PRESSURES FOR MORE "PARTICIPATORY" FORMS OF ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION IN THE SOVIET UNION*

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There are no labor-managed firms in the Soviet Union and no obvious sings of a transition to self-management. But the need to create more participatory forms of organization at the work place has been recognized for some time. Since approximately 1965 we can observe the emergence of a participatory current in Soviet sociological and economic literature, as well as explorations of novel ways of selecting managerial personnel and short-lived experiments with self-managing work teams. These matters have not received the attention they deserve, perhaps because so much of the Soviet literature on worker participation is empty rhetoric. The continuing celebration of a highly participatory system — when everyone knows it is not — may obscure serious efforts to pose the issue of changing the distribution of managerial authority in the enterprise. In addition, some of the traditional concerns of economists studying the Soviet system — their focus on the issue of planning versus the market, the relations between the "center" and the enterprise — may have diverted our attention somewhat from the continuing Soviet problem of finding effective means of mobilizing work effort at the enterprise.

Even a cursory acquaintance with the Soviet literature on labor problems reveals widespread work discontent, chronically unsatisfactory labor discipline, and the ineffectiveness of existing official mechanisms of "worker participation" to instill a sense of involvement in enterprise decision-making. Illustrations abound. For example, Arutiunian's studies of rural economic etnerprises in the late 1960's revealed that some two-thirds to three-fourths of the most numerous, rural stratum perceived itself as without influence over important decisions in farms and other rural economic units. Moreover, individuals employed on collective farms — in a strictly formal sense the most participatory type of rural economic unit — exhibited

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the lowest sense of participation.[1] More recently, studies of industrial plants have disclosed widespread dissatisfaction among workers (81% in one case cited) with production conferences — one of the principal forms of officially designated worker participation.[2] A pioneering study of job attitudes among young Leningrad workers recorded surprisingly low proportions of satisfied workers, ranging from 20% among those employed in unskilled and low-skilled jobs to 50% among the highly skilled.[3]

We cannot determine how representative these figures are. But at the very least they help explain the emergence — in the midst of ritualistic celebrations of worker participation — of a serious concern with providing opportunities for rudimentary forms of worker initiative in plant-level decision making.

Our purpose here is to review some of the principal forms assumed by the issue of worker participation in management (or "production democracy") in Soviet public discourse. In what contexts has the idea of participation (in its real rather than fictitious sense) been introduced? Unfortunately our review will also be a chronicle of the failure to implement the idea. But an optimist might say everything has its beginning, and some things may require a new beginning.

STUDIES OF WORK ATTITUDES

Our interest here in Soviet studies of work attitudes rests not on what they have revealed about the extent of work discontent but on the ways in which they have been used as vehicles for an argument.

The excellent empirical study of young Leningrad workers' job attitudes in the mid-1960's by Iadov and Zdravomyslov has served as a model for later Soviet efforts in this area. Perhaps the principal finding of this study was that the "richness of content of work," the "creative opportunities" offered by the job, was the most important single factor determining the attitude of the worker toward his position in the labor process. "We can assert that for the young worker the most important factor determining the general level of satisfaction in work is the content of labor, and only then comes the magnitude of wages and the opportunities for advancement on the job."[4] The authors made it clear that they were not negating the continuing importance of material incentives. But if the question concerned the relative importance of money wages versus job content the answer was unambiguous. Differences in the degree of work satisfaction experienced by workers in low-skilled manual jobs and in skilled, "high-contract" jobs were substantially greater than differences in the average wage levels of these groups.

1) Iu. V. Arutiunian, *Sotsial'naia struktura sel'skogo naseleniia SSSR*, Moscow, 1971, p. 108.

2) T. M. Dzhafarli, "The Study of Public Opinion: A Necessary Condition for Correct Decisions," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, 1978, No. 1, p. 74.

3) V. A. Iadov and A. A. Kissel', "Work Satisfaction, An Analysis of Empirical Generalizations and an Attempt at Theoretical Interpretations," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, 1974, No. 1, p. 85.

4) V. A. Iadov, "Orientation: Creative Work," in G. M. Gusev et al., eds., *Obshchestvo i molodezh'* Moscow, 1968, p. 134. This section also draws on A. G. Zdravomislov, V. P. Rozhin and V. A. Iadov, *Chelovek i ego rabota*, Moscow, 1967, pp. 288—306.

