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Disability and work. Discursive constructions of exclusion and dissensus

Introduction

In 2005, I joined Tomasz Szkudlarek's doctoral seminar. My research explorations concerning the subject of disability at the time were located in the field of special education and seemingly distant from the interests of my future dissertation supervisor. Seemingly, because my reflections on the theoretical contexts for the conceptualisation of the phenomenon of disability were already directing my search towards Martin Buber's philosophy of encounter/philosophy of dialogue (1992), the I-You relationship, or the concept of postmodernity presented in Zygmunt Bauman's publications (2000). At the time, it seemed highly important to me to have a different view of people with disabilities, one that eschewed the patterns of normality, fitness, and pathology. Perceiving disability as difference and of people with disabilities as an oppressed and forced into silence minority group has become a common area, a place of interface, a space that connects special pedagogy with educational cultural studies.

Constructing and implementing the doctoral dissertation research project constituted an extremely important stage, indeed a milestone in my scientific development. Participating in Tomasz Szkudlarek's doctoral seminar, I discovered extremely interesting theories for interpreting the phenomenon of intellectual disability, which transferred the explorations undertaken onto the ground of *Disability studies*, which were new and still unknown in Polish special pedagogy at the time, in 2006. Through this scholarly encounter, I have for years been fascinated

by poststructuralist conceptions of discourse (Foucault 2000; 2002; Laclau 2005), which assume that most social phenomena (which I consider to be disability, work, or emancipation) are constructed in and by discourse, which is a tool for enslavement, oppression, exclusion, and forcing “alternative versions of reality” into silence, and for emancipation – since “the world is always bigger than any version of it in people’s minds” (Melosik 1994: 203). Language/discourse as “a system of human utterances and a practice that forms the objects of which the discourse speaks” (Foucault 2000: 10), a key factor in the social construction of social life and an important element of power relations plays an extremely significant role in creating both exclusionary and inclusive practices, as meanings and discourses are not only forms of “talking about” but are also tools for generating social practices, “actions as the realisation of what follows from content” (Szkudlarek 2008: 127).

In this article, in gratitude for all the scientific inspiration, I would like to highlight the issue of the exclusion of people with disabilities from the field of employment and bring to light the causes of the still present and extremely difficult to overcome discrimination on the open labour market of this social group. In presenting this issue, I will present areas of economic oppression that emerged in the era of early industrial capitalism and have survived to the present day, discursively perpetuated exclusionary practices and actions attempting to resist the imposed order through the painstaking “gouging of new lines of outlet” (Deleuze, Guattari 2015) fighting against the despotism of the capitalist labour market.

At the same time, it should be noted that the dividing line outlined in this text between “us and them” is only one of many possible ones, and concerns practices resulting from the consequences of the label of “unproductive body”. Indeed, oppression against people with disabilities in contemporary societies takes various forms: from exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, violence, to cultural imperialism (Twardowski 2018), but it is always the result of some discursive recognition, a discursive construction, given a label by the “normals” (Goffman 2007), to all those recognised as other/alien, who are blatantly separated by some feature/difference from the known Ones. In addition, as Dorota Podgórska-Jachnik points out, at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, a multidimensional perspective began to be taken at the phenomenon of marginalisation and exclusion, to which people with disabilities also – but not exclusively – succumb, hence social policy increasingly takes solutions aimed more at specific horizontal problems (e.g. low labour force participation) than at measures targeted only at these people (Podgórska-Jachnik 2016: 16). In this text, the unmasking of oppressive factors and actions taken therefore only refers to the existing domination, subjection and exclusion in the labour market area.

I will begin my idea by introducing the reader to the discipline of disability studies and the socio-cultural model of disability, as conceptualising this social

phenomenon through this prism captures and explores its discursive constructions and, consequently, all the action and practices undertaken.

