

11. Participation and harm-minimization

Abstract

This paper discusses the general development of participation of employees in decision-making in the organizations where they work, within the framework of widening circles of legitimate interests and of ongoing technological change. It also discusses the institutional structure and the impact of workers' self-management in former Yugoslavia as a form of participation with radical intentions, its meaning from various perspectives, as well as its tentative appraisal from the vantage point of the present time in Croatia during the transition to a market economy.

Introduction

In the early 60s Andre Malraux, at that time minister of culture in the French Government, on a visit to the United States, asked President Kennedy the following question: 'After World War I we all believed that the fundamental problem of the times was the conflict between nation-States. Only retrospectively we discovered that we were wrong; the colour of the epoch was provided by class conflict. Now, after World War II, the cold war has convinced us that class conflict was, indeed, the fundamental motive in world politics. It seems, however, that we are again behind the times. What would you say is today the main problem confronting us in the developed world?'

Kennedy's answer was: 'To manage industrial societies'.

Now, thirty years after this conversation, both question and answer seem somehow over-ambitious. If we had to decide today what overall goal to formulate for human behavior, the answer would probably be: the minimization of harm! Even for the relatively peaceful developed world this would be the answer, at least of all those who speak about the risk society. For the developmentally disoriented former second world harm minimization is an even more obvious objective. For the situation in some parts of former Yugoslavia harm minimization is the only rational objective left.

Development of participation

It seems natural that people should participate in decisions related to work they do together with others. And yet, it is still exceptional; a fact in need of an explanation. Two answers come to mind. One is the historical persistence of inequality. Some people have apparently been subject to others throughout time: children to parents, slaves to masters, peasants to lords, workers to owners, subjects to rulers etc; a hard habit to change. The other is the peculiar direction that the process of division of labour in industrial organizations too. Instead of the traditional manner of dividing fields of activity into subfields, what was broken down in industry was not the field of activity but the individual work process into more and more narrowly defined and simpler work operations.¹ The simpler the operation and the less knowledge and skill were needed to perform it, the less the work was valued. And the lower, also, the status of the performer, in regard as well as in remuneration. Add to this the abundance of labour consisting of simple operations and the scarcity of capital for complex undertakings, and you have the economic mechanism subjecting the supplier of labour to the supplier of capital. Ironically, those whose aim was the liberation of workers from their subordination

¹ 'The greatest improvement in the productive powers of labour and the greater part of the skill, dexterity and judgement with which it is anywhere directed, or applied, seem to have been the effects of the division of labour' Adam Smith (1937, 3).

to the capitalists, did so by subjecting them to the power of the State, a power known to be more extensively and more difficult to control than any other power in society.

Whoever the controlling power, to nowadays treat workers in an organization as a physical resource only is – in the words of Talleyrand in a different context – more than a crime, it is a mistake. In this way it is impossible to obtain the full value of what people could, potentially, contribute, and it is almost certain to arouse, sooner or later, the resistance of the professionals among them. Organizations, as places where people work together, have to come to terms with the fact that people have interests, i.e. relatively stable motives² that are not always easy to foresee and, when at cross-purposes with the common endeavour, hard to check. Consideration of people's interests in an organization used to start from the assumption, that people do not want to work unless they are forced or paid to do so. After all, they were forced, very unselectively, throughout history by the alternative of starving. Even the classical representatives of the opposite attitude, Max Weber's Calvinists, whose central value is work, appear to have been forced by intensive metaphysical anxiety to turn to hard work that could serve as test for one's transcendental destiny. There are other interests as well. Organizations are forms of interaction and thus subject to the tensions that interaction normally produces. Interaction may take the form of cooperation, working together to achieve common purposes, or the form of conflict, working against each other in order to achieve alternative purposes.³ There is also the tension between the autonomy of the participants to pursue both cooperation and conflict as dictated by their interests and the limits imposed on this pursuit of movement by the organization's structure. Relatively enduring structures create dependence of some participants on others and mutual interdependence. Depend-

² Or, more elaborately, as 'a complex set of predispositions embracing goals, values, desires, expectations, and other orientations and inclinations that lead a person to act in one direction rather than another' (G. Morgan 1986, 149).

