivity	20,16

Lecture: 20,12% of the RMI recipients of 31/12/1996 were employed both in January and September 1998

Table 4 - Transitions employment/unemployment between January 1997 and September 1998

Permanent employment	8,6 %
Single Transition between employment and unemployment	19,1 %
Double transition between employment and unemployment	11,4 %
Three or more transitions	10,3 %
Permanent unemployment	50,6 %

Source : INSEE-2001

Obviously, the segmentation of the workforce is as deep as the difficulties of going back to work are strong. In order to stimulate the outflow of the RMI-system, a tax credit was a second measure was taken last year (2001), by means of making part-time work more interesting. As the official report Pisani-Ferry says it explicitly : “this tax-credit system should be maximal when leaving the RMI for a job and decreasing till the person is reaching the minimum wage. (...) The purpose is to cease any support of inactivity before part-time work.” (Rapport Pisani-Ferry 2000).

We must add the fact that the mobilizations of the unemployed during the winter 1997-1998 had a trivial impact on the situation in France: conditionality and workfare are less developed but a significant increase of social minima was refused with market oriented arguments (traps, disincitement). The reduction of poverty and unemployment had to be solved by mean of a combination between keynesian and liberal methods. So, on one hand, half million jobs were created in the public sector to reduce the youth employment, and on the other, the “cumul” of incomes and tax credits were created to “make work pay”.

2.3 – Belgium

In Belgium, for the year 2001, 25% of the global underemployment (large scope including elder people, early retirement, etc.) cumulated benefits and wage-related income. Several systems were experienced since the early eighties and some of them still exist. We present briefly some of them.

- Benefits and part-time work in the eighties

During a rather short period in the eighties, Belgium distinguished itself by allowing to part-time workers an unemployment benefit. Reflecting the fact full-time work was still the “typical” norm and following the idea people were involuntarily in part-time work, a “part-time benefit” was created to complete the partial loss of income. Far from surprising, part-time work increased very rapidly after this : it goes from 7,7% in 1983 up to 15,7% in 1998. Among the part-time workers, the proportion of involuntarily workers combining wage with a benefit increased from 14% in 1983 till 51% in 1990. After that year, the distinction between “involuntarily” and “voluntarily” vanished and the additional benefit was reduced to an insignificant amount and received a restricted access. Only 5,1% of the part-time workers still receive a combined income.

It goes without saying this double-sided income made part-time work very popular which in return undermined its involuntary characterization. Since this “atypical” labor was almost totally female, it was very “self-evident” to give weight to a discourse of “conciliation” between work and family. The involuntary dimension of it could then be denied because of its so-called family-friendly effect on time-spending.

Obviously, the combination of incomes from wage-labor and social security appeared in parallel with a downscaling of both wages and benefits. The insufficient character of part-time wage was made acceptable with a benefit. But at the same moment, the social security system introduced administrative categories in between the unemployed population like as household-head cohabitant and single. So, 67% of the part-time workers corresponded with the cohabitant-category. During the eighties, the population working part-time and receiving a benefit corresponded for 67% with the category of cohabitants of which the benefit was much lower and almost delinked with the latest wage-level. The right of combined incomes coincided also with the introduction of fixed contractual benefits linked with the family situation. Since that period, the growing feminization of the labor-force corresponded mostly with part-time precarious work and low wages. But this reality was kept outside the official and dominant academic analysis because of the familialistic viewpoint considering one (male) and a half (female) income as the norm. We cannot deny the social security-system sustained a gendered segmentation of the labor-market. Unemployed single parents hold on the “household-head” status and receive a benefit of 850 Euro, which is not much behind the minimum wage and far above the average part-time wage (650 Euro).

- Local Employment Agencies (LEA)

A second possibility of cumulating work and benefits was created with the Local Employment Agencies organizing the paid services towards individuals and organizations. Long-term unemployed people are permitted to keep their benefits in combination with a maximum amount of 45 hours paid work per

month. Users of the services pay a check of which a fragment is going to the individual worker and the another to the Agency. This system is nowadays used by more or less 10% of the unemployed people (an average of 42000 in 2000). The LEA-system is very popular among unemployed people because they can increase their monthly incomes with an official recognized form of work. Again, we cannot forget the fact that for 82% the LEA-workers are women. And again, it is obvious that this system doesn't push people back into the normal labor-market because, the average amount of monthly income is equal or lies above a part-time wage and the stability is much higher inside this system of neo-domestic labor-market than outside of it.

The fact that the social benefits didn't increased anymore since the beginning of the eighties is not unimportant regarding to the popularity of these systems.