But the importance of job content as a determinant of work satisfaction was precisely the problem. Even in the early 1960's, the authors claimed, the proportion of workers with relatively high educational and cultural levels exceeded the proportion of "high-content," creative-type jobs. More important, the "disproportion" between the relatively small number of satisfying jobs and the work aspirations created by rising educational levels could be expected to increase. In short, the problem of work discontent would become even more serious unless measures were taken to "compensate" workers for the gap between their limited work content and the aspirations fostered by extended schooling. One of the principal means of "amortizing" this gap (along with job rotation and providing opportunities for "creative" leisure) was the

> "development of all types of participation of workers in the management of production. The highly educated worker now coming to the factory is prepared to assume greater responsibility for the affairs of production and the organization of labor. It is perfectly obvious that much more must be done to develop all forms of initiative in the sphere of management than we have done up to now."[5]

The failure to spell out the specific forms that worker participation in management might take obviously limits the force of the argument. The same is true of the Leningrad sociologists' general appeal for "the broad development of a system of self-management in production."[6] But the very general form of these proposals should not obscure their significance. The context in which they were made is the important thing. Self-management and worker participation were being proposed as partial solutions to the increasingly severe problem of work morale.

Other studies presented the argument somewhat differently but the point was the same. N. Alekseev's study of work attitudes in a sector of the Soviet fishing fleet may serve as an illustration.[7] Although this was hardly a major sector of the Soviet economy (the study covered "collective fisheries," apparently organized on the same principles as collective farms), the author had long been associated with the participatory current in management literature and it was clear that the issues raised were applicable elsewhere. Alekseev sought to establish an empirical relationship between the degree of work satisfaction and the opportunities for ordinary workers to participate in managerial functions. The latter were implicitly defined as decisions bearing on the organization of the production process, the distribution of premium payments, and the maintenance of work discipline. Not very surprisingly, Alekseev found a positive relationship between satisfaction in work and each of these participatory variables. Some of his claims are presented in rather extreme terms and are not supported by the evidence he adduces — for example, the claim of a "sharp polarization" of work attitudes and behavior depending upon "inclusion or exclusion" in the management process. But the policy implications were clear. Prevailing

5) V. A. Iadov, p 142.

6) A. G. Zdravomyslov et al., p. 296.

7) N. I. Alekseev, "The Interaction of Social Factors Determining the Attitude Toward Work," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, 1975, No. 3, pp. 112—121.

opportunities for worker participation were inadequate; their extension would bring into play a "main reserve" for increasing labor productivity and would be decisive in fostering "optimally positive" attitudes toward work activity.

A recently published (1976) study of work attitudes in the Soviet oil industry reveals the distance traveled since the pioneering study of Leningrad workers a decade earlier. The Leningrad study, it will be recalled, stressed the importance of the functional content of work, its scope for creativity, in accounting for worker reactions to their jobs. The author of the oil-industry study (A. Tikhonov) builds on this earlier work, but goes beyond it by explicitly introducing the "social organization" (as distinct from the "productive organization") of the work place as an appropriate tool for studying the labor process and its impact on workers.[8] It is interesting to see how Tikhonov justifies this extension of the conceptual apparatus of Soviet research on work attitudes and, in the course of doing so, makes a case for more participatory forms of work organization.

Recent Soviet literature on the labor process, Tikhonov argues, relies on an excessively narrow approach to the problem of raising the content of work and increasing its scope for creativity. The stress is typically placed on enriching work by substituting machinery for burdensome manual labor and simultaneously raising the share of mental or intellectual functions in the total labor process. But the enrichment of work in this view is seen as proceeding exclusively along a horizontal dimension — as a redistribution of functions between man and the machine. The vertical component of the labor process, i. e. the distribution of functions between the labor of management and supervision on the one hand, and the labor of "execution" of work on the other, tends to be ignored. The scope for creativity in work, however, depends as much on this vertical or social aspect of work-place organization as it does on the relationship between man and the machine. More specifically, the enrichment of the work process must be seen as significantly dependent on what Tikhonov calls the "production independence" of the worker, or the degree to which the functions of planning, organization and control of the work process are directly delegated to the ordinary worker. The questions posed by Tikhonov make it clear that he did not regard the prevailing distribution of authority over the labor process, more particularly, the split between the planning of work and its execution, as a closed issue.

> "What level of independence of workers in the planning, organization and control of their own labor should be regarded as optimal from the social and economic points of view? How should the system of long-run and operational decision-making at various levels of management be restructured? At present it is difficult to get fully substantiated answers to these questions."[9]

His own findings, however, clearly pointed to an unduly low managerial component in the worker's overall activity. Fully two-thirds of the workers

[8] A. V. Tikhonov, "The Influence of Production Independence of the Worker on Attitudes Toward Work," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, 1976, No. 1, pp. 31—44.

