

Decent work essay sample



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Ever since Karl Marx gave his groundbreaking criticism of the conditions of the proletariat, the world has evolved to continuously better the working conditions of the average laborer. Today a new concept is emerging that hopes to epitomize the ideal working conditions in a civilized society, that concept is Decent Work. Decent Work aims to promote opportunities for workers to perform decent productive work and enjoying economic freedom, equity, security and a proud sense of dignity. If there was ever a condition of employee utopia, it would be Decent Work.

Decent Work is a useful and lofty goal. Decent Work is a standard by which all civilized modern countries should hold themselves. Decent Work is a way for productive citizens to lead healthy productive lives in comfort and security and that all governments should strive to provide just that for their citizens. The critical element for Decent Work to happen is through governmental efforts to increase the value of the individual workers. The value of work should increase and the state should make it such that the bargaining power rests not with the employer or the labor union but rather with the individual employees. This valuable work is best achieved through a rigorous education system that arms the employees with skills and knowledge to make them more productive.

Mr. Juan Somavia, ILO Director General has this to say about Decent Work.

“ Decent work means productive work in which rights are protected, which generates an adequate income, with adequate social protection. It also means sufficient work, in the sense that all should have full access to income-earning opportunities. It marks the high road to economic and social

development, a road in which employment, income and social protection can be achieved without compromising workers' rights and social standards.”

(Somavia, 1999)

From the statement of Mr. Somavia, we can identify key components of Decent Work. First is the protection of rights. In a Decent Work environment, the legally granted rights should be respected by the employer and taken advantage of to the fullest by the worker. Second is an adequate income, an income that will cover not just the day to day expenses of the laborer but an income by which the worker can secure his financial freedom. Ideally, the worker should not be plunged into an economic abyss if he or she is faced with an emergency that precludes him or her from going to work. Third is “social protection” by which discrimination is disallowed and is inexistent. Lastly, a condition for Decent Work is the existence and availability of the above working conditions for all that need it. Decent Work should be available not only to those who are currently employed but also to those that are entering the workplace or seek to transfer to another employ (CINTERFOR, n. d., p. 1).

One thing that needs to be remembered in an employment relations situation is the oftentimes conflicting viewpoints between the participants in the situation. The unions, the employers, and the state may all share different viewpoints on what Decent Work should be and what should be the best way to achieve that state. For example, employers value the ability to have a flexible labor market - the ability to fire and hire at will to make sure that their operation is running as efficiently as possible. As expected, such policies will not go over well with labor and workers' unions (Rodgers, 2006, <https://assignbuster.com/decent-work-essay-sample/>

p. 3). Another point of contention might be taxation, to provide Decent Work, the state might want to enact a deduction on the salary of the worker for a form of collective social security while the individual worker might want to keep his salary intact and just work on his social security on his own (Orr, n. d., p. 1).

There are several strategies for achieving Decent Work. One strategy is through legislation. Lawmakers could enact laws that set a minimum standard of work for employers to follow. These laws might include minimum wages, mandatory sick and paid leaves and other benefits. Additionally, lawmakers may simply protect the right to bargain of labor unions. Labor unions allow workers to achieve that same minimum standard of work for themselves without having to resort to a lengthy process of legislation. Additionally, labor unions may ask for benefits that are specific only to their niche field of work which may be overlooked by lawmakers. An example would be gasoline allowances for workers that travel a lot such as salespersons. Lastly, the employer could simply promote a decent working environment out of his own accord (Langmore, 2005).

The best way to achieve a sustainable environment of Decent Work is if the initiative of Decent Work came directly from the employer. Forcing the employer to perform or provide minimum mandatory benefits may turn out to be harmful for the business and in the long run hurt the employees (Pollin, 1998, p. 1). Mandatory wage minimums and benefits increase the overhead costs of the business and restrict the profits of the business. Similarly, labor union negotiations may hold both the employer and the employees at an impasse for too long a time that it hurts both parties.

However it is wonderfully naïve to assume that employers shall always give livable wages and benefits at their own accord. Thus, my position is that government should enact policies that would make sure that having a decent work environment is for the employer's own interests. Key aspects for this solution would be a very liquid labor market, an emphasis on paying correct wages in lieu of minimum wages and an emphasis on continual employee education and development. Another thing that the state should ensure is a strong economy that is able to create jobs at a sufficient rate. By sufficient, this means that enough jobs are created to match with the population growth and the growth of participants in the workplace.

Instead of augmenting minimum wage, the state should try to augment the skill and abilities of the workers. The state should ensure that training and specialization programs are always easily available for people that wish to add to their skill sets. This way, the productivity of the business increases as well as the average educational quotient of the citizenry. I also believe that this solution is also more market based and is more efficient as compared to enforcing a mandatory minimum wage. This coupled with extreme fluidity in the labor market will create a condition wherein the employer is willing to create good working conditions lest he lose his employees to another rival firm. To ensure Decent Work conditions, the government should act to put the bargaining power not in the employer but in the individual employees. This is not similar to labor union bargaining as the bargaining power of the union comes from their numbers. The labor market should be a seller's market, not a buyer's market.

Admittedly, the employer may simply relocate to another locale that offers lower labor costs. To offset this risk, the state should make sure that the local labor force has something to offer that is not available overseas. Again, the state could do this through investment in education and skill development. The state should encourage employers not to value cheap work but rather to value valuable work.

Another avenue for the state to promote Decent Work is by promoting the development of entrepreneurs and small businesses. The creation of more wealth generating businesses is good for the economy as the creation of value is increased. Additionally, by having more people run their own companies and businesses, the state is essentially making them achieve their own definitions of Decent Work. It is hard to not achieve Decent Work when you are only working for yourself at your own accord. People should be encouraged to just work for themselves especially if they have enough skills to create value on their own. Also, with the emphasis on augmenting worker value instead of augmenting worker wages, the overhead costs of running small businesses go down which shall encourage their creation. Small overhead costs due to mandatory benefits and wages not only help many people start a business but more importantly help a business survive to the point of it being able to provide those services by its own accord. A self-owned business is a wealth generation model that the state should encourage as part of promoting the concept of Decent Work.

To summarize, the crux of this proposition is education. Decent Work is rooted in having a labor force that is productive and holds the bargaining chips rather than the employer. Education and skill development is key to

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doing that. The state should encourage the development of its citizens so that they could all earn their value in their employ. Similarly, citizens that possess the skill and ability to start their own companies should be encouraged to do so. In such a scenario, the employee wins as he/she now earns what he or she is worth instead of what the government tells his employer to do (if the employer decides to stiff him, he may always opt to go to another employer). The employer wins as the business is now composed of a more skilled and more productive labor force that shall help the company increase its value. And the state benefits from having a skilled and educated labor force that is unparalleled. Education is the magic bullet and it will work better than any law, any strike, any compensation package that we could ever come up with.

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