- “activation” of benefits in the late nineties

During a rather short period, the government introduced “activated jobs” in the service sector compelling unemployed to search work with using their benefits as a direct reduction of the wage-cost. Between 1997 and 2000, this system gave work to 18 000 people among which 70% where part-time. The purpose was to subsidize such social and environmental activities that a “traditional” market activity would not do because of the low productivity or added value. The fact that a rather stringent control-system refused more than half of the employer's demands because of substitution and cannibalism regarding existing jobs indicate how strong the logic of profitability can be... Casual work and bad jobs are chasing away decent work and pay.

- (Mis)using the funds of social security to finance competitiveness of firms

On a collective level, employers and governments have put a strain upon security system by means of reducing direct contributions. Lack of resources is only partially compensated by fiscal means. Some of these reductions are unconditional and general to the sectors exposed to global competition; others are linked with some target-groups such as unskilled, low wage, long-term unemployed, youngsters. In both cases, the principle is the same: reducing the labor costs in order to stimulate the recruitment or in order to sustain the competitiveness of firms as condition to keep up employment levels. During our fieldwork, we saw how this system made it easier to find a job after one year of inactivity — “after that, I became cheaper” — or simply inverting the order in the unemployment lines without reducing its length.

Table 5 - Reductions of employer's contributions to social security system in Belgium

	Reduction of contributions (in billion Euros)	Part of these reduction in global soc. sec. resources	Part of these reduction in the global labor cost (private sector)
1994	1,06	4,2 %	1,0 %
1996	1,42	7,8 %	1,7 %
1998	1,85	8,2 %	2,8 %
2000	3,10	15,3 %	5,2 %
2001	3,76	18,1 %	6,3 %

Source: Bouquin (2001)

Of course, from a neo-liberal viewpoint, these reductions of resources are consistent with the freezing of social expenditures on social, health, retirement entitlements and guarantees. In order to understand the scale of this, the 3,75 billion euros reduction of 2001 represent almost 4/5 of the 4,25 billion euros expenditures on unemployment benefits. Therefore, the tendency towards a minimal public security system with less resources is translated in a push of lowest skilled layers towards subsidized (casual) work while higher skilled are being oriented towards additional health-insurance's and private pension schemes. Concerning the unemployed, we may see here a strong correlation between on the one hand restricted rights, duration and amounts of benefits, the growing compulsory character of social policies regarding the recipients and on the other hand the reduction of resources for social expenditures. The social security system had to become economically effective and this could be achieved through the individual use of benefits on the labor-market to make part-time, temporarily or casual work socially acceptable and financial attractive are the two faces of the same liberal agenda. Using resources of social security in order to reduce labor costs is justified by the argument "to protect" the employment of the higher productive workers but in reality, these resources mainly serve the competitiveness of firms whereas the wages are being disconnected with the productivity-growth (Bouquin, 2001).

2.4 – Germany

As statistics of the Federal Employment Agency show, the imposition of disqualification from benefits on the grounds of § 144.1 no. 2-4 under the Third Book of the Social Security Code presently (i.e. since January 1st, 2000) comprises almost 6,000 cases per month on average, with unemployment benefit and unemployment assistance accounting for about 50 per cent each of these impositions. For about 500 recipients of unemployment benefit and about 1,000 recipients of unemployment assistance per month on average these impositions meant an expiration of their benefits, i.e. they were no longer eligible to benefits at all.

To analyze the labor market management function of the benefits system one must consider the following developments: In the course of the last fifteen years in particular, the German social protection system has witnessed the emergence of a stricter overall conditionality of benefits. This tightening of the rules applies to the provision of all of the different benefits and is characterized above all by a growing linkage of rights to obligations. That is, as a "quid pro quo" for receiving benefits, claimants now have to comply with numerous conditions such as the "actively seeking work" requirement, the "availability for work" condition and the "acceptability of work" criteria. Moreover, the entitlement to benefits has undergone increased selectivity, i.e. the eligibility criteria claimants must fulfil have been made stricter in as much as both the "qualifying period" requirement and – where it applies – the "means test" condition were changed to the detriment of claimants

Table 6 - Unemployment and tolerance to casualization in Germany (1999)

Would accept in order to find a job (n=157)	Without any problem	With restriction
- more flexible working hours	84,1 %	10,8 %
- a change of occupation	62,2 %	19,0 %
- an occupation with less qualifications	31,2 %	43,3 %
- with less pay than before	33,7 %	34,3 %
- with a higher workload	26,7 %	49,6 %
- a temporary job	20,3 %	49,0 %
- to change one's living area	23,5 %	40,2 %