Introduction. Disability Studies.
Disability as a discursive construct
in a socio-cultural model

Disability is a permanent feature of societies but manifests itself in very different ways at different stages of their historical development (Gańczarz 2014). What is defined as disability is determined by the meanings attached to physical and intellectual “deviations from the norm” in a given social group or culture. *Disability studies* constitutes an academic discipline that analyses the meanings, nature and consequences of disability as perceived as a socially/discursively constructed phenomenon, or a product of cultural practices and their interpretations. In addition, it has a strong emancipatory overtone, linked to the awakening of an awareness of rights and the claim of direct impact over all disability solutions (Podgórska-Jachnik 2016: 20). *Disability studies* with its explorations encompass the study of disability history, theory, legislation, politics, ethics, art, literature, media, the political economy of disability or disability activist social movements and is embedded in the cultural model way of thinking about disability. In 1994, Tom Shakespeare called for more attention to cultural representations of persons with disabilities. Inspired by feminist debates, he discussed various theoretical approaches and suggested that “disabled people are objectified by cultural representations”. By cultural representations he meant theatre, literature, images, movies, and the media (Shakespeare 1994: 283–299).

In 2006, Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell introduced the concept of the “cultural model of disability”. In their assumptions, “the cultural model provides a more complete conception than the social model, in which ‘disability’ means only discriminatory encounters. Formulating a cultural model makes it possible to theorise a political act of change that identifies disability as a site of resistance and a source of previously suppressed culture” (Snyder, Mitchell 2006: 10). Furthermore, in Snyder and Mitchell’s perspective, the cultural model approach tends to identify identity, and the body as constructed (2006: 10).

Anne Waldschmit, referring to the Anglo-Saxon concept of the cultural model of disability, points out that in the perspective of this model, disability is not seen through the lens of a single fate, as in the individualist-reductionist model of disability. Nor is it simply the result of discrimination and exclusion, as in the social model. On the contrary, the cultural model questions the other side of the coin, the universally unthreatened “normality”, and explores how practices of (de)normalisation

lead to the social category we have called “disability” (Waldschmit 2017: 22). As the author further explains, the cultural model of disability should not treat disability as an explicit category of pathological classification that automatically, in the form of causation, results in social discrimination. On the contrary, this model considers disability and normality as effects generated by academic knowledge, mass media and everyday discourses (Waldschmit 2017: 24). In any culture at any given time, these classifications depend on power structures as well as the historical situation, and depend on and determined by hegemonic discourses. In short: the cultural model considers disability not as a given individual or fact, but describes it as a discourse or process, an experience, a situation, or an event. Both *disability* and *ability* refer to dominant symbolic orders and institutional practices of producing normality and deviance, the familiar and the different. Assuming the constructivist and discursive nature of disability, one can take into account the historical and cultural perspectives on the creation of processes of inclusion and exclusion, stigmatisation, as well as socio-cultural patterns of experience and identity, meaning-making and social practices, power and resistance (Waldschmit 2017: 23). Referring to analyses of the field of *Disability studies* and the reflections of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2017), Jolanta Rzeźnicka-Krupa portrays disability as “a certain set of meanings by which we differentiate and label bodies and minds, thus producing those with disabilities and upholding the ideal of a naturally stable, essentialised being. This concept is a label, a signifier that, by initiating an assignment to a particular category of identity, marks a defect and produces oppression” (2019: 11).

For many years, disability was regarded as a personal tragedy individually and independently faced by the person “affected” by it in order to overcome it. In this context of the individual/medical/clinical model, disability is perceived as a defect caused by damage to body structures. Michael Oliver (1990), elaborating on Victor Finkelstein’s (1980) account attempting to explain the development of an ideology that perceives disability as a tragedy, personal passivity and dependency, stated that “a disabled person is an ideological construct linked to a primary ideology of individualism and secondary ideologies linked to medicalisation and normalcy” (Oliver 1990: 58). Inspired by the work of Antonio Gramsci (1971; 1991), he emphasised the crucial role of a reinforced ideology or mindset, that is, a set of values and beliefs that form the support for social practice, in sustaining social oppression (Barnes, Mercer 2008: 35). In the 1970s, British activists (UPIAS and the Disability Alliance) opposed such definitions and practices of disability, taking action that led to developing a social model of disability. They initiated criticism of a “non-disabled” society that “handicaps” people with disabilities. This has given rise to the so-called sociopolitical model of disability (Barnes, Mercer 2008), which draws attention to the impact of social and environmental barriers. The sources of discrimination and oppression lie in the belief that people with disabilities

(defined and perceived as defective, weak, flawed, abnormal) must conform to the non-disabled majority. Besides, the division formed over the years between “able normality” and “abnormal disability” has made the “able” group a privileged group that sets the normative, i.e. universally valid, standards by which we all judge others. Persons with disabilities, perceived as non-normative or unproductive, are pushed away and excluded. They belong to a despised minority and the rationalist culture contributes to the rise of cultural imperialism and violence (Young 1990: 11, after Barnes, Mercer 2008: 31).