³ As persuasively illustrated by C.J. Lammers (1993).

ence, again, gives rise to strivings for independence in order to increase one's chances for interest satisfaction. These tensions are the essence of organizations.⁴

The tolerance for interests is increasing in organizations as a consequence of changes in the social context of organizations and changes in the position of the individual within organizations.

- Political and social developments during the last two centuries, when considered in the long run and discounting many relapses, a progressive widening of the circle of interests that are considered legitimate, i.e. whose public articulation and open pursuit is socially accepted. It began with the democratic reforms and revolutions, with basic human rights to life and liberty and with the political interests of people who had become citizens from being merely subjects. It continued through the legitimacy of economic and social interests in the reforms leading to the Welfare State and in the social democratic and socialist reforms and revolutions. These movements emphasized particularly the interest position of workers in industrial and other organizations. Industrial workers themselves developed a special mental bond with their work place, a feeling that this place, in a sense, belonged to them, a sort of 'psychological appropriation of the work place by the worker' (Wilpert, 1990). The process continued with the recognition of the legitimacy of ecological interests, of the rights and interests of minorities, with anti-discrimination movements and claims to social justice in an increasing number of areas.
- Technological advance and changes in the division of labour have led directly to a gradual increase in productivity. In organizations greater general affluence increases the possible share of each participant and thus a chance of rank-and-file participants

⁴ Emile Durkheim (1892), commenting upon Montesquieu's separation of powers doctrine, generalized the concept of tension into a structural principle not only of organizations or of the political system but of human societies.

to satisfy their material interests by sharing, to a greater extent, in the results of the organization's work. Technological advance also leads to the questioning of hierarchy as the best form of integrating industrial organizations. Knowledge and information necessary for their functioning are growing and can no longer be concentrated in the top of the hierarchy alone. Thus, the argument for hierarchy, that it is the most economical way to communicate in organizations, is becoming less and less valid. The optimal span of control is decreasing with the increasing level of expertise of the positions to be controlled. To coordinate through hierarchies is more and more time-consuming and produces resistance in the professionals so coordinated. The information-revolution makes it possible, in principle, to transfer all routine work to machines and thus remove the traditional bottom of the hierarchical pyramid. It is becoming legitimate for the increasing number of professionals in organizations to participate in technical decisions, because of their expertise, but then also to participate in decisions concerning their personal interests.

Both the widening circle of legitimate interests and the changing character of work, have their consequences in the future. They are likely to exercise their full impact upon human relations in cooperative work tomorrow rather than today. Maybe then most people will be engaged in work that is cognitively significant to them, that challenges them, that is not informationally empty, as is a large part of work on the assembly line. Also, people engaged in work in organizations will feel that the chances of improving their interest position are not below a critical threshold. Both assumptions are unrealistic for most work in the classical industries. This explains, at least in part, the empirical finding that workers sometimes resist the introduction of participation or do not actively engage take part in it when participants is introduced. Most existing forms of institutional participation in industry are future prospects.

The more this is true, the more they are elaborate.

Workers' self-management in former Yugoslavia

In the second half of the twentieth century self-management in former Yugoslavia was introduced as the required form of managing industrial as well as non-industrial organizations. Now that it has been submerged in the implosion of the different variants of communist ideology and of socialist economic and political systems in Eastern Europe, the question is, what, if anything, can be learned, from this large-scale social experiment? A more definite answer will have to wait for historical research. What is attempted here is no more than a tentative outline of some of the problems that the professional historians will be confronted with. We start from the fundamental normative and statistical facts of the institutional development of self-management, pointing out the various, sometimes mutually incompatible, perspectives of the actors, participants, or simply contemporaries of that development, considering some of the possible positive and negative points of an over-all appraisal, and finally, speculating briefly about the links between self-management and the present state of affairs in the area.