[9] A. V. Tikhonov, p. 33.

Tikhonov investigated exhibited "low" to "medium" opportunities for "production independence." Rarely were work tasks planned and distributed by the workers themeselves. Not only was the work experience impoverished and its attractiveness reduced thereby, but enormous and unnecessarily detailed burdens of administration were imposed on managerial staffs. Some prevailing forms of worker participation in management — and here Tikhonov obviously meant fictitious forms like socialist emulation campaigns, attendance at production conferences, "volunteer-type" *(na obshchestvennykh nachalakh)* activity to improve productive performance — merely served as "compensation for the social costs of srtrictly regulated, executor-type labor." Overcoming fragmatation in the work process required that "the functions of management and supervision of work, and of its execution, be combined in the labor process of the direct producer."[10]

Whatever the occasional rhetorical flourishes and the failure to specify the forms that worker participation might take, it should be clear why we regard these studies of work attitudes as part of the participatory current in Soviet social and economic thought.

THE MANAGEMENT LITERATURE AND THE ISSUE OF "ELECTIONS"

The need for the professionalization of management has been a dominant theme in the Soviet management literature of at least the last two decades. The increasing complexity of managerial tasks, management as a professional skill requiring specialized and extended formal education, the need for a distinct managerial stratum to coordinate the activities of the enterprise, the necessity for „relations of subordination" — short, the unavoidable division of function between the managers and the managed — have long been staple components of the Soviet management literature.[11] But in the years following the economic reforms of 1965 there emerged another theme, variously introduced in the form of proposals to extend "production democracy," "democratic principles of management," "worker initiative in management." The two themes of professionalization and participation have continued their uneasy coexistence ever since, with the second distinctly subordinate to the first but representing more than mere window dressing.

The expectations induced by the reforms made it possible to pose the issue of worker participation in a new way. Under conditions in which the scope for autonomy by the enterprise was severely limited by a myriad of assignments and instructions from higher agencies the possibility of effectively broadening the social base of participation in management could hardly be taken seriously. What could worker participation mean under such conditions other than conscientious performance of job tasks assigned by managerial personnel? The reform, by appearing to enlarge the scope of

[10] A. V. Tikhonov, pp. 32—33.

[11] For some typical examples see V. G. Afanas'ev, *Nauchnoe upravlenie obshchestvom*, No. 2, Moscow, 1968, pp. 190—97; G. V. Suvorov, "The Problem of Studying the Structure of Management of the Production Collective," in A. S. Pashkov, ed., *Chelovek i obshchestvo*, No. 8, Leningrad, 1971, p. 76.

decisions that could be made at the enterprise, particularly by holding out the prospects of increases in decentralized investment and premium payments out of retained profits, provided a king of "platform" for raising the issue of the distribution of managerial authority within the enterprise.

The reform did not directly provide for changes in the structure of authority within enterprises. The proponents of what we have called the participatory theme in the managerial literature explicitly called attention to the distinction between the decentralization of economic management — which the reform seemed to provide — and the democratization of management. The former was clearly recognized as a necessary condition for the latter, but not sufficient. The distinction between decentralization and democratization was invoked to warn against concentrating the expanded decision-making authority of the enterprise exclusively in the hands of professional managers.[12]

The years immediately following the 1965 reform were a period in which some of the most familiar concepts in the Soviet lexicon — including the concept of socialism itself — were reformulated in the language of "production democracy." The new formulations that occassionally found their way into the management literature directly challenged some rather sacred concepts. For example, the simplistic identification of "democracy" with the existence of socialized property was explicitly rejected. The significance of such property was that it created *"only* the foundation for involving the masses in management" (emphasis in the original).[13] Similar criticisms were directed at the way in which the concept of property itself has been traditionally regarded. Property had been narrowly viewed from its "juridical" aspect only, i.e., from the standpoint of its legal form of ownership. In this view, the greater the amount of socialized property and the more centralized its management, the "higher" the form of property. But the juridical aspect of property was only an "external cover" which concealed "real economic relations". The distinction made here (in a 1967 publication) between the "juridical" and "real" aspects of property, with the latter implying collective control by producers over the utilization of property and its product, was to become a hallmark of the literature urging the democratization of management.[14]

In 1969 the economist A. Birman, one of the principal proponents of extending the economic reform, posed the familiar question, "what is socialism?" His answer was not quite the usual one:

> "It is not only a certain, sufficiently high level of material production, not only the socialization of the means of production, but the indispensable participation of working people in the management of production, of the whole country. But even the word 'participation' is not enough;

12) Ia. S. Kapeliush, "Democracy and Centralism," in V. A. Fomin ed., *Nekotorye voprosy nauchnogo upravlenia obshchestvom,* Moscow, 1967, pp. 37—46; P. M. Panov, "Problems of Development of Democratic Principles in the Management of Production," in Iu. E. Volkov, ed., *Sotsiologicheskie problemy upravleniia narodnym khoziaistvom,* No. 1, Sverdlovsk, 1968, p. 110.