Paul Abberley (2002: 120) notes that if we are to look at disability as a form of oppression, we must develop views concerning what society should be like so that disabled people are not rendered disabled by that society. Oliver, on the other hand, believes that the “social theory of disability” requires answering the questions: “What is the essence of disability? What are its causes? How is it experienced?” (Oliver 1996: 29–30, following: Barnes, Mercer 2008: 21). Furthermore, by claiming that disability is socially constructed and represents a kind of social oppression, the social model of disability raises another new question: if disability constitutes a limitation of activity imposed on disabled people by contemporary social structures and practices, how is it created/formed? In British studies concerning disability from the 1980s some leading thinkers sought answers to these questions in Marxist or materialist paradigms (Finkelstein 1980; Oliver 1990; Gleeson 1997; Russell 1998; 2017; 2019).

The perspective of historical materialism was introduced into disability studies by Finkelstein in 1980. In his book *Attitudes and disabled people*, published at the time, he put forward a theory according to which three qualitative changes in the social relationship towards disability can be related to three main phases of economic and technological development: pre-industrial (feudal society), industrial capitalism and post-industrial society (Barnes, Mercer 2008: 33). Building on Finkelstein’s early insights, many scholars of disability and social oppression of disabled people have analysed the relationship between disability and capitalist relations of production. Michael Oliver (1990; 1996), like Martha Russell (2017), believes that the exclusions and dependencies experienced by persons with disabilities in the twentieth century are due to the pre-existing economic degradation of the disadvantaged, combined with their categorisation as “unproductive” and dependent. Whereas, both through the functioning of the labour market and the social organisation of work, the economy has played and continues to play a key role in creating the category of disability and in determining social responses to persons with disabilities. Moreover, the oppression faced by persons with disabilities today is rooted in the economic and social structures of capitalism, which themselves produce racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, and disability (*disablism*) (Oliver 1996: 33).

Thus, disability can be constructed as a personal tragedy, in a medical model based on an ontology of lack (Rzeźnicka-Krupa 2019) it is a defect, an individual trait, a disease and the person who has it or is stigmatised by it should be treated so that, more like the healthy ones, he or she can fit into a world governed by a normocentric discourse, because otherwise he or she will remain marginalised. Disability also appears as the result of an oppressive social relationship, but above all, for many scholars, it is a category or label that underpins all practices of exclusion sanctioned by industrial capitalism and the early capitalist work ethic, a system that both then and now perpetuates and reinforces inequality and discrimination in the labour market. Discrimination that is inevitable, ever-present, and impossible to overcome.

Disability in the economic model. The “unproductive body” stereotype and exclusion from the labour market

Along with the spread of industrial capitalism, the hegemony of “able” normality became, in the assessment of disabled people, a measure of their “incomplete humanity” (Oliver 1990: 89, following Barnes, Mercer 2008: 36). Barbara Gąciarz notes, “the most important transformations, the effects of which continue to this day, took place in the era of capitalist industrialisation, which firmly entrenched in social consciousness, customs and culture the stereotype of the unproductivity of this category of people, stigmatising them as expendable people and imposing on them the status of outsiders. This was a logical and consistent consequence of the dominant ideology of individualism and the cult of economic rationality as the main determinant of value. People with disabilities did not fit into such a social framework, they did not meet the requirement of participants in economic competition, they were not fit to be full participants in labour relations” (Gąciarz 2014: 20). In this way, as Russell (2017) conjectures, industrial capitalism created not only a class of proletarians, but also a new class of “disabled” who did not meet the requirements of the “standard body of workers” and whose labour power was effectively wiped out, excluded from wage labour. Industrial capitalism imposed a category of disability on those “non-compliant bodies” deemed unfit for use by the owners of the means of production. As a result, people with disabilities born in communities began to be considered a social problem, which triggered practices of separating them from mainstream life. “Unproductive bodies” began to be perceived as a social problem, which led to justifying removal and segregation policies.