Institutional structures

In Yugoslavia after World War II enterprises were transferred, mainly through confiscation or by nationalization, to State ownership. For the first five years enterprises were managed, more or less according to the Soviet model that is, by a hierarchy of government bureaucrats in the framework of an over-all governmental economic plan, with limited economic manoeuvring space for the individual enterprise. After the rift with the Soviets in 1948, workers' self-management was introduced gradually. In 1950 a law 'on the management of State economic enterprises. . . by their work collectivities' prescribed that the workers should elect workers' councils of 15 to 120 members, for one year, with limited decision-

Table 1. Selfmanagement: Institutions and members

	1952	1960	1970	1986-88
Workers' councils	8833	11085	17956	33686
Members	199.259	285.623	797.159	441.816*
Selfmanaged communities of interest	5125			
Members	591.442			

(Dunn and Obradović 1978, 12; Statistical Yearbook of Yugoslavia 1989, 144)

* Excluding basic organizations of associated labour.

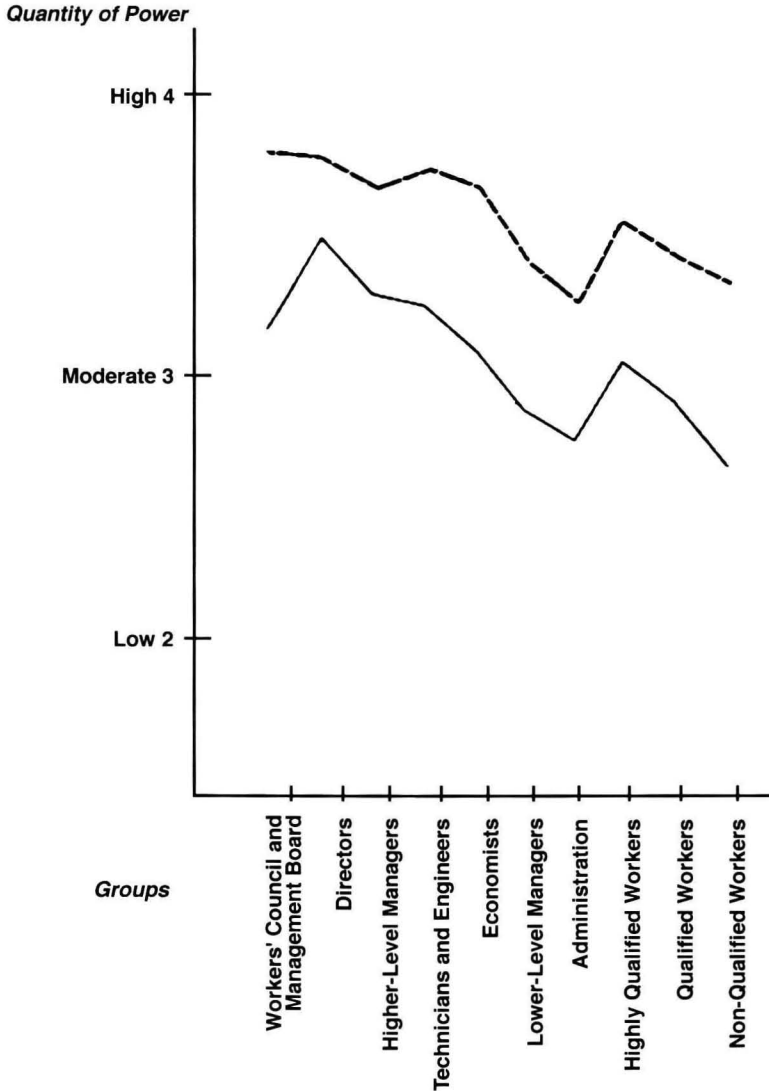


Fig. 1. Distribution of Actual and Ideal Power in 15 Enterprises (Rus, 1978: 202)