Social support as a mean of active employment policies

It is important to mention that claimants of social assistance are NOT granted access to promotion of employment measures implemented under the framework of the Third Book of the Social Security Code. These active labor market schemes are designed by the Federal Employment Service and are characterized by nationally standardized regulations. On the other hand, the measures for recipients of social assistance, the framework of which is laid down in the Federal Social Assistance Act, show a considerable degree of local variation, since the local social assistance offices, which are in charge of their execution, have at their disposal a certain room for maneuver in the design of the measures. What type of measures and how many of them actually come into force basically depends on both the prevailing financial situation of the individual local and communal bodies and the respective political readiness to allocate funds towards the activation of recipients of social assistance. For this reason, there is not only a substantial difference between labor market schemes designed by the local social assistance offices and those designed for the recipients of unemployment benefits, but also - depending on the cities - among the schemes particularly set up for claimants of social assistance themselves.

Analogue to the situation of the conditionality applied in relation to the provision of benefits, the interface between entitlements to benefits and labor market measures is much tighter and stricter in the context of the lower-ranking social assistance. Here a considerable package of measures, closely combined with the threat of benefit reductions (25 per cent of the standard rate in a first step) or the suspension of benefits (temporary or even continually in a second step), has been taken over the last years in order to require claimants to work in exchange for, or instead of, drawing benefits. According to the regulations of the Federal Social Assistance Act, by making use of these so-called "welfare to work" (Hilfe zur Arbeit) measures (all of which are temporally limited) the bodies in charge of the provision of social assistance measures are supposed to create either additional jobs (normale Arbeit oder Ersatzarbeitsplätze) or job or work opportunities (Arbeitsgelegenheiten) which are suited for the re-integration of the recipients into the labor market. The Hilfe zur Arbeit measures are officially considered as an integral element of the overall provision of social assistance; their declared intention is the strengthening of the claimants' self-help capacity, their motivation and their competitive position on the labor market.

Informants who are solely dependent on social assistance state that the use of these measures primarily serves the purpose of taking disciplinary action against claimants. In this connection, reference is made to the mandatory “welfare to work” measures under §19.II.1.2nd alternative (Gemeinnützige und zusätzliche Arbeit) and §20 (Maßnahme zur Überprüfung der Arbeitsbereitschaft) of the Federal Social Assistance Act, with which the informants already came into contact. By these measures, which are directed particularly towards young persons, recipients are obliged, irrespective of their occupational qualification or background, to do any sort of (mainly inferior) regular or occasional community work at any time – outside the labor law, not compulsorily insured and for a remuneration of at the most DM 4 per hour (which tops the amount of assistance). Over the last years, the local social assistance offices by which these programs are administered have increasingly made use of these two inferior options of the welfare to work measures, altogether, they account for almost 50 per cent of all the realized “Hilfe zur Arbeit” measures.

In view of the “dumping wage”, informants consider these measures as exploitative: “One the one hand they exploit us by paying us a compensation which is absolutely unacceptable both from the perspective of industrial law and in moral terms. Not even in Turkey or Romania would people be ready to do such work for such a ridiculous remuneration. But here in Germany, in one of the richest countries of the whole world, in a country which claims to be a welfare state on the grounds of providing inalienable social rights to its citizens, some people can simply be forced to work for almost nothing since they happen to have to claim their social right to draw social assistance. And if you just refuse to subordinate yourself to their exploitative conditions they punish you by reducing or discontinuing your income support.” Informants also express fundamental doubts about the nature and quality of these measures as regards their required skill level and the respective work experience deriving from them. Informants are outraged at the so-called “willingness to work” condition which obliges them to occasionally prove their “positive attitude to work” at the request of the social assistance office, and their general interest in finding a job by doing work which is considered as both extremely lousy and humiliating. Informants strongly criticized these activities required of them – which they call workfare measures (Arbeitszwang) – as contributing towards their personal humiliation since they feel unduly punished for the “mere” reason that no jobs are available for them on the labor market.

Some participants had experienced other options of the various Hilfe zur Arbeit measures apart from the two most inferior measures as mentioned above. These other legal options under the Federal Social Assistance Act authorize the social assistance offices to create, for example, employment for claimants on the mainstream labor market either through wage subsidies (which mostly take the form of direct contributions to salary costs, but also comprise a reduction of the employer’s social security contributions) to employers (§18.IV) or allowances for beneficiaries who take up either a compulsorily insured job or self-employment (§18.V). Participation in these measures is mandatory, unless the claimant is in the position to assert that the job s/he is required to take up is not acceptable on account of a violation of legal regulations (such as the law on safety and health at work or the labor law in general) or – in the case of single parents – due to the risk of jeopardizing well-ordered care for a small child who cannot be taken care of by a third party. An unwarranted refusal of a job invariably results in the imposition of sanctions, i.e. the reduction of or disqualification from benefits.

