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HOW THEY BECOME COOPERATORS*

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The appearance of another social group in our society - that of cooperators - is a fairly new, contradictory and intensive process. This is confirmed by the increasing number of people working in the cooperative sector: January 1, 1989 - 1.4 million people, July 1 - already 2.9 million people. The growing volume of production and services is even more impressive. That's why one should realize that the process underway cannot be regarded as a mere crystallization of a more or less homogeneous socio-professional or socio-industrial group which takes in the personnel of other social formations and gradually acquires the features characterizing the group's unity.

Obviously, the cooperative movement faces considerable difficulties - both of the period of its formation, when the new fights the old, and of the turning point in the life of society as a whole. Not only cooperators but all the sound social forces as well must decisively take this or that way of changes. The problem of determining the cooperative strategy and lines of development is aggravated by the contradictory nature of the new Soviet cooperation. Even now it is possible to discern different trends, and, consequently, possible ways of evolution.

Of course, one can suppose that these heterogeneous trends will develop side by side, complementing, but not fighting each other. However, present-day developments in and around the cooperative sector (that came to the fore at the fall session of the USSR

Supreme Soviet), attempts to stifle cooperation, the politization of cooperatives in return, the appearance of various associations and unions - all this proves that division and rivalry are more customary in our society than collaboration on the basis of a sound compromise.

Unlike the so-called consumers' cooperative societies (to say nothing of collective farms), which have long become a minor part of the administrative and bureaucratic apparatus, new cooperation implies several ways of development: from typical private property with wage labour (for example, 3 or 4 people, often relatives, set up a co-op and sign labour contracts with several dozens of people) to traditional producer or customer associations (classical co-operation, so to speak) and up to Utopian socialist associations.

Of course, these tendencies are so far in embryo, they are rather vague. There are a lot of mixed and transitional types, and sheer profiteering is also prominent (which, by the way, always goes along with the primitive accumulation of capital in new spheres, a kind of "Gründer" period, as it were). But, anyway, pure phenomena hardly ever exist in reality.

The core of contradictions in the development of new cooperation seems to lie exactly in the heterogeneity of its basis, and not in the opposition of honest cooperators to grabbers who cook shashliks (pieces of mutton roasted on a spit) or to racketeers, though this collision is a vital one for cooperators.

The above-mentioned facts lead to significant conclusions as to the social structure and unity of cooperators. The new social community appears and develops into a separate body with its inner structure, stratification and specialization. All these simulta-

neous processes make up a contradictory unity. The present-day initial and rather contradictory period of the cooperative development needs active and energetic people persistent in reaching the aim. These qualities are absolutely indispensable for those who set up co-ops and therefore face numerous bureaucratic and other obstacles. It is no mere chance that while filling in our questionnaire many of these people defined their status as that of "manager", implying a wide range of management skills, much more than an average Soviet administrator usually possesses.

Besides organizing and management qualities, one should be efficient, hard-working and able to combine jobs. It's not by chance that more than 60 per cent of the cooperators who took part in our poll work over 40 hours a week.

Needless to explain that the above-mentioned criteria of selecting cooperators' staff are generalized, and, therefore, partly abstract. Nevertheless at a number of meetings with M. Gorbachev workers constantly voiced their concern over the fact that the most active and efficient go away to work in co-ops. Leaving aside many interesting aspects of this issue it should be emphasized that apart from wide-spread anti-cooperative sentiments these statements reflect the real interaction of an active individual and cooperation: cooperation today brings all socio-economic labour relations (which have been head over heels for decades here) back to the sound ground of economic interest. Labour, payment, and results of work acquire their genuine content, estrangement is being overcome. Not only labour remuneration, but also the very nature of labour changes: it becomes conscientious and often creative, which is in the long run not less important than money. Even a

mere possibility of realizing the individual creative potential strongly attracts the worker of a state enterprise.

The author together with V.Gimpelson and V.Magun has held a poll among 150 cooperators of Moscow and Taganrog. The results make it possible to get, through an approximate, idea of a cooperator's social image and biography, and also to achieve a better understanding of social mechanisms which influence individuals and their social environment.

Any social layer or group includes active and passive individuals. The essence lies in their correlation. And the latter, in its turn, is determined by the role in the social division of labour and by the cultural (widely understood) level of the group. The socio-demographic structure of the community is not of less importance.

It's quite understandable that men are more active in the cooperative movement. Unfortunately, we have never come across a case when a woman heads a cooperative. The analysis of the press also testifies to a considerable prevalence of men in cooperative management. The poll has revealed that 66 per cent of cooperators are men. Of course, women prevail among shop-assistants, dress-makers, cleaners, accountants and economists, but that takes care of their part in the newcooperation.

Leaving aside some other features of the present-day cooperator (such as education, social origin, welfare) let us look at mobility and the part it plays in the development of a modern cooperator. This seems to be an intergrating feature.

The overwhelming majority (88 per cent) of the cooperators who took part in our poll used to work in the national economy.

They widely and evenly represented all the branches and spheres of modern industry, services and infrastructure. Every fourth person used to work at a scientific research institute, a higher educational establishment or a design office before coming to co-ops. The employment in other spheres varied from 2 to 9 per cent. 67 per cent have several professions. Immediately before joining cooperatives 21 per cent had been workers, 13 per cent - middle level personnel (nurses, accountants, etc.) and 50 per cent - specialists in various spheres. Only 9 per cent had been engaged in individual enterprise.

Mobility characterizes with great precision the activity level of a given social or professional group. We have obtained rather high territorial and professional mobility indices.

How many times have you changed your ...

(per cent)

	... profession	... place of work
never	40	13
once	26	21
2-3 times	19	33
4-5 times	5	12
more than 5 times	3	10

The data show that a lot of future cooperators were dissatisfied with their working conditions and payment, so they often changed their places of work and enterprises. One shouldn't forget that we deal with fairly young people (53 per cent are 25-39 years old) who have a higher education (55 per cent) which takes up some

time of their labour biography.

As far as the choice of profession is concerned, future co-operators turned out to be more stable: two thirds chose it at once or rather quickly, and for half of them this choice came in handy when joining the co-op. Another important factor is the length of service at the previous place of work. Every fourth cooperator had worked for not less than 11 years at the same place before he passed on to a cooperative, every fifth one - 5-10 years, and every second one - less than 5 years, thus displaying a fairly high readiness to change the place of work.

At present a co-op is the top of the labour career for those who participated in the poll. In this connection the following question might arise: what channels brought these people to cooperatives? They are doubtless ready to take this step, but a specific analysis of how people switch over to cooperatives is of great practical interest. According to our observations, people get their job in a cooperative by two main ways:

- a) through acquaintances already working in co-ops (31 per cent) and mutual acquaintances with cooperators;
- b) by becoming one of the co-op founders (27 per cent).

Other possibilities are rarely used.

On the whole the analysis of cooperators' social image and elements of their biographies confirms the assumption that people who join the cooperative sector are mostly active and energetic, seeking not only to reach and keep high consumer standards, but also to achieve a greater self-realization in their labour. These are comparatively young, educated and efficient people with versatile life and professional experience which enables them to take the path of cooperation, the path with a vague future and a cont-