Along these lines, Russell (2019) acknowledges that the phenomenon of disability has its roots in economics, and that the economy, through both the functioning of

the labour market and the social organisation of work, plays a key role in creating categories of disability and determining social responses to people with disabilities. Therefore, Russell believes that disability is a (historical) social creation of capitalism that determines who has a job and who does not, and what this means depends on the level of economic activity. The term “disabled” is used to describe/classify people deemed less exploitable as labour or not exploitable at all by the owning class that controls the means of production in a capitalist economy (Russell 2019: 12), and a disability policy that fails to recognise this is at best attempting to push flawed anti-exclusion reform strategies.

Workers with disabilities experience permanent economic discrimination in the capitalist system due to employers’ perceptions of incurring additional costs when hiring or retaining a non-standard worker. In this context, as Jihan Abbas argues, economics should be perceived as a key part of the disability and employment debate, a type of individual intervention and advocacy that has historically failed in developing an understanding of disability issues, and the employment promotion agenda is seen to have failed because it relies on individual contexts and tends to ignore structural barriers as well as the broader political and economic context that drives marginalisation (Abbas 2017). Capitalism is a system of social relations in which profit maximisation and the constant need to revolutionise the forces of production are basic and unavoidable conditions for survival. Capital is only interested in work that will increase material wealth. From the point of view of an individual capitalist, productive work is simply work that generates profits, and thus the notion of a “productive individual” is important in the economic model of disability, because the idea that the value of an individual is directly related to participation in the labour process constitutes a key aspect of understanding the need to create jobs for people with disabilities (Abbas 2017).

Changes of place, acts of dissent, and the never-ending fight against discrimination in the labour market

Similarly to Olivier, Russell believes that it was early industrial capitalism that created and eliminated the “disabled, unproductive and substandard body” from the circle of paid labour, and now, in its version of turbo-capitalism, upholding profit and productivity sustains the *status quo*. Russell was an American activist and researcher whose work brings to the fore an explicit critique of the oppression of disability and an analysis of the economic inequalities faced by people with disabilities due to austerity and the lack of economic democracy in capitalism. Her analyses exposing the modes of exclusion of people with disabilities generated in the capitalist economy of the United States of America, together with

her perspective explaining the impossibility of abolishing discrimination against people with disabilities in the field of employment, despite many reforms and actions of the disability movement, are very helpful in understanding the contemporary employment situation of persons with disabilities in Poland. In Poland, which after 1989 took the course of a free-market capitalist economy shaped by neoliberal productivism.

However, before this happened, it is worth noting that in both socialist Poland and liberal democratic Poland, work was/is of great importance. On both sides of the “wall”, slogans related to “getting to work” or “giving people jobs” were/are present. As Bauman writes, “they were present on both sides of the great divide that was to distinguish the capitalist as well as the communist version of reality. The slogan ‘he who does not work does not eat’ became the rallying cry of Marxist-inspired opposition to capitalism” (2006: 42). Work provided a livelihood, but was also a major determinant of social identity and self-esteem. Therefore, it can be considered that exclusion from employment constitutes a fundamental form of discrimination against persons with disabilities and that work/opportunity to work remains a key element of a just society (Roulstone, Barnes 2005). The awareness of this fact, combined with an awareness of the importance of work for human beings, existed in the policies and practices of the Polish state both in the era of outmoded (socialist) and contemporary (neoliberal) productivism. Despite similarities in their approach to the work ethos, the two Polands differ in the ways in which they combat the exclusion from paid work of people with disabilities and in the socio-economic context that determines the actions taken.

In socialist Poland, before the political transformation of 1989, a Poland of socialist work ethos and socialist productivism, in which the rehabilitation of disabled people was considered almost exclusively in a medical context, a rehabilitation subsystem termed the “Polish employment model” was developed (Mikulski 1995: 226). Some people with disabilities found employment in disability cooperatives, which from the very beginning were one of the characteristic features of the Polish rehabilitation model, combining economic and rehabilitation goals. Marcin Garbat (2017) notes that the Polish People’s Republic was a period of dominance of disability co-operatives, where indeed graduates of special schools found employment, mainly in simple jobs. The long-standing experience of the disability cooperative, which was abolished by a resolution of the Sejm on 20 January 1990, was used for the widespread reconstruction of the protected labour market and the establishment of the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (Waszkowski 2016). The system supporting the employment of persons with disabilities in socialist Poland was based on a medical model and a separation policy. Everyone who did not obtain employment in the disability cooperatives was condemned to an existence in nursing homes. Therefore, specific reserves, ghettos, living spaces

for “unproductive and sick individuals” were created. However, it is noteworthy that in those days a space of “unconscious inclusion” of persons with intellectual disabilities unexpectedly emerged in State Farms (Jabłoński 2016). As Maciej Jabłoński notes, it was precisely in the State Farms that it was not the inefficiency that was important, but finding a job that matched a person’s abilities, competences (Jabłoński 2016: 132).