Trainingfare for recipients of unemployment benefits

The active labor market measures which, in principle, are available to recipients of unemployment compensation (i.e. unemployment benefit and unemployment assistance) are mainly financed through the unemployment insurance’s revenues from the contributions of employers and the compulsorily insured workers alike. They consist of schemes aiming at the training and further education of claimants on the one

hand and employment promotion programs on the other. Both areas of activities show a huge variety of single measures, many of which are focused on the (presumed) needs of specific target groups such as the hard-to-place or the long-term unemployed. While in general all the measures are nationwide, some programs are specifically designed to address the much above-average unemployment-rate in the new federal states (which at present amounts to about 17 per cent on average in comparison with an average of about 9 per cent in the old länders) and therefore are applied only there.

The training and further education schemes encompass both courses and practical activities that are supposed to identify the claimants' occupational suitability and aptitude for certain work, to support the independent job-search behavior of the unemployed, to check on the claimants' willingness and ability to work, to enhance a successful examination of vocational training or retraining, and finally to make it easier for the unemployed to be placed into a job. During 2001, a monthly average of 350,000 unemployed persons (end-of-month stock) participate in such measures; i.e. that currently about ten per cent of the altogether approximately 3.5 million recipients of unemployment compensation (unemployment benefit and unemployment assistance) receive active support in the field of training and further education schemes.

In general, the vast majority of the informants bewail their present non-consideration for any of the longer-term employment schemes. If a lot of criticism about many of the provided schemes is appropriate they nevertheless voice that "under particular circumstances" they would be quite interested in participating in such measures. A point of criticism vis-à-vis the active employment schemes is their pay. Informants point out that for an increasing number of measures the regulations have been changed in such a way that they now allow for a remuneration below the collectively agreed wages. This applies to the extensively used so-called job-creation schemes (Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahmen) where the pay in general must not exceed 80 per cent of the negotiated wage rate for the respective job. Moreover, exceptional regulations have been introduced with regard to the taking up of employment of new entrants to the workforce, hard-to-place persons and long-term unemployed persons whose remuneration is allowed to fall short of the going wage on account of the presumed lack of productivity of those categories of workers. In this connection, it is stressed that the combination of compulsory schemes and "wage dumping" practices quite obviously is intended both to lower the reservation wages of the unemployed and to make claimants familiar with low-paid jobs. By some informants it is pointed out that "in the long run such practices will not be without consequences for the general wage level on the labor market."

The German "Making work pay"-approach

A considerable number of informants had recently experienced short-term active labor market policies. The most prominent of these measures is the so-called "Help for employees" (Arbeitnehmerhilfe) which, in spite of public protests on the part of the former opposition parties and the trade unions, came into force on July 1st, 1996, and is now promoted by the "red-green" government on the basis of a so-called "experiment clause" (Experimentierklausel) which aims at creating a growing demand on the part of employers. The Arbeitnehmerhilfe is a type of in-work-benefit which is extended on the basis of short-term contracts in the private sector which must not exceed a period of three month at a time, but can principally be renewed by the same employer if the contract then concerns another field of occupational activity. Both claimants of unemployment benefit and unemployment assistance can be required to participate in the help for employees measures - irrespective of their occupational qualification. Participants are paid the going wage rate by their employers, and additionally get DM 25 per day as an "expense allowance" (Aufwandsentschädigung) from the employment office (which are not considered as an integral element of the wage, i.e. if a participant gets ill, this compensation is not paid). The working hours have to

be at least 30 hours per week. Claimants can only refuse to participate in such a measure if the pay (that is the wage plus the allowance) turns out to be lower than their benefits.

In the German context, particular attention is drawn to the much more frequent use of activation measures and the higher degree of social control over claimants deriving from these practices. Numerous evaluations of these activation measures (such as the *Hilfe zur Arbeit* and *Arbeitnehmerhilfe* programs, in particular) point to their rather punitive and surveillance character. Since these programs are compulsory and only about work (rather than training or other forms of reasonable activation) they are considered as the German version of “workfare” (Sonnenfeld, 1999). In this connection, it is stated that the introduction of an interdependence between the granting of benefits and the requirement to work reverses the intention to fund employment rather than unemployment into its cynical and authoritarian opposite. In this way the legal claim of the unemployed to an income compensation (be it in the form of social assistance, unemployment assistance or unemployment benefits) is considered to be given up completely. It is rather replaced by a maxim according to which benefits mean a “public wage for publicly provided labor”, or to put this in other words: “Only those who work shall eat”. In the face of article 12 of the German constitution according to which no-one must be forced to work, the requirement to work in the framework of the workfare measures is considered to break the fundamental rights of the unemployed (Sonnenfeld 1999, 6). Workfare is seen as intending to discipline the beneficiaries, to deter them from claiming benefits and to increase the willingness to accept low-paid and precarious jobs on the mainstream labor market. In the extreme case, the workfare measures might even serve as an instrument to replace ordinary — and thus more costly — jobs.