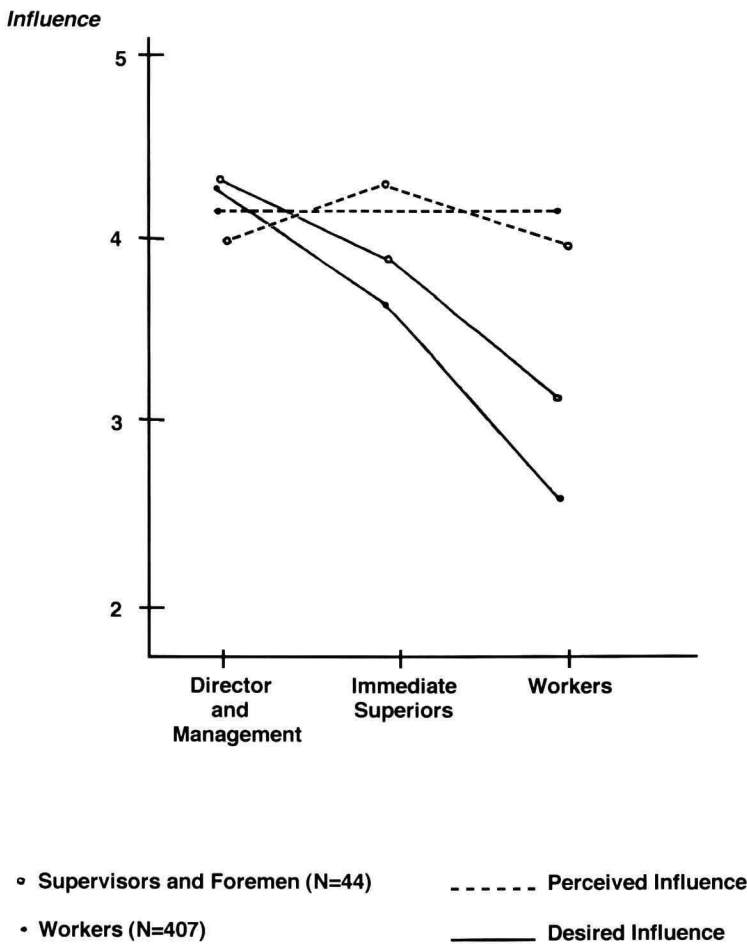


Fig. 2. Influence of Hierarchical Levels As Perceived by Supervisors and Foremen and by Workers (Šiber, Šverko, Klajić and Magdič, 1978: 225)

making powers. The councils in turn appointed management boards of 3 to 11 members for the same period of time. The director was appointed by government. The framework within which enterprises conduct their business continued to be the State economic plan. The director continued to exercise his right of hiring and firing and should veto decisions by the workers' council. Gradually the responsibilities of the workers' council expanded. The constitution of the Socialist Federated Republic of Yugoslavia from 1963 extended the self-management system to all 'work organizations',

economic as well as non-economic, and prescribed that the director should be appointed by the workers' council, after a public competition for the job, and on the advice of a committee composed of delegates of the workers' council and government representatives. In the meantime, the State economic plan has become a kind of economic forecast and the economic autonomy of the enterprises expanded. Ten years later, through a series of legislative measures culminating in the new constitution of 1974 and the Law on Associated Labor of 1976, self-management in work organizations was

further decentralized with the introduction of 'basic organizations of associated labour' – individual plants or other smaller units within the organization – with their own workers' councils. Another institutional innovation was the introduction of 'self-managing communities of interest', mainly in the non-economic field of service institutions, composed of representatives of the working collectivities in the institutions, and of representatives of the users of their services, i.e. of other work organizations and local communities, responsible for the allocation of resources to the individual institution out of special public funds outside the government budget. Only in 1989 by the new Law on Enterprises the right of the workers' councils was increased to the ability to appoint the director without formal government interference.

With industrialization, urbanization, the growing number of work organizations, and the expanding inclusiveness of the self-management system, the number of self-management structures and their members is increasing (see above):

Out of a total employment of 6,884,000 this amounts to 15% of the labour force engaged in self-management structures. The proportion of blue versus white collar workers in the workers' council members was 76.2 to 23.8 in 1960 and 67.6 to 32.4 in 1970 after the expansion of self-management to non-economic organizations (Jovanov, 1978; pp. 343).