The Polish post-transformation system of vocational rehabilitation and support of employment for people with disabilities was built on different ideas and assumptions: separation policy was replaced by integration policy counteracting exclusion from many social spaces, the medical model of disability gave way to a social model, people with disabilities admitted to public discourse and debate in a democratic space could start demanding the realisation of their rights, including the right to work on the open labour market. However, above all, people with disabilities have regained a voice, a voice that allowed them to make their presence visible, to become visible, a voice that has begun to shatter the stereotypes perpetuated over the years that condition exclusionary social practices, a voice that has shouted: we abandon the reserves, our rights are human rights, disability is normal. Persons with disabilities began to create and carry out their project of emancipation by challenging the boundaries of visibility and audibility that had been sanctioned for years (Ranciére 2007, after Szkudlarek 2015). Their project of emancipation manifested itself in acts of *dissensus*, of acting “out of place” and saying “not at that time”, of demonstrating a presence where they were not supposed to be, and of manifesting a capacity for competences they were by definition not entitled to (Ranciére 2007, following Szkudlarek 2015: 69). One could say that a difficult and unequal struggle against sedentary thought (Deleuze, Guattari 2015) began, which has been/is aimed at bursting the given label of “incapable of working” and appearing as a worker in the open market, a struggle against thought that marks all these Others with their rightful place on the periphery.

The system built in democratic Poland to counteract the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the field of employment, supported by numerous social campaigns aimed at reversing the meaning from “disabled – unproductive” to “disabled – able at work”, had to meet the demands of neoliberal productivism and the goals of the capitalist economy. On the horizon loomed the spectre of new divisions and discrimination not stemming this time from a socialist policy of separation, but from a neo-liberal call for profit and productivism guarded by an accountant’s calculus. In his analyses of the situation of post-socialist countries, Teodor Mladenov (2015) draws attention to the problem of neoliberal productivism. As he writes, in the post-socialist countries after 1989, we may be facing a new invalidation of persons with disabilities and a new cause of their exclusion from the labour market, which is linked in these countries to the neoliberal regime’s move

towards market productivity. Productivism is considered as a cultural-material mechanism reducing people to resources that can be taken advantage of in order to increase production (Mladenov 2015). A person with a disability, defined in a medical-productivist perspective as inefficient, is marginalised and invalidated in a productivist society.

However, in order to meet the demands of the new reality and enable people with disabilities to enter the open labour market, the Employment and Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities Act was enacted in 1991. At that time, the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (PFRON) was established, whose task was, among other things, to subsidise jobs for persons with disabilities in the open, but also in the protected labour market. The Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Persons with Disabilities was established. On 27 August 1997, the Act on Vocational and Social Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities came into force (Journal of Laws of 1997, No. 123, item 776) introducing a system of incentives for employers in the form of wage subsidies for employees with disabilities and a quota system to persuade businesses to hire employees with disabilities. The constructed employment support system, the state's social policy, and the activities of NGOs, including the introduction of the supported employment model, were/are aimed at increasing the employment of people with disabilities in an open and inclusive labour market. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified by Poland in 2012, reinforces and promotes this course of action. The European Union's strategy also supports enabling a significant proportion of people with disabilities to earn a living on the free labour market (Giermanowska 2016: 82). According to Ewa Giermanowska (2016), such a trend is linked to a policy of normalisation, inclusion, and social integration, treating the rights of people with disabilities as equal to other members of society. The new vision of an open labour market for persons with disabilities, established on 10 May 2023 thanks to an initiative by the Activation Partnership Inclu(vi)sion Foundation, constitutes another initiative fighting for implementing the right to work included in Article 27 of the UN CRPD. The partnership aims to increase quantitatively and qualitatively the employment of people with disabilities in an open, accessible and inclusive labour market to 40% by 2030. As the initiators of the project state, "increasing the employment of persons with disabilities in an open, inclusive, and accessible labour market creates opportunities for a dignified, independent life for representatives of this community, but also positively influences the economic development of Poland. The optimal environment for change on the labour market for people with disabilities is open dialogue and

cooperation between representatives of business, government, local government, and NGO institutions”¹.