2.5 – Conclusion: in-work benefits as part of the process of recommodification and casualization

According to G. Esping-Anderson (1996), the different welfare regimes and social policies developed a logic of decommodification, since workers can hold a level of welfare independently of their immediate activity on the labor market. In this perspective, only workfare is developing a logic of recommodification and combined incomes aren't. But, isn't there a common logic between the use of resources of social security to regulate the labor market as well as to cheap labor cost and to increase competitiveness and on the other hand, in-work benefits ? For analysts like Bob Jessop (1993), it is essential to recognize the link between the new active social policies oriented towards employment “at any expense” and the evolution towards an economy based on flexible accumulation and neo-classical principles. By subordinating in one way or another (avoiding traps and inactivity, making work pay or reducing labor costs), welfare provisions and social rights are made integral part of a recommodification. Taking into account the fact actual dominant discourse isn't focussing anymore on too high benefits and ditto reservation wages (still on too high labor costs), but more on the problem of poverty, low wages and part-time work, the evident solution consists in “making work pay” by “in-work benefits” giving someone the possibility of cumulating income. This kind of social policy seems much less compulsory and disciplinary just because it gives people more financial margins. But at the same time, as we saw above, these systems participate into the extension of precarious, casual work situations, by making them acceptable or less unacceptable regarding to the barriers social security guaranteed before.

For these reasons, the analogy with the old Speenhamland system described by Karl Polanyi (1976) cannot be denied. When judges decided in 1795 to guarantee an income against poverty which one could earn altogether with work, working class of England faced during almost three decades a continuous downscale of wages and living conditions. Nowadays, even if the amount of this additional income is not defined by the dynamics of the market (offer and demand), it acts upon the price-definition of the wage-labor and enforce the process of recommodification. Of course, the way it does depends on the reality of collective

bargaining, unemployment, minimum wage, unionization and scarcity of qualifications.

In-work benefits will reduce casualization and bad work situations and recommodification in general under the sole condition that they will as high as they lose their “additional” character. But to which extent is this different from high unemployment insurance? The only difference is the fact the latter doesn’t give way to combine work and benefits and this is far from negligible. In one case, employers are facing unwillingness to accept low wage work because a benefit is better (and it is indeed), in the other case, they found a certain willingness to accept this bad work, which, with the actual social and sexual division of labor is certainly not easy to escape.

3 - No shortcuts but an alternative route

If we bring these aspects back to the question of in-work benefits, the only version of it that will not reproduce Speenhamland-effects upon the labor market corresponds with a “basic income” which in my opinion, can only be a decent living universal and socialized wage. This universal socialized wage necessary tackle also the systemic components of the question, in place of relying upon a sole element (measure) to solve a vast and heterogeneous social crisis of which unemployment is only one aspect. As we’ve said, these systemic aspects not only concern the need for financial resources (taxing much more added value of private corporations and the financial markets), but also implies a democratic allocation of human resources in order to satisfy actual (and extending) needs of the populations. This allocation cannot be organized by market mechanisms since they only recognize high productivity and added value-labor which in turn underlines the need of public sector services (education, health, care). If the term “full employment” must be avoided — which I don’t think if we use it in a political sense, giving existence to citizen rights — it cannot be replaced by full activity in a dual society. Defending a socialized wage implies another social and economic organization of society which basic income in its minimalist version doesn’t.

To conclude, firstly, we would like to deal here with practical answers towards job insecurity and poverty. Secondly, the issue of new collective guarantees and thirdly the role of the State.

3.1 – A universal wage in a full employment society against poverty and job insecurity

The existence of widespread poverty in Europe today is an accepted fact. In 2000, 18% of the population had income of less than 60% of the EU15 average; 60 million poor people and 15 million unemployed. The existence of job insecurity is beginning to be admitted but we still do not know whether the concept of “flexicurity” responds to this problem. We shall return later to the question of transitional markets and forms of contract combining social guarantees and flexibility. However, in order to combat job insecurity, it is necessary either to guarantee sufficient income to live in dignity, or to reintroduce employment standards, or to combine the two approaches.