13) L. Klepatskii, "On the Question of Forms of Organization and Management of Industry in the USSR," In V. A. Fomin, p. 65.

14) A. Tsipko, "On the Economic and Legal Concept of Property," in V. A. Fomin, p. 124; Iu. V. Arutiunian, p. 104.

> it is the *exercise* of management by the working people themselves (emphasis in the original). Socialism is a self-managing — through the state — society of working people."[15]

Whether Birman's insertion of "through the state" in the above definition was merely a protective device or something more, the important feature was surely the linking of the idea of socialism with self-management rather than primarily with the socialization of property. Birman's main concern, however, was not with matters of definition but with the logic of the case for worker participation. This rested on the notion that improved productive performance of the Soviet system could only be attained by "perfecting the relations of production." Exclusive reliance on technological advance, rising skill levels and increasing wages was simply no longer sufficient. Introducing more participatory forms of economic organization — and here Birman cited as examples worker involvement in hiring and firing of enterprise personnel, in devising premium systems — had become a matter of "objective necessity."[16]

Another illustration of efforts to pose the issue of worker participtaoin in a new way in the management literature appears in the writings of Iu. Volkov. In an article published in 1970 Volkov stressed that involving workers in management functions should not mean simply providing opportunities for them to assist managerial personnel in the latter's efforts to strengthen work discipline, locate "production reserves", and generally to "improve production." To conceive of worker participation as exclusively an aid to managerial staffs in the performance of the latter's functions was to "stand things upside down." The main feature of management is decision-making in the enterprise ("those who make decisions possess the highest rights of management"), and worker participation in management — if it was to be meaningful — must provide for participation in that decision-making process.[17]

The participatory theme in the management literature was not confined to the rather broad formulations just reviewed. More specific proposals to implement the idea were also forthcoming, but they had to be reconciled with the sacred principle of one-man management. This principle, enshrined during the early days of the first Five Year Plan, essentially provides that the leadership functions of every production unit (whether an enterprise as a whole, a shop, or a section) are assigned to a single executive who also bears responsibility for the productive performance of that unit. "All individuals working in the unit are obligated to fulfill the instructions of the executive."[18] Without directly challenging the principle of one-man management, Birman posed a question which had been asked more than once in the management literature of the post-reform period: "Can we not attempt to map out... when and in what sequence particular questions

15) A. Birman, "The Most Gratifying Task, *Novyi mir,* 1969, No. 12, p. 176.

16) A. Birman, p. 177.

17) Iu. E. Volkov, "Problems of Development of Democratic Principles in the Management of Socialist Production," In V. G. Afanas'ev, ed., *Nauchnoe upravlenie obshchestvom,* No. 4, Moscow, 1970, pp. 152—153.

18) F. F. Aunapu. *Chto takoe upravlenie,* Moscow, 1967, p. 14.

will be within the competence not only of the director, shop superintendent and foreman, but also of the production conference, the general meeting...?"[19]

A partial list of the kinds of proposals offered to implement worker participation since 1965 would include the following: granting the "collective organs" of the enterprise (in this context the trade union or the production conference) the authority to decide on the allocation of retained profits and premium funds; establishing procedures for unions to participate jointly with plant management in adopting production plans and plans for the introduction of new technology; making the decisions adopted at production conferences of workers and employees "juridically obligatory" for management; creating an elected "organ of collective management" at enterprises with equal representation from the management staff and ordinary workers, and empowered to make binding decisions on all issues other than the "operational" management of the production process; introducing "elections" of managerial staffs — or at least selected categories of managerial personnel — on an experimental basis.[20]

That none of these measures has been implemented is less important, for the moment, than the fact that they have been proposed. The discussions and even empirical studies generated by some of these proposals reveal the urgency of creating at least a sense (if not the reality) of worker participation in management decisions and the resistance to doing so. Consider, for example, the proposal to introduce "elections" of managerial personnel. Surely it seems difficult to take this proposal seriously. Indeed, what meaning could be attached to elections of either lower managerial staffs or plant directors by a working population long unaccustomed to freely choosing its leadership at any level of economic or political organization? Could such elections be anything but a facade behind which the plant's Party organization would make its selections? Whatever the answers to these questions, a brief review of the conflicting Soviet reactions to the proposal seems instructive.

