

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 66

The dignity of work 3 – Work, the right to participate

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Our discussion of work thus far has assumed separate roles for managers/capital owners and employees. However, over time in many companies worldwide the “separateness” of these roles has become blurred. Employees now in a number of instances have opportunities to participate other than as the “worker”.

Workers are often as part of compensation packages offered part ownership in companies, to share in profits and to participate in management. While in some instances owners of resources/capital or business may fear the moves in this direction, this is something that should be embraced.

We are told in the *Compendium* that “the relationship between labour and capital also finds expression when workers participate in ownership, management and profits. This is an all-too-often overlooked requirement and it should be given greater consideration.

‘On the basis of his work each person is fully entitled to consider himself a part-owner of the great workbench where he is working with everyone else.’ Fundamentally, simply by just being involved in work, the worker is part-owner of what is produced; it cannot be produced without his/her labour. Workers' views and input are therefore critical tools for owners of capital to value if they would like their capital to work for them.

“A way towards that goal could be found by associating labour with the ownership of capital, as far as possible, and by producing a wide range of intermediate bodies with economic, social and cultural purposes.

These would be bodies enjoying real autonomy with regard to public authorities, pursuing their specific aims in honest collaboration with each other and in subordination to the demands of the common good. These would be living communities both in form and in substance, as members of each body would be looked upon and treated as persons and encouraged to take an active part in the life of the body (*Laborem Exercens*)’.”

It is often felt that when workers are allowed to participate beyond just being a “worker” and are involved in management, profit sharing and ownership that these initiatives stimulate a greater level of motivation and commitment to the final outcome.

What does this mean for us in a practical sense? For large corporations suggestions for inclusion of the employee are:

- Profit Sharing - An arrangement in which an employer shares some of its profits with its employees. The compensation can be stocks, bonds, or cash, and can be immediate or deferred until retirement.
- Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOP) - Employees can buy stock/shares directly, be given it as a bonus, can receive stock options, or obtain stock through a profit sharing plan. Some employees become owners through worker cooperatives where everyone has an equal vote.
- Inclusion in management decision making – representation on Board of Directors and Management Committees
- Staff associations such as Workers Cooperatives and Trade Unions

For those persons with small businesses that may employ very few persons, simple inclusion of employees in decisions that affect the business, where they feel their views are important can make a significant difference. Profit sharing can still also be considered on a smaller scale.

A few articles back, the subjective nature of work was highlighted, that is work is the activity of the human person as a dynamic being capable of performing a variety of actions that are part of the work process; it was less about the technology and materials of production. This implies that because of “the new ways that work is organised, where knowledge is of greater account than the mere ownership of the means of production, concretely shows that work, because of its subjective character, entails the right to participate.

This awareness must be firmly in place in order to evaluate the proper place of work in process of production and to find ways of participation that are in line with the subjectivity of work in the distinctive circumstances of different concrete situations (*Gaudium et Spes*).

Next week we look at Chapter 6 d the relationship between labor and private property.