Guaranteeing sufficient income would act effectively on the availability of labor and reduce the “tolerance threshold” for job insecurity that individuals are prepared to accept. This approach acts directly on social situations via supply and demand in the labor market. At the same time, by combining social security benefits and income from work, this option could also further the trend towards the devaluation of labor and lower wage costs. In cases where this additional income is relatively generous, it also favors a “tax revolt” on the part of contributors and households carrying a large part of the tax burden from full-time working. This in turn, for reasons of political legitimacy, leads to the repressive trend of *workfare*. If it remains insufficient, such additional income runs a high risk of locking individuals into job insecurity, or rendering it socially acceptable. For these reasons, we favor, following B. Friot (2000), an “universal wage” (*salair universel*), i.e. the right for everyone to earn a decent living wage, as a student, worker as well as a

retired person. This proposition is exactly the opposite of the one that considers a wage only as a payment for hiring and using work-force, payment determined by the laws of the labor market. Because work is more and more processual, collective, dependent on education, cognitive, a wage needs to be understood as a collective payment, more and more disconnected with the immediate mobilization during the constraints of time (working time) & space (the firm). Moreover, it is impossible to combine an equal pay with a individualistic approach of the wages, based on ones added value to the global productivity. Therefore, the universal wage means a further socialization of the wages and wage-labor, not based upon a fiscalized funding which leads all the power to the private ownership of capital, but upon a direct socialization (of part) of the surplus-value extraction. Till now, the best expressing form of such a kind of socialization is, indeed, another repartition between wages and profits, not in the sphere of circulation but in the production itself. This means that, historically, the social protection, generalized in Europe since World War II, express in an unachieved way, the movement towards socialization, even if, in each of the different models, we can criticize the laborist (pro-work), undemocratic (controlled by state or union apparatus) and discriminating dimensions towards women, unskilled, foreigners. To open a new social horizon on a global scale, we cannot do anything else than to understand this, in order to build upon what exists and not to deconstruct this social protection in a pro-market way as the actual unfolding policy is doing.

The resolution of the actual social crisis cannot be reduced to the sole issue of income. We need also to a new employment standard. This norm should be based on the idea that not all work is a job, that we must combat situations where people are called on to work two hours a day, where the working hours themselves are intolerable in terms of oneself, as well as one's health and social life. This therefore means abandoning the paradigm of "employability", which tends to individualize the cause of non-employment and reduce resolution of the unemployment question to a qualitative adjustment of the supply and demand of labor, although there are many other parameters (productivity, working hours, productive choices of capital and public macro-economic policies). In our view, working towards a new form of employment cannot be dissociated from "zero unemployment", or in other words "full employment", meaning that no labor force is unsellable on the labor market. Remember that, unlike the common representation of the "golden sixties", "full employment" has never been determined by economic development alone, but also by political choices. Claimed by Beveridge as indissociable from democratic society, the minimum application of state functions, "full employment" also meant a different order of priorities, notably that "*full employment means having more vacancies for workers than there are workers seeking vacancies.*" (Beveridge, 1967 : 2). One may retort that this means the end of trading in labor and that inflation will return with a vengeance. We would reply that we must reopen the path to a different development rationale. Why should there be no other healthy future than the tyranny of markets favoring deflation, stop-start growth and growing social polarization within populations and regions? Why would it be impossible to guide the future of humanity towards the development of an economy of services and work liberated from the valorization and accumulation of Capital? If this requires the extinction of financial markets and the socialization of wages, is this the worst thing that could happen?

In the current state of progress with globalization, European integration and an ideological climate still enamoured with the dogma of neoliberalism, it remains difficult to link the issue of "full employment" with that of the role of the state and political intervention. Moreover, as we pointed out earlier, the liberal nature of European construction — in terms of both orientations and the hardly democratic functioning — makes this debate somewhat elusive. Nevertheless, the formulation of an alternative route cannot cut corners in defending the real harmonization of certain regulatory frameworks: firstly, a common minimum wage standard; secondly, a minimum guaranteed income for retired people and social minima in general; thirdly, an employment standard. With regard to this last aspect, the choice is not so much whether one can shore up a standard (full-time employment for an indefinite period) that has become increasingly

vulnerable. Not only because the modern forms of hiring labor (temporary, fixed-term contracts, call contracts, bogus freelancers) play a growing part but also because the problem is at the heart of the employers' offensive, which openly attempts to challenge the open-ended contract. It is therefore becoming a matter of urgency to reconstruct a common foundation.