Therefore, it can be considered that the disability community, together with many NGOs, supported by social inclusion policies, has been fighting for years for equal access to employment for people with disabilities in the open labour market, for carrying out Giddens’ politics of emancipation (Giddens 2012) or for carrying out the idea of equality of participation which is the normative core of the “two-dimensional concept of social justice” (Fraser 2005). Activists with disabilities are struggling and unfortunately they are running into a wall, because despite all these efforts, a broad base of institutions, services, projects directed at professional activation and employment support, social campaigns deconstructing the stereotype of the “unproductive body”, the labour force participation rate of persons with disabilities of working age in Q4 2022 was 33.5% and the employment rate oscillated at approximately 31.6%, (GUS BAEL 2022) and has remained basically unchanged for years. The professional activity of persons with disabilities is also highly diverse. Across the group, those with a university degree perform best. Analyses by Giermanowska (2016: 72–76) show that almost one third of people with higher education, one in five with post-secondary, secondary vocational, and basic vocational education are economically active. The highest professional activity is in the 35–44 age bracket, while the lowest is in the under 24 and over 55 age brackets. According to the researcher, this means that after leaving school young people have problems with entering the labour market, and people who have become disabled while in employment also have problems reintegrating into work and maintaining employment (Giermanowska 2016: 73). Giermanowska also notes that the factors that most strongly determine the professional activity of persons with disabilities include the degree and nature of the disability. One in four people with mild disabilities are economically active, and one in five with moderate disabilities. Only 3.7% of people with severe disabilities are professionally active. Persons with intellectual disabilities and on the autism spectrum are the most excluded from the open labour market. The rate of professional activity for people with intellectual disabilities is 8.5%. These persons constitute the group of unemployed people who have the greatest difficulty in obtaining employment. This situation is caused by the existence of social barriers and stereotypes regarding society’s belief that their work is not worthwhile (Kukla, Duda, Czerw-Bajer 2011: 127). Of the 400,000 people on the autism spectrum living in Poland, only 2% are working despite promoting diversity management policies in companies (Kutwa 2022) and, as Giermanowska (2014; 2016) points

¹ <https://inclusion.aktywizacja.org.pl/partnerstwo> (accessed on: 31.08.2023).

out, the reality is that employers largely prefer to pay penalties to PFRON for not hiring employees with disabilities.

Therefore, the emerging image outlines the clash between all the activation activities: initiatives, partnerships, NGO projects, anti-exclusion policies, equal opportunities and diversity policies, i.e. all those civic activities and voices pointing to the need to create a new, open and inclusive labour market and the realities of a free market capitalist economy focused on profit and productivism. All these activities attempting to give resistance to discursively encoded ways of thinking about the place of persons with disabilities outside the labour market, these initiatives resisting the hegemony of ableist culture and exclusion from employment by assigning “unproductive bodies” with the belonging, closed space of a care home, all these socio-political activities that can be considered as “actions of non-sedentary thought” (Deleuze, Guattari 2015, after: Rzeźnicka-Krupa 2019: 25) that open up space and oppose being stuck in established regimes of thought clash with a despot: the rules governing the contemporary labour market, but at the same time, by opposing them, they attempt to disrupt and open it up to labour diversity. This kind of “nomadic war machine” (Braidotti 2007; Deleuze, Guattari 2015) rolls very slowly encountering resistance.

This resistance directs us again to the considerations of Russell (2017), who believes that it is the work of NGOs or social movements of people with disabilities that identify the source of unemployment for this social group in the discriminatory attitudes of employers, seeking change through establishing individual rights and remedies in accordance with the liberal theory of “equal opportunities” for employment, which in essence means equal access to work not available to all. In her opinion, no anti-discrimination law can break the systemic economic discrimination against persons with disabilities without affirmative action. Russell believes that, in practice, civil rights, which focus primarily on attitudes and prejudices, do not pay enough attention to the barriers posed by the economic structure and power relations towards the employment of persons with disabilities. According to the researcher, class interests perpetuate the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the workforce through systematic corporate accounting practices and forced unemployment. She believes that if we conceptualise disability as a product of the exploitative economic structure of capitalist society, one that creates and oppresses the “disabled body” in order to allow the small capitalist class to create the economic conditions necessary to gain enormous wealth, it becomes clear that anti-discrimination legislation that fails to recognise/perceive the contradictions of promoting equal opportunities in an unequal society is insufficient to address the unemployment of this group, and that the liberal rights model is designed to prevent criticism of power because of the exclusion from employment and the inequalities experienced by people with