Writing in 1965, on the eve of the economic reform announced is September of that year, Iu. Volkov referred to the election of managerial personnel and their accountability to the work collective as "an absolutely necessary feature" of self-management in the sphere of production. But he warned against the view that this was a simple matter which could be introduced "even today." The transition to elections would mark the completion, not the beginning, of self-management in the communist society of the future.[21] In 1967—68, perhaps spurred by the expectations created by the reform, a number of writers went beyond Volkov's cautious way of posing the issue. To justify the desirability of giving work collectives the right to "independently" replace factory managers, cases were cited in which tyrannical directors had caused the firing, exclusion from the Party,

19) A. Birman, p. 182. For other versions of this question see P. M. Panov, pp. 111—112, and A. F. Sinel'nikov in V. A. Fomin, ed., p. 51.

20) A. F. Sinel'nikov, pp. 52—54; Ia. S. Kapeliush in V. A. Fomin, pp. 37—46; S. A. Ivanov, *Trudovoe pravo i nauchno-tekhnicheskii progress*, Moscow, 1974, pp. 414—417; N. I. Alekseev and I. A. Raizhskikh, "The Highest Organ of the Collective," In V. G. Afanas'ev, ed., *Nauchnoe upravlenie obshchestvom*, No. 6, 1972, pp. 156—158.

21) Iu. E. Volkov, *Tak rozhdaetsia kommunisticheskoe samoupravlenie*, Moscow, 1965, p. 176.

and even imprisonment of workers criticizing managerial behavior.[22] When V. G. Afanas'ev, perhaps the most authoritative official spokesman for "scientific management," proposed (in 1968) that the time was ripe for introducing elections on an experimental basis as part of the search for more participatory forms of management, it was clear that the proposal had at least some support at the highest levels of political leadership. Afanes'ev's proposal was couched in very "practical," non-ideological terms:

> "The election of enterprise managers can become one of the forms of participation in management...
>
> The fate of the manager is essentially in the hands of higher-level organs rather than in those of the collective which he manages. Hence the tactics adopted by some managers of orienting themselves not to those 'below' them, not to gain the respect and confidence of the collective, but to those 'above' them. It is not the respect of the collective which is important to them but primarily the good will of their superiors. This creates bureaucrats and zealous administrators, some of whom unfortunately have not yet been removed. This situation would be fundamentally changed if the masses had the right to elect enterprise managers..."[23]

In 1969—70 at least three "public opinion surveys" on the issue of election of managerial personnel were reported in Soviet publications. Although we can hardly vouch for their scientific validity, one feture of the reported results inspires confidence in their general reliability. They revealed deep social divisions among the population — and very much the kind we would expect — on this issue. A Kiev study disclosed that more than 70% of a sample of factory directors, chief engineers, chairmen of trade union committees, and Party secretaries opposed the idea of elections to managerial positions.[24] A study in Cheliabinsk confined to workers and foremen showed almost two-thirds of the workers favoring the view that "the collective itself should choose its leaders," while the comparable figure among foremen was only 13%.[25]

However the most persuasive evidence of the contrasting views of "higher" and "lower" strata was contained in a study prepared under the aegis of the Soviet Socialogical Association. This appears to have been a carefully designed poll drawing its respondents from a variety of geographic locales and seven socio-occupational groupings ranging from ordinary workers to top-level managers. We have brought together some of its principal findings in Table 1 below. They seem to confirm the author's striking although hardly surprising conclusion: "We may observe... definite regularities. The greater the involvement of the group in the management of production, the higher the step on the ladder of official position, the greater the opposi-

22) P. M. Panov, p. 114. For another example of management literature which posed the issue of elections as something to be currently implemented see Ia. S. Kapeliush in V. A. Fomin, pp. 37—46.

23) V. G. Afanas'ev *Nauchnoe upravlenie obshchestvom*, No. 2, 1968, pp. 259—60.

24) F. M. Rudich, *O sochetanii gosudarstvennykh i obshchestvennykh nachal v urpavlenii proizvodstvom*, Kiev, 1969, p. 76.