3.2 - New collective guarantees

Faced with increasing job insecurity, in parallel with the renewed negotiability of the workforce, the debate on new collective guarantees is still in its infancy. At this level, the creation of a "professional status" merits our attention. The first objective of this "professional status" is to reunify the fragmented situation surrounding the right to individual social security benefits in terms of annual holidays, training, credit hours, children's education and engagement in associations (Supiot, 1999). This proposal forms part of a larger picture, including the "activity contract" (Boissonnat Report, 1995) and work on the subject of "transitional markets". The common denominator linking them is employment instability, on the one hand, and the desire to reconstruct statutory guarantees for marginal/precarious or atypical labor on the other. From this standpoint, the labor market is seen as inherently unstable since the individual no longer has a fixed employer and he himself sometimes gives priority to inter- or transprofessional mobility. Therefore, these "transitions" (übergänge) must be addressed by regulatory political action with the aim of procuring new social guarantees in terms of training, free time, and domestic or associative activities.

Alain Supiot proposes the reconstruction of a common foundation that is both based on law and conventional, in contrast to contractualization (in the civil law sense) and the movement towards making the workforce a negotiable item. In his view, professional status should no longer be linked to employment (and therefore attached to the employer), but would be placed "beyond" the employer by basing it on "work in general", in other words on all activities including training, domestic work and activities with associations: *"The paradigm of employment would thus be substituted by a paradigm of the professional status of persons, which would not be defined by the exercise of a given profession, but would encompass the various forms of work that any person might accomplish during his existence"* (Supiot, 1999:89-90). However, Alain Supiot is opposed to the idea propounded by the Boissonnat Report (1995) of using the term "activity contract" for this new common legal basis, since activity is indefinable and too broad for use as the basis of specific but uniquely universal rights. Such universal rights would have to be developed largely in the form of *rights to social benefits "facilitating the changeover from one type of work to another (...) to avoid the risks of becoming locked into a given work situation"* (Supiot, 1999:90). A worker could thus obtain training, elect to invest his efforts in an association or take up work as a freelance worker.

This approach has the merit of reopening the debate. It nevertheless remains blind to the labor force management methods of the neoliberal era. In effect, these proposals are based on the practice of the externalization of social rights from the application of all or part of the labor law and collective guarantees. Having first affected the most unstable segments (low skilled, categories discriminated against such as women and immigrants, etc.), this sidelining of a norm for protection has progressively embraced all categories, from skilled workers to technicians, engineers and managers. These reorganizations contribute firstly to a return to the workforce as a negotiable item, even though the most skilled categories can "play the system". However, Supiot's analysis tends to take into account only the obvious elements, comparing the unfortunate precariousness of non- and low-skilled workers with the fortunate self-employed in the higher strata. It follows that there are "positive transitions" as well as "negative transitions". The first applies to the "labor market nomads" who enjoy a situation guaranteed by their high level of "employability", whilst the "negative transitions" apply to the various forms of relegation to job insecurity,

unemployment and social marginalization. To us, such a dualist representation of these transitions seems to hamper discussion of how instrumental rationality dominates individual behavior and tends to make the use of oneself — as a depository of human capital— subject to the make-believe world where the customer is king.

The analysis offered suggests certain reforms to be carried out. Note that Supiot sees a close link between labor law drafted during the post-war period and Fordism. But, is it a kind of systemic link or just the historical expression of the changing balances of forces between labor and capital? Since he doesn't answer this question, we may think that the proposed "professional status" represents more a civic but very similar approach than a basic income.

On the subject of an approach involving the acquisition of new rights attached to the person (universal), Robert Castel (1999) wonders whether collective protection and guarantees for a part-time cashier would have to pass through haphazard mediations external to the working relationship which would not be included in actual employment conditions? He goes on to ask, "how, by displacing the constraints of employment rights to the person, can we institute strong constraints on the employers' side?" Bringing back "gray areas" of employment must not lead to chasing shadows. According to Castel it will be necessary to continue to use working relationships and employment conditions as a basis for collective action in this area.

On this subject, since the nineties there have been several signs of the re-emergence of collective mobilization and union activity. As for restructurings (layoffs, bankruptcy, relocation), these remain essentially defensive moves. On the other hand, several indicators point to growing resistance to the deterioration of working conditions in the new sectors (call centers), the highly "unstable" ones (food industry, retail trade), and in strategically important ones such as transport (metro, road, air and rail). Union membership is on the increase accompanied by a rising number of work disputes. This trend towards remobilization remains rather patchy but affects almost all European countries. Expanding sectors are seeing a rise in the level of trade union membership (healthcare, non-profit, retailing) and many micro-conflicts arise in these and other sectors.

