

What is globalization doing to the world of work, both domestically and internationally? How does my own work reflect the forces of the global economy? What is an evaluation and description of one organized effort to address problems of the workplace?

The global economy is impacting the workplace both in terms of the types of jobs that are being created versus those that are disappearing and also in terms of the work environment, wages and benefits. Pilisuk (1998) refers to the hidden nature of structural, cultural and direct violence as it pertains to the manifest ways that violence, particularly against females and children, surfaces albeit not in ways which allow people to see that it is a symptom of the globalized economy. Pilisuk (1998) defines the global economy as “a system of exchange in which all goods, services, and information and the resources to produce or distribute them are available for purchase in a single marketplace” (p. 200). In this global market, multinational corporations are able to wrestle control away from local businesses and societies and to concentrate wealth in the hands of those few who have large investments in corporations. As a result, people and governments lose power and control, and the people become vulnerable to the whims of a global power structure which can wield enormous control of natural resources (land, timber, minerals, water, etc), as well as people’s compensation and health and welfare benefits. With insufficient legal structures to force corporations to comply ecological and social conscience in the way they conduct business, corporations are able to become the 21st century dictatorships much like Stalin, Lenin and Hitler whereby civil liberties such as free speech and freedom of religion are seriously suppressed, but also through the manipulation of wages, increasing poverty surfaces. With poverty, of course, comes increased crime and poor health (Pilisuk, 1998; Comas-Diaz & Jansen, 1995). The invisible structural causes of violence, according to Pilisuk, must be exposed and transformed.

There is a proliferation of prostitution due to women being forced to seek alternative ways to make a living and, by United Nations (UN) account, there are 57 million women and children prostitutes (Pilisuk, 1998). Substantial numbers of female children from Asia and the Philippines are sold into sexual slavery by prostitution rings eager to exploit the large numbers of women who lack the skills or job market to economically support their children. The trafficking of women is prolific in Eastern Europe, particularly in Thailand, the Philippines and, more recently, in Ukraine (Pilisuk, 1998). According to the UN, 4 million people are trafficked annually and as many as 500,000 in Western Europe alone, according to the International Organization for Migration (Pilisuk, 1998).

The sale of illegal drugs is also becoming a way for unemployed persons to make money when, as adolescents, they have little hope of garnering secure, legitimate employment, or, as an adult, they have been laid off and the jobs have been shipped overseas. Violence against women includes domestic violence, sexual abuse of girls and women, and killing and maiming women because of their gender (Comas-Diaz & Jansen, 1995). Under this rubric is also female infanticide, aborting female fetuses, excluding females from obtaining an education, denying women access to healthcare, forcing women into strenuous physical labor, and the denigration of women who have been raped either by a non-family member (Coma-Diaz & Jansen, 1995). The psychological impact on these women who are commonly diagnosed with clinical depression, anxiety disorders and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is pervasive, but this also negatively impacts their ability to obtain employment and, once secured, to fulfill the role of a competent, productive worker. Minimally, in countries where worker conditions are extreme and

oppressive, she is likely to phenomenologically experience a secondary abuse by the employer who is male.

Women living in countries where they are denigrated and devalued, along with treated as subhuman, have little hope of getting an education and earning wages that allow them to become economically independent (Comas-Diaz & Jansen, 1995). This creates a cycle of poverty whereby women and children suffer from hunger and increased diseases and disorders due to lack of adequate healthcare. Furthermore, because they are subjugated, they do not have access to legal or political channels that would potentially assist them in ameliorating their marginalized and oppressed status in society. This all translates into a workforce of highly uneducated, unskilled females who make considerably less

Across the globe, governments are hiring and utilizing larger numbers of military or paramilitary forces to either initiate terror campaigns against a society that is a potential threat to those in power (Alecio & Taylor, 1998) or as a means to quell social riots and revolts against governments or against activities directly related to the continued burgeoning of global market forces. These forms of mass social oppression certainly are aimed at the social fabric of society, however, cannot help but have psychological impacts that carry over into the workplace (Alecia & Taylor, 1998). This generates fear, anxiety and depression that, in turn, impacts a person's ability to be productive and efficient at work.

When mass groups of people live under state sponsored terror, the human psyche responds in ways that allow the person to adapt to, and defend against, adversity, harm or death. This psychological response becomes a pattern embedded in the psyche and

extends its reach to children. Thus, maladaptive and pathological parenting becomes the norm where children are verbally and physically abused by parents who lack sufficient psychological strength and maturity, along with adequate nurturing social context, to provide healthy, adaptive parenting to their children. As a result, these children are continually exposed to parental abuse and/or neglect which perpetuates a cycle that extends intergenerationally.

In countries where “vigilante justice” (Alecio & Taylor, 1998) is the means whereby individuals or groups form to avenge injustice because the state has been inadequate in providing a legal system to bring justice to criminals, the social fabric of that society breaks down. In Guatemala in the 1990s, it was common for vigilante groups to capture suspected criminals who were perceived to have escaped justice and execute them in public (Alecio & Taylor, 1998). Kidnapping is a lucrative business for the oligarchy of a state or nation (Alecio & Taylor, 1998). Used as a way to wield control and maintain power, the elite are able to use the money to perpetuate their elite position.