25) Ia. E. Stul' and I. O. Tishchenko, "Social-Psychological Principles of Management," In V. G. Afanas'ev, ed., *Nauchnoe upravlenie obshchestvom*, No. 4, 1970, p. 275.

tion to elections."[26] Among ordinary workers and engineers, opponents of the idea of elections did not exceed 5—7%; as we move up the managerial ladder from foremen to shop superintendents to plant directors the proportion opposed to elections increases from ¼ to 1/3 to ½, respectively. The comment of the authors of the less ambitious Cheliabinsk study could readily apply here as well: "Workers hold more radical views on democracy than managers."[27]

Table 1

Institute of Social Research Survey of Attitudes Toward Election of Managerial Personnel,) 1969: "Is it Advisable at Present to Fill Certain Managerial Positions Through Elections?"*

Groups of respondents	Categories of answers, in %					
	N	no	yes	difficult to answer	no answer	Total
1. Workers	363	4.7	89.0	6.3	—	100.0
2. Workers, deputies of Soviets	105	6.6	82.9	8.6	1.9	100.0
3. Engineers and technicians	51	5.9	88.2	3.9	2.0	100.0
4. Lower-level managerial personnel	86	26.7	66.3	5.8	1.2	100.0
5. Upper-level managerial personnel	84	42.8	52.4	3.6	1.2	100.0
— directors of enterprises	38	50.0				
— shop superintendents	46	34.2				
6. Executives of Party, trade union and Komsomol organizations	114	19.3	77.2	1.7	1.8	100.0
— union officials	31	32.4				
— Party secretaries at enterprises	30	26.7				
7. Scholars *(uchenye)* and journalists	97	16.5	81.4	—	2.1	100.0

*) The precise period in which the survey was conducted is not clear, although it was probably, some time in 1967—68. The results were published in 1969. Respondents in the categories of workers, engineers and technicians, and lower-level managerial personnel were drawn from eight cities. The other categories were more widely dispersed.

Source: Ia. S. Kapeliush, *Obshchestvennoe mnenie o vybornosti na proizvodstve*, Information Bulletin No. 39 (54) of the Institute of Concrete Social Research of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Moscow, 1969, pp. 9, 10, 13, 14.

What are we to make of these polls and the accompanying commentary? We must assume that all the respondents were thoroughly familiar with the nature of Soviet-style elections. But to recognize that elections of managerial staffs would necessarily be a kind of facade is not equivalent

26) Ia. S. Kapeliush, *Obshchestvennoe mnenia o vybornosti na proizvodstve*, Information Bulletin No. 39 (54) of the Institute of Concrete Social Research of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Moscow, 1969, p. 14.

27) Ia. E. Stul' and I. O. Tishchenko, p. 276.

to saying that such elections would make no difference, that the individuals chosen would be the same with or without them, and that the nature of managerial authority would be unaffected. For the overwhelming majority of worker respondents even the semblance of participating in the choice of superiors at the work place was apparently a welcome prospect. Was worker support for the idea also an expression of a more general dissatisfaction with the conditions of factory life? As for the sizable proportion of managerial personnel and Party secretaries who opposed elections, could it be that the very idea of the accountability of managers to the managed (certainly a departure from the prevailing theory and practice of Soviet management) was seen as a threat to traditional patterns of authority at economic enterprises?

Much of the published commentary on the issue, as well as the manner in which some of the survey results were presented, were designed to allay the concerns of managers. Thus proponents of elections stressed that the principle of one-man management was not in question. Furthermore, at least for the present there was very little support for the idea of direct elections to higher-level managerial posts. Most respondents who favored elections obviously had in mind positions such as foremen and leaders of work brigades. If elections were to be eventually extended to top management positions the procedure would be indirect: workers would elect foremen, foremen would elect shop superintendents, and the latter would elect the plant director. The main issue, however, was not the formal election procedure but the source of managerial authority. As the author of the Soviet Sociological Association's study (a supporter of the idea) put it, elections would mean that authority was delegated from "below," that "leaders would be monitored and replaced by those whom they led."[28] Whether they took this prospect seriously or not, the large proportion of managers and Party secretaries who opposed the idea of elections may have recognized that this, in fact, was the principle involved.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this episode was not that the issue was raised but that the markedly differing reactions of distinct social groups were publicly acknowledged. To admit that such groups saw themselves as having conflicting interests in the resolution of an issue like the source of managerial authority and accountability was not a common feature of Soviet life. The social divisions exposed in the course of this discussion of the late 1960's may help to explain why the issue of elections became dormant in the first half of the 1970's. All the more significant, therefore, that it has re-emerged more recently. In 1977 the author of the Soviet Sociological Association study of some nine years earlier reviewed his earlier findings, appealed for "an extensive experimental verification of the idea of elections in production," and acknowledged the continuing widespread opposition among managers to the proposal.[29] There is no evidence that the current discussion or experimentation has gone beyond that of the late 1960's.[30] But the re-emergence of the proposal points to

28) Ia. S. Kapeliush, "In Favor of the Experiment," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, No. 35, 1977.