The aim of a new employment standard is not so unfashionable as we may think. An opinion poll conducted in France, 79% of people between 20 and 30 said that they were strongly in favor of indefinite employment contracts and a secure income, whilst only 11% want temporary work? Because the real world of work experienced by this generation is marked by job insecurity, 50% of young people less than 25 years old in employment receive a wage below the statutory minimum; in one generation the wage gap between 25 year old and 40 year old has multiplied by three; 30% of young people under the age of 30 have a temporary job compared with 6% of those over 30; part-time work is twice as common amongst young people than amongst older people; etc. Facing such a vast insecurity, it is far from surprising these same young people express the need for a continuous income and secure work-situation even if a majority (70%) is willing to change job several times. In a situation where the aspirations of wage earners are going to test working relations, new militant energies and the changing situation are feeding collective action. The key question remains therefore: how to reconstruct a social outlook in which the positions of low paid and precarious workers as well as "stable" (core) workers converge towards a better quality of life for all? The weight given to respectively "universal" or "specific" social rights also no doubt depends on the regulatory power of union organizations, their representativeness and their capacity to further claims, as well as on the place accorded to political (legislative) intervention. This brings us to the last question, that of the State.

3.3 - Recognizing the political character of the economy in order to democratize it

At this turning point in history, still marked by neo-liberal dogma, the role of the State oscillates between that of stimulator of the new economy and a “regulator” of social tensions. In parallel, the concentration of economic power in the hands of those seeking returns on capital and the major monopolies has never been greater. The fact that the turnover of certain multinationals exceeds the budget of a country such as Denmark is typical of this development. Classification of the 50 largest economic entities reveals that half of them are comprised of multinational firms. The forms taken by enterprises have certainly changed. Having become network-firms with the phenomena of subsidiarization and externalization, no less than 50% of world trade concerns intra-group trading. There is a phenomenal concentration of power over regional development, the environment and even more, on the social and economic fabric... The choice of investments, where they are made and their nature, layoffs, fashioning populations in relation to their work (training), are all profoundly structuring elements of society. Environmental disasters such as the sinking of the Erika off the French coast highlighted the danger of the supremacy of commercial law where anything is possible.

As for the labor movement, and even for society itself, it is becoming imperative to extend democratic control over large firms, without which democracy itself will be wiped out before the tyranny of the financial markets and major companies. In this arena, the debate must focus on the State as well as on the counterweight of unionism. On which subject, we believe that two remarks need to be made.

Firstly, any analysis that sets the State against the market and tends to represent regulation as an alternative to a full market is very likely to turn out to be an impasse. This overlooks the fact, so accurately pinpointed by Amartya Sen, that *"the success of capitalism is as much due to the role of the state as to that of the market"*. Whether it is the monetarist policy initiated by Reagan in the early eighties or the orientation of European construction, any neoliberal counter-reform without state intervention would be impossible. The creation in Europe of a single market and a new currency are living proof of this. We therefore have to dare to change the debate. A discussion is needed on the nature of public and state intervention, without which the current wave of globalization threatens to make all spheres of social life subject to market expansion.

Secondly, there is a case for the union counterweight being released from its confinement within enterprises and nations. Sidelined by social reorganizations, mergers and internationalization, fragmented by the break up or segmentation of working groups, unionism can only regain lost ground by founding its efforts on general political principles. The economic and social responsibility of enterprises goes beyond its “responsibility in company matters”. With the use of public grants and a wide variety of exemptions, companies must provide accounts, and this right of oversight cannot exist without union action. This means that all of the rules and competency’s enjoyed by unions inside firms — at local and global level — need to be reviewed. Conversely, recommending solutions such as social responsibility and a “citizen enterprise” with ISO 8000 series certification, means firstly admitting that certain firms would not be. In addition, with a cascade of subcontractors and other forms of externalization, it is becoming easy to obtain an ethical or “citizen” label for brands whilst core and peripheral production activities are carried out using forced labor (Klein, 1999) .

Moreover, in this era of mergers, concentrations, the formation of near monopolies and ever-fiercer competition, one might well wonder how consumer action could influence production choices and impose

respect for social norms. At a time of hyperindustrialization of agriculture and food production, the debates driven by various health crises have revealed the obstacles to formulating regulations that guarantee health security that at the same time preserve the profit motive. Although resolving these problems means also posing the question of social forms of ownership, it also implies a transformation of working relations. Indeed, under the current wage regime, the constraint of selling labor at a discount is omnipresent under these conditions. It is always possible to find available labor even for the most onerous or dangerous tasks (industrial cleaning at nuclear power stations carried out by subcontractors employing clandestine workers), thereby fragmenting the alternative based on a single work place. Simultaneously, at the global level of the company, consumption also remains subject to purchasing power and it comes as no surprise to see the development of cheap but poor quality food, insalubrious accommodation and (non)-education for this category of poor people and other “unemployables”. The only action open to trade unions and/or citizens does not profoundly change the course of events. For this reason the question of an alternative must go beyond the issue of concrete measures as well as the rebuilding of unions and social movements at local and international level, it must also question the role of the State and its field of action in a political way.

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