

Children First Contra Humiliation

By Leo Semashko, edited by Rose Lord

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Dear Evelin,

I am very grateful to you for your deep understanding of the necessity to make children a priority in society and for its firm support. I fully agree with you that the quality of its relation to children and youth defines the quality of a society. As seen in the last two centuries and deftly expressed by Janusz Korczak in the beginning of the 20th century, the traditional quality of relations of an industrial society and state to children, leaves a wide open space for humiliation of the children's dignity. Despite all the successes of an information society growing inside the industrial society, children are now doubly marginal.

Double marginality of children is, first, the age marginality and, secondly, the social marginality. The age marginality is natural; it is connected with the initial age, when the human is still small, weak and ignorant. But the child possesses all human qualities at the beginning of development. This marginality comes from nature, it is temporary, and it passes with age. The social (including state, political and legal) marginality of children is created by society and defined by its quality. Presently social marginality of children is manifested first of all in the age voting qualification. All the Constitutions recognize a human as a citizen of the state from the moment of his birth but voting rights are only received from the moment of maturity, as a rule, at 18 years. However, there is an opportunity to give voting rights from the moment of birth but, owing to the age marginality, the EXECUTION of a child's voting right would be INCUMBENT upon his parents or legal guardians.

Thus, social marginality of children differs from natural (age) that there is a social way of overcoming it. (The only way to overcome the natural marginality of children is for them to reach adulthood.) However, until now the industrial society and state is not interested in overcoming the social marginality of children. Therefore, the children of the industrial society must endure this double marginality, this double source of humiliation. In this connection the most authoritative international organization – the UN - was compelled to ascertain on the Special Session (May 2002) that modern society leaves children in "poverty, discrimination and neglect" and that it has not created "a world fit for children" yet. Poverty, discrimination and neglect are doubly strong sources of humiliation for children. Double marginality of children in the industrial society fosters humiliations of children, at least twice as large and strong as the humiliation suffered by adults. You, as the doctor of medicine and psychology know better than I, what deep and pernicious consequences (psychological, moral, social, professional etc.) result from the double humiliation of children.

The quality of the human capital of society and social capital of the person is cut "at the root" by double marginality of children. A social priority of children, established by the social-cultural institute of children's suffrage executed by parents and guardians, is the sole way to overcome the social marginality of children and the reason for their

humiliation. The priority of children will neutralize a social source of their humiliation and arm them and their caregivers (parents, teachers, doctors, grandmothers, grandfathers, instructors etc.) with the powerful tool of an opposition and minimization of their humiliation owing to their natural (age) marginality. The priority of children removes the social marginality of children in all countries and cultures.

A serious step in the direction of children's priority and a sharp reduction of their humiliation was made in Sweden, the first nation in the world to accept in 1979 the "anti-spanking" law forbidding parents to use corporal punishment on their children. But this law, despite its doubtless value, only limits arbitrariness on the part of parents and does not aim them at prevention of the social humiliation of children ("poverty, discrimination and neglect") and does not arm them with an adequate powerful and lawful mechanism. The social-cultural and legal institute of children's suffrage executed by parents can be such a mechanism. It creates and establishes the necessary preconditions for the priority of children in a society and state. Only in a condition of children's priority, when children come first in the society and state, is it possible to expect a qualitative reduction of the children's humiliation and an increase in the quality of the human and social capital.

I see a role for children's priority in the statement of equal dignity of all people proclaimed by the Declaration of the Rights of Human and in prevention of the humiliation of the human dignity. I do not consider my opinion to be the final word; therefore I would be glad if you put it up for discussion on the site of your unique international organization "Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies" (HumanDHS). The discussion topic can be formulated approximately so: "Priority of children, human dignity and humiliation prevention". Such a discussion is possible on our site if its authors would be interested in it.

Warmest wishes of peace and harmony,
Leo