As Alecio & Taylor (1998) point out, once a society is known for impunity with criminal activities, there is a mentality that rises which says anything goes and consequences are not present. When the criminal justice system breaks down, there is a subsequent proliferation of “iron fist” policies by an oppressive patriarchal figurehead. Military control over the populace becomes a way of life, as do oppression, suppression and the denial of democratic liberties and values.

Dumont (1996), a psychiatrist in Massachusetts, provides an excellent expose’ of the social costs when mental health services are privatized. He describes the destruction

of community mental health services for patients seeking outpatient care, along with the deterioration of care for inpatient populations as the shift from public funding of services to a market driven system took place. This translated into increased violence and homelessness of mental health patients. Dumont also describes the negative impact in terms of demoralization on the mental health professionals providing the care as the focus on saving money replaces excellent, quality care. Downsizing mental hospitals and massive layoffs of mental health clinicians in outpatient settings has resulted in contracting services. With fewer clinicians to provide services, the quality of care to the community has suffered. This creates workers who “tend to be dispirited, angry, and less motivated” (Dumont, 1998, p. 296). Additionally, when adequate staff is available, there is a decreased emphasis on finding the source of clusters of complaints such as a community source of toxic substance. Due to greater unemployment of mental health professionals, there is less time to devote to patients, thus, long-term psychotherapy which focuses on the root causes of mental health issues is replaced by brief treatments intended to address larger numbers of clients, but with only superficial, short-term amelioration of their issues.

**A description and evaluation of one organized effort to
address problems of the workplace.**

The March 1998 organized effort by laborers on two banana plantations near Morales, Izabal is an excellent example of the power that large groups of people who organize under a united cause can make (Perillo, 1998). Workers at two banana plantations, Mopa and El Panorama, tried to organize unions having grown weary from extremely long hours, poor pay and squalid living conditions. It is not uncommon for management to force workers to work overtime up to six days per week and many times up to 14 hours

per day. During periods of high production, a work day can be 17 hours. If an employee objects, they are told to look for work somewhere else. Sexual advances toward women by management is a common complaint. Housing is a one story, 10' x 10' cinder block room with a cement floor. The entire family shares the one room. The medical dispensary rarely has adequate medication and most workers cannot afford medicine elsewhere. If a worker leaves work early, that day's wages are lost. These are the reasons that laborers attempt to unionize since this is the only way the employees have a chance at decent work pay and conditions. There were 22 workers from these 2 plantations who requested from the Judge an injunction recognizing a collective conflict which specifically prohibits an employer from firing a worker without a court order, pending resolution of the conflict. The Judge issued the injunction. The plantation owner fired the 22 ad-hoc committee members and suspended production and abandoned the plantations, locking out the rest of the workforce. Since firing workers prior to the legal resolution of the injunction conflict violates the law, the owner should have been sanctioned immediately by the court. However, the owner submitted false documents to the Judge which alleged that the workers had been fired prior to the Judge *issuing the injunction*. The owner pressed criminal charges against the 62 workers he identified as the core union supporters and he also pressed civil and criminal charges against the unions' Executive Committee.

This posed the backdrop for what came next when 350 armed anti-riot police arrived to give arrest warrants to the 62 workers who had been involved in union organizing activity at the two banana plantations that catapulted the tensions between management, government and laborers. Once the police arrived, 1,000 workers from

neighboring plantations joined the laborers from the two banana plantations. Human Rights organizations were alerted and the next day the troops withdrew. The company who owns the plantations fired 508 of the 1,000 workers out of retaliation and this prompted 4,500 unionized banana workers to walk off their jobs in protest. By the end of the day, the company reinstated the 508 workers. Six months following, however, there were 250 workers at these two plantations who remained locked out of their jobs.

These types of organized efforts can be highly effective, however, only when there are requisite laws in place which protect union activity and which are enforced. In the aforementioned case, the workers would clearly have won the effort if it were not for plantation owners who are corrupt and deceitful and if the court system were not so clearly on the side of the owners. Without having sufficient knowledge of the law, it seems that there should have been some means whereby the workers could have proven that they were not fired prior to the issuing of the injunction, rather they were fired after the injunction, but before the court could resolve the conflict. The case highlights the importance of not only adequate laws, but also a strong, ethical court system with ethical judicial officials who cannot be “bought” by corporations. When the judicial system is rife with corrupt officials, it makes it impossible for authentic justice to reign.

In the United States, unions have declined substantially over the past two decades. It seems imperative that checks and balances must be placed on corporations or their run away greed is going to pose a risk for a healthy capitalist economy which is built upon an edifice of a robust middle class. While unions are not the complete answer to resolving this crisis in the run away global economy, they can be one effective aspect.

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