What did these new institutions change in the actual relations of people at work? The following two figures show how the division of power and influence of the various actors in self-man-

⁵ It is interesting to note the relative peak for highly skilled workers. The data show that actually the majority of workers' council members were skilled or highly skilled workers, and that the percentage of unskilled workers in the council was small:

	1960	1963	1970
Highly skilled	15.1	16.7	17.2
Skilled	40.5	37.8	33.7
...			
Unskilled	7.2	8.0	7.4

(Jovanov, 1978)

aged organizations was, as estimated by participants in the late sixties and early seventies:

In both examples the managers (management board, director and management) are perceived as most powerful and influential, and workers, particularly unskilled workers, as least powerful and influential.⁵ In the first example (Figure 1) the desires of the respondents follow, on the whole, a parallel trajectory, with the understandable exception that people feel the workers' council should be at the top of the power scale. In the second example (Figure 2) the workers opt for a strictly egalitarian distribution of influence as desirable, while the foremen would like to see themselves ('immediate supervisors') exercising most influence.

It is, however, significant that even the late sixties and early seventies, probably the peak of the acceptance of the self-management system, many had a different attitude. In a reasearch conducted in 1969 in Belgrade, Sarajevo, and Zagreb, 80.9% of the respondents expressed agreement with the statement: 'Industry needs decisive managers' and 76.5% with the statement: 'If people would talk less and listen more, everything would be better' (Jusić 1978, 322).

In international comparisons Yugoslav workers, on normative and carefully designed reputational measures, top others (Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Israel, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom, West Germany) not only on the extent of participative structures found and the number of institutional participative rules applicable at the worker level. They also score higher on workers involvement, on influence of representative bodies, and on all dimensions of workers influence. The only exception is the influence on short-term decisions at worker level, where Yugoslav workers second to Norwegian workers. Yugoslav data also show the smallest difference in influence between workers and top management (Industrial Democracy in Europe – IDE – 1981, pp. 280).

In 1980 the economic difficulties of Yugoslavia caused a crisis. The yearly increase in the social product dropped from 8.0 in 1971 to 0.2 in 1983. Productivity in industry fell from a yearly increase of 4.9 in 1971 to a decrease of -0.9 in 1983, while unemployment rose from

7.2 percent. to 14.6 percent. force and the yearly rate of increase in retail prices grew from 16.11 to 39.2 (Mencinger, 1986, p. 126). After 30 years of industrialization in 1980 Yugoslavia was still in the penultimate place in Europe on GNP p.c. with 2,623 US dollars. In 1987 and 1988 the social product had for the first time decreased in absolute terms and the inflation had reached run-away proportions (Statistical Yearbook, 1989, p. 99, 230). In these circumstances a repeated comparative investigation of participation (IDE, 1993) showed that in the period 1977–1987 worker influence in Yugoslavia had declined in comparison with the previous period, while it was still higher than in the countries compared (IDE, 1993, pp. 144–149).

Conflicting perspectives

The meaning of self-management changed from one group to another in Yugoslavia; it wameant many things to many people.

- In the minds of the initiators of the self-management system within the Communist Party (CP) there was probably a mixture of Marxist fundamentalism with down-to-earth political pragmatism. Some of them might have sincerely believed in the ideological ‘correctness’ of a return to the radicalism of the early Marx.⁶ But, at the same time, all of them were aware of the need for a new source of legitimacy with their own followers after the rift with the Soviet Union, and the excommunication of the CP from Yugoslavia by the Informbureau of Communist Parties in 1948.
- For many liberal socialists and probably for a majority of the intellectuals, self-management held the promise of a gradual dismantling of the political dictatorship that originated in the Resistance led by the CP during the war, and of the gradual

⁶ ‘...the slogan...’The factories to the workers, the land to the peasants’ is not an abstract propagandistic slogan, but has a deep substantive meaning. It entails a whole program of socialist relations in production, concerning social ownership, concerning rights and duties of the workers and, accordingly, it can and must be implemented in practice, if we really intend to build socialism’ (Tito 1950, 1).

emergence of either ‘socialism with a human face’ or the break-through to a non-socialist democratic regime.