29) Ia. S. Kapeliush, *Literaturnaia gazeta, No. 35, 1977.*

30) The only recent discussions of this theme that we are aware of, in addition to Kapeliush's, are O. I. Kosenko, "The Collective Chooses Its Leader," *Ekonomika i organizatsiia promyshlennogo proizvodstva*, 1977, No. 1, pp. 89—95, and "Workers Elect the Foreman," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 1976, No. 44.

continuing pressures — including pressures from the more secure elements within the managerial stratum — for introducing at least the semblance of more participatory forms of economic organization. The question is when, if every, political authorities will be prepared to confront the social tensions, conflicts, and risks that will follow.

A Short-Lived Experiment

Our final illustration of efforts to pose the issue of "democratization of management" is drawn from Soviet agriculture. This is a large subject which deserves a separate study. Our remarks here are intended only as a postscript to the preceding discussion. The purpose is simply to illustrate an additional context in which the participatory idea has emerged.

The Akchi experiment concerned a single state grain farm in Kazakstan in the period 1968—70. The reports in Soviet publications of the period present a somewhat sketchy and perhaps idyllic picture of the farm's operations, but the details of these operations are not our main concern. Our interest is in the ideas on work organization, authority and self-management which were articulated in the discussion surrounding the experiment. Although only a single farm was involved the experiment attracted considerable attention both during its life and for some years afterward.[31]

There is nothing to indicate that the experiment was ended because of the farm's poor economic performance. The very opposite seems to have been the case. As measured by the usual indicators of labor productivity, production costs, and profits per worker its economic performance was reported to be vastly superior to that of comparable farms in the region. Some of the claims, in fact, seem difficult to accept — for example, a level of labor productivity some 5—6 times the normal level. But there was nothing unusual about particular farms or plants being singled out in Soviet press reports for achieving exceptionally high economic indicators. What was unusual was that the farm's success seemed to have nothing to do with high levels of mechanization, the "intensification" or prolongation of normal labor time, or the high quality of supervision by the farm's Party organization. Published descriptions attributed the farm's unusual performance, instead, to a form of work organization and management structure in which "the functions of production and management were not divided" between different occupational strata.

The basic units of labor organization were small, self-managing work teams *(beznariadnoe zveno)* of 5—6 members. The teams were assigned their "own" plot of land and complement of machinery. This form of work organization had occasionally been applied elsewhere but the more common form of organization was the large work brigade of several hundred members requiring close managerial supervision. The smaller work units were self-managing in the sense that no specific work assignments were given team members by farm administrators standing outside the work

31) Our discussion here and all quotations in the text are drawn from the following: *Literaturnaia gazeta*, May 21, 1969; *Molodoi kommunist*, 1970, No. 2, pp. 62—68; *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, 1974, No. 2, pp. 186—87; V. Perevedentsev, "For All and For Each," *Nash sovremennik*, 1974, No. 1, pp. 139—144.

group. In the language used in Soviet discussions of this topic, the teams were based on the "internal social control" of the work group itself as contrasted with the "external control" required to supervise the larger work brigades. Unlike the system prevailing on most farms no individual output norms and piece rates were established at Akchi. Team members were paid from the proceeds of the team's "final output" (grain available for delivery to the state) rather than on the basis of tilled or sown area. The team's income was distributed equally among its members, although there was no separate accounting of the amount of work done by individual members. Problems of work discipline, if they arose, were to be handled within the work group. The coordination of the work activities of team members was the responsibility of team leaders who worked in the field.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of the farm's organization, certainly the most challenging to prevailing managerial ideology, concerned the structure and functions of the management staff. This was composed of only two individuals (for a work force of 60—70); the farm director and the bookkeeper-economist. Apparently the "internal control" or self-supervision exercised by the work teams, the mode of payment, and the absence of individual output norms all operated to reduce the need for "external" (managerial) sources of supervision and authority. The retention of the smallest posible number of individuals who were not "direct producers" also reflected the views of the experiment's organizers that the bloated administrative staffs of most farms created attitudes of "dependence" among workers, a feeling that "the authorities know best." The main functions of this mini-managerial staff were described as maintaining "diplomatic" relations with the government ministry and supply organizations and providing instructions in the new mode of work organization. Although the farm was assigned a production plan by higher authorities the latter left it free "to arrange its internal affairs in a manner which seemed most rational to the members of the collective." The farm was freed from the maze of directives and monitoring activities that normally accompany farm operations.