disabilities (Russell 2017). Furthermore, Russell believes that a liberal society promotes equality by establishing social and political rights, in theory, because in reality it rarely distributes them equally. This means that individual rights are considered to be above the rules of the market. However, there is a mutual relationship between market institutions, inequality, and equality of opportunity. Policymakers are well aware that laws affect the functioning of the economy and, at the same time, the market affects the functioning of laws. It is more likely that certain regulations will be elevated to the status of law if they have a relatively low cost. Therefore, the theoretical right of a worker with disabilities is not a right, as it is determined by the employer's account (Russell 2017).

Russell believes that discrimination against people with disabilities in the labour market in a capitalist system is natural, as business owners and managers discriminate against those workers whose handicap increases the cost of production. In the contemporary world, the politics of inclusion, integration and equality is a process that is increasingly described as dependent on participation in standardised economic activities. Russell believes that discrimination can be ameliorated but cannot be eliminated by changing attitudes, because the power lies in production belonging to the owners of capital. Productive capital is privately owned, and owners are not forced to make capital available for the employment of workers. Therefore, denying access constitutes an important property right of capitalists over which workers have no control (Russell 2017: 235), and civil rights legislation does not intervene in the labour market to mandate the employment of disabled people.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is worth recalling the questions: what is the purpose of the economy: to promote market profits or to sustain social ties and encourage people to participate and cooperate? Should the ability to generate profit be the measure of a person's worth (Russell 2019: 21)? Russell claims that the struggle for rights and the liberation of independent living is a strong theme of historical change and there is an opportunity to reconfigure disability and eliminate the oppression of people with disabilities. The biological justification for the exclusion of disabled people from the realm of work must be challenged and replaced by a materialist justification calling for a radical and legitimate change in political economy (2019: 22). Disability, being a reflection of social class – in this case the proletariat displaced from the workforce – provides an opportunity to force a broader discussion on the legitimacy of contemporary work organisation (2017: 236). According to Russell, persons with disabilities have been socially conceptualised by capitalism

as “bodies” mature for economic exploitation, and discrimination persists despite the rhetoric concerning rights and inclusion policies. If this is understood, perhaps then the struggle of persons with disabilities for an equal place in the sphere of work will be met with the class consciousness necessary to challenge the current problem of disability unemployment (Russell 2017), and the attempt to build the kind of social organisation advocated by disability activists that allows all members of society to participate in social interactions on an equal footing would make Nancy Fraser’s concept of social justice more feasible. However, for this to happen, two conditions must be met. The first means distributing material goods in such a way as to ensure independence and a voice for the participants, as well as to exclude all forms of economic dependence and inequality that reduce the equality of participation. The second condition requires that institutionalised patterns of cultural value express equal respect for all participants and provide them with equal opportunities to achieve social respectability (Fraser 2005: 50), which is carried out through acknowledging distinctiveness as well as specificity (Fraser 2005: 58). Therefore, social justice, “could, in addition to recognising the common humanity of all people, also require recognition of their distinctiveness and particularity” (Fraser 2005: 59).

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Summary

Disability and work. Discursive constructions of exclusion and dissensus

In this article, the author sketches the issue of the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the field of employment and explains the causes of the difficult-to-surmount discrimination on the open labour market that affects this social group. The discussed issues are presented with reference to the theory of disability studies and the socio-cultural model of disability perceiving disability as a product of the dominant discourse. Presenting the problem of the marginalisation of people with disabilities on the labour market, the author goes back to the roots of any exclusion created in the era of early industrial capitalism, which created and then excluded the "unproductive body" from the field of employment. In the following section, referring to the concept of the economic model of disability, areas of economic

oppression, discursively perpetuated exclusionary practices and actions attempting to resist the imposed order, through the painstaking “forging of new lines of outlet”, fighting against the despotism of the capitalist labour market are discussed.

Keywords

disability and work, economic model of disability, discourse, labour market exclusion