- Some interpreted self-management as a movement within the long-term trend towards the expansion of the circle of legitimate interests from subject to citizen in the political field, from resource to producer in the economic and parallelly to the role of participant and self-manager in all organizations where people worked while other people depended on the results of their work.
- A Marxist fundamentalist interpretation of self-management was adopted by the left-wing opposition to the regime (around the publication ‘Praxis’ and other groups), who criticized the formalistic and bureaucratic features of existing self-management structures and the small actual influence of the workers.
- The right-wing opposition to the regime, if they thought about self-management at all, stigmatized it as a calculated deception by the rulers, or considered it a sign of the weakness of the rulers.
- Sociologists, political scientists, economists, lawyers and others who faced self-management as a scientific problem agreed on the facts – as illustrated in the examples above – but disagreed on their interpretation. The network of self-management institutions and the extent of powers formally granted to the workers was largest in the world. Some increase in real power and influence of the workers compared to their previous position as well as in comparison with other countries could not be disputed. But some felt that the increase was so small that calling the existing relations self-management, on this ground, was tantamount to deception; the results fell far short of the promise that the idea of self-management had held. Others, however, thought that this increase was real, when compared with the previous situation and with other countries, that the increase indicated the existence of further possibilities and, that whatever increase

was achieved exceeded their previous expectations of self-management.

Tentative appraisal

It is important to note that self-management in former Yugoslavia meant the introduction of a radical and generalized form of participation far in advance of the social and technological developments described in Part I of this article. Industrial workers, for most part from a peasant background, were required to manage their enterprises based on technology predating the informational revolution and more in line with hierarchical relations with the concentration of necessary information at the top of the pyramid and with a mechanized production line at the bottom.

Within these limitations, it can be argued, on the positive side, that Yugoslav self-management, compared with Eastern European countries, did remove some of the political pressure on the economy, made first steps in the direction of the market possible, created a class of professional managers,⁷ and in this way was important in the coming transition to a market economy. Self-management educated the workers and created a feeling of collective property and collective responsibility for the organization they worked in, an important advantage particularly in times of crisis and stress. In this respect the formerly self-managed enterprises in Croatia have shown unexpected resilience in the face of severe stress, caused by war as well as by the transition-transformation from 'social ownership' to a mainly privately owned market economy. Self-management was the main component of the ruling ideology and, as memories of war-time Resistance faded, the main source of legitimacy for the regime.

Therefore, the regime created a massive network of self-managed institutions and exercised influence, in various ways, upon society at large, so that these institutions operated in a favourable climate of value orientations, unlike participatory institutions in most other countries. In Yugoslavia self-management was not an exception to the prevailing climate in econ-

⁷ This argument is strengthened by empirical findings, e.g. Pusić (1992).

omy and society; it was becoming its background texture.

The relationship to the political regime, a one-party dictatorial form of government, is where the listing of negative points of Yugoslav self-management must start:

- Self-management was so strangely part of the regime that it could not survive the regime's demise, nor the implications of inefficiency attached to its economic ideas as well as the rejection in principle of its political methods. It did not succeed in reducing the prohibitive economic inefficiency of systems of generalized public ownership of means of production. In essence, the economic results in Yugoslavia were not different from those in Eastern Europe, though the contribution of self-management to this negative outcome may be debatable. The system proved vulnerable to economic crises, such as the situation in the 80s when more monocratic and hierarchical forms of management were favoured. Self-management contributed to the tendency to oppose dismissals and thus to, sometimes extensive, over-staffing in organizations.
- Self-management is a very costly form of management in terms of time, and it is likely to produce frustration, particularly in professional managers.⁸
- Self-management, after all, did not legitimize the regime that sponsored it, and in the multi-party elections of 1990 it did not play a major role in the platform of any political party.