The experiment also sought to apply an aspect of the socialist — indeed, Leninist — heritage rarely invoked in the voluminous Soviet management literature: "Under socialism all will govern in turn and will soon become accustomed to no one governing." That is, the principle of job rotation was to be applied to the positions of farm director and work-team leaders. The new directors would be chosen from among team leaders, and the latter would be drawn from team members. The selections would be made internally by an "economic council" consisting of the farm's small managerial staff plus work-team leaders and the farm's "social organizations" (the Party and trade union).

The somewhat idealized picture of the farm's operations which emerges from published accounts should not obscure its significance. Whether the farm actually operated in the reported manner is less important than the fact that the ideas on work organization and management which the experiment embodied received a brief hearing. In short, the published reports on the experiment were vehicles for an argument. What was the argument? It affirmed, in however limited a form, the idea of self-management by "direct producers." It denied that Soviet technological backwardness was the main source of poor economic performance in agriculture. It affirmed the

compatibility of an equalitarian income distribution (at least within work teams) with efficient work performance. Perhaps most important — and most challenging — was something that was left unsaid. The Party's "mobilizing" and "monitoring" role (its function of *kontrol'*) hardly seemed necessary at Akchi, and its participation in selecting the rotating incumbents of managerial positions was not a structural requirement of the farm's mode of operation. In the language of one of the published commentaries on the experiment, Akchi was an argument for moving from "juridical" socialization of property to a "real" change in relations of production, to the "collective management" of socialized property.

Although the experiment could not have been initiated — and surely not publicizied — without the approval of high-level political authorities, it projected a form of economic organization that could not help but raise serious questions about the prevailing distribution of power and rewards both in the individual enterprise and the society at large. Whatever the experiment's other features, one can readily imagine the reaction of "professional" managers (both in the economic and political spheres) to the apparently serious attempt to test the principle that "all should manage in turn." The implicit threat which the experiment posed to the power and privileges of such groups was undoubtedly the source of its undoing.

This was indirectly confirmed some 3—4 years after the experiment was terminated. In 1974 a Soviet sociological journal reported that at a recently held conference on rural economic and social problems a number of speakers had argued that the principles of the Akchi experiment offered "the only promising path for the country's agricultural development."[32] The writer then presented what was obviously the "official verdict" on the experiment. Its positive feature was that it was an organizational form using "value levers," and as such it merited application "as an effective means of raising labor productivity in small work groups." In other words the acceptable feature of Akchi was apparently its reliance on a system of payment based on a small work group's finished product. But its other feature — "a rudimentary form of organization of work collectives based on democratic principles" was a throwback to prerevolutionary times and had no future prospects. What could "rudimentary" forms of democratic work organization mean other than the experiment's efforts to affirm the pirnciple of collective management, to test the feasibility of rotating leadership positions among members of the work group, and to reduce the role in the enterprise of privileged strata who were not "direct producers." There was no reference in this verdict on Akchi to any alleged *economic* failings of the farm. Indeed, its outstanding economic success was affirmed at about the same time (1974) in an article by the respected economist, V. Perevedentsev — but apparently to no avail.[33] We have found no evidence of more recent discussions of the Akchi experiment or anything like it.

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32) *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, 1974, No. 1, p. 186.
33) V. Perevedentsev, pp. 142—143.

Our review of efforts to pose the issue of creating participatory forms of economic organization in the Soviet Union has been a chronicle of failure. None of the studies, proposals or experiments reviewed here has been translated into institutional changes that would redistribute managerial authority and reduce the enduring barriers between those who plan and control the enterprise's operations and those who execute its work assignments. But the evidence presented here should make it clear that pressures for the democratization of the work place have not been absent in the Soviet Union. Indeed, we do not doubt that such pressures are a more important feature of Soviet life than pressures for political democratization. The former have a "practical" meaning for Soviet authorities — the possibility of improved economic performance — which explains why arguments for the democratization of management occasionally receive a hearing.

Are there any prospects for a transition to genuine worker participation in management? The economist's natural answer is likely to be: not until the introduction of a more market-oriented system makes possible increased enterprise autonomy. We prefer to put the matter somewhat differently. The implementation of almost any of the proposals reviewed in this paper would meet the resistance of large social groups whose privileges rest on an authoritarian system of managing the work process. Worker participation in management would be *socially destabilizing*. The prospects of improved economic performance seem less pressing than the maintenance of social stability.