Conclusion

Now, four years later, conditions are not sufficiently normalized for even a subjective speculative appraisal of self-management. What

⁸ The Croatian sociologist J. Zupanov (1994) relates a conversation he had with a professional manager in the late 80s about the new law on enterprises, then still in the project stage. 'The law will do no good – he quotes the manager – if it does not empower the manager to set things right in the factory – with a pistol!'

might have been the possibilities if developments had proceeded along previous lines? Had the transition from one-party to multiparty political system not exploded into inter-ethnic aggression, into the misuse of the common armed forces of the Yugoslav State in the service of paranoid dreams of aggrandizement at the expense of one's neighbours. Yugoslavia has disintegrated and is engulfed in war among the different states.

In one of the states, Croatia, a new constitution was adopted in December 1990, after the first contested elections in Spring 1990. In the framework of a market economy (Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, 1990, Art.49 par.1) a constitutional guarantee of private ownership (Art. 48 par.1), article 55 par.4 of the Constitution proclaims: 'Employees may participate, in accord with the law, in decision-making in the enterprise'. However, almost one third of the Republic of Croatia is today under military occupation and one half is within reach of military operations: 30% of its productive facilities are destroyed or severely damaged. The Republic has to provide for 379,908 refugees and displaced persons (June 1994), while 200,000 workers force are under arms. The transition from the former economic system, based on public ownership, to the one sketched in the constitution of 1990 is far from complete. Until March 1994, a decision has been reached in 2,416 cases of 2,873 firms that had applied for transformation, about 2,200 firms have been registered, and the ownership structure is known in 2,010 cases. Of these 2,010, 937 firms (46.7%) are completely privatized, 731 (38.4%) are partly privatized, and 302 (14.5%) are still owned by public bodies. The completely privatized firms represent only 8.5% of the total value, the partly privatized with still important government holdings 46.6%, and the 14.5% of publicly owned firms represent 44.9% of the total value (Ostović 1994). In the process of transforming, the privatized enterprises are taken over by their managers in, approximately, one third of the cases, while there are 460,000 small shareholders, mainly among the employees who were enabled to acquire shares under privileged conditions. What happens more often than it should, are acts of 'cowboy-

privatization', exploitative take-overs implying serious losses of value both in the visible and in the invisible assets, of the transferred firm.

That under these conditions Croatian enterprises continue to function and to produce is in itself a fact requiring an explanation. On the basis of informal contacts in the Croatian economy, it is my impression that this feat of survival is, at least in part, the result of the willingness of rank-and-file workers to suffer considerable personal sacrifice in order to keep 'their' enterprise going. This readiness may be the result, among other factors – such as the absence of alternative employment – of attitudes formed by the self-management system under which the enterprises functioned for the last four decades.

It is possible that previous investigations of the self-management system overemphasized the formal decision-making process and did not pay sufficient attention to the 'hidden' changes in atmosphere, attitudes, values fashioned by self-management below the level of conscious activity, the many ways in which people 'psychologically appropriated' (Wilpert) not only their work-place, but also the enterprise. Also, the character of self-management in Yugoslavia, which was inauthentic due to the dominant position of the Party and its influence on the decisionmaking process, was beginning to change in the last decade, a period of the degeneration of one-party rule. The younger generation of managers was discovering new degrees of freedom in their business policy, but by that time most researchers were no longer interested in Yugoslav self-management. Now, there is almost no field research in industrial relations. The reliability of its main instruments, the interview and the questionnaire is seriously reduced under the circumstances. Even if the investigators knew which questions to ask, people might not know what to answer. Even if they knew, they might not be willing to tell, or their attitudes could change significantly in short time intervals under the impact of events. We are, therefore, limited to speculative conjecture, to contestable, no refutable hypotheses.

The fact that workers in former Yugoslavia were prepared to sacrifice even under less

stressful circumstances to save 'their' factory is an established fact. This was usually not interpreted as a result of self-management, but of the manifestation of archaic village- or clan-solidarity – an interpretation not unreasonable in view of the social environments in which these attitudes were found. However, we should not forget the examples from other countries where workers were ready to assume responsibility for enterprises in financial difficulties. The hypothesis is not without its 'prima facie' plausibility.

And anyway, living the experience of the times, to some discouraging, to all fraught with known and unknown risks, for people to participate rationally in decisions about their work with others seems an orientation likely to minimize, more than others, the harm to be expected in the course of the human adventure.

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