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**SOME SOCIAL CONTRADICTIONS IN THE ATTITUDE OF THE
POPULATION TOWARDS THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT***

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*The views expressed in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Secretariat of UNIDO. This document has not been edited.

The public opinion plays not the least of the roles in the successful development of cooperation. Recognition and support may promote establishment of the favourable social environment for its more successful introduction, whereas, on the contrary, disapproval and dissatisfaction may fetter and depress its development.

In May - June, 1989 the Institute of Sociology under the USSR Academy of Sciences carried out All-Union sociological studies on the subject: "Regional characteristics of the development of Cooperative Movement in the USSR". Part of the public-opinion poll conducted in five big cities in various regions of the country: Moscow, Leningrad, Kharkov, Tallin, Tbilissi - served as material basis for the present paper. The aim is to analyze the factors determining the attitude to the cooperative movement in these cities on the part of population and cooperators themselves. Besides the materials of the public-opinion poll, there were also used the results of analysis of publications in the press on this subject. They give a more complete idea of the situation in general.

The results of the public-opinion poll show that respondents presume that negative attitude of the public to cooperation is prevailing. To the question: "Do the people surrounding you support the cooperative movement?" - on the whole more than half of those questionnaires replied as follows: "The majority is against". Only 16% of them are of the opinion that "the majority

supports it". Other indirect questions of the questionnaire as well as the analyses of numerous publications which appeared in the press in the last 2 years, help to understand the reasons for such spread distrust to cooperation. They lead us to the conclusion that these reasons are not so simple and they have deep routes connected with the stereotype of social thinking. Cooperative sector is an unusual form not only in the structure of economy, but also in the structure of social consciousness. The idea of cooperation is difficult to apprehend and it requires break-up of the accustomed stereotypes.

One of them is strong conviction that the only lawful and proper work is in the government institutions and at the state enterprises. The strength of this stereotype is evidently natural as for a long period of time a thought was suggested to people that socialism is incompatible with other forms of activity. Complete dependence of a person on the state system has cultivated a habit of non-criticism, thoughtless subjection to administrative apparatus, to the chief, to rules, orders, etc. Therefore the sector of cooperation is often perceived as some alien phenomenon. If not governed by the state, then it can be judged without fear, with true hatred to "chastnik" (private craftsmen), "kulak", "Capitalist". And exclamations can be heard : "Who has permitted it?" . "These are negative abnormal phenomena, inadmissible at the stage of developed socialism"; "family contract in the rural area is the straight way to the revival of the "kulaks", and the activity of cooperatives in towns will lead to the revival of bourgeoisie" - such are the quotations from letters of readers. (Yu.Orlik. "Izvestija", 26 Febr. 1988). It is quite clear that

it is impossible to break up such stereotypes for 4 years. It will take quite a long period of time and possibly, change of the whole generation.

One more, not less strong stereotype, is the principle of equalization. Far too long it was regarded that the basis of social justice is receipt of identical wage. The result is: the equality in poverty suits us more than inequality in wealth. Somebody else's material well-being is annoying. If a metallurgist, combine operator, cooperator earns one thousand roubles - everybody is filled with indignation : such pay is nearly as high as that received by the General Secretary of the Central Committee of CPSU! And what's wrong about it?... But such facts jar on us. When everybody gets equally - then it is all right!" (V.Yakovlev. "Rouble - worker and rouble - drone". Izvestija, 25 October, 1989). It is just this circumstance - the reluctance to admit that workers have the right to receive high wages - is the main reason for most resentment with cooperation. Immediately cooperators are called swindlers, rogues, although everybody knows that they work hard. 70% of those questioned stated that cooperators work more and harder than in the state sector of economy. The following fact is also interesting. When various abuses or even crimes in the state sector come to light, the public opinion treats them much quieter than any similar occurrences taking place even on a smaller scale, in the sector of cooperation.

The evaluation of public opinion separately per cities has proved that the strongest distrust to cooperatives is in Moscow. Here 63% of respondents are of the opinion that the majority is against cooperatives. Similar results were obtained

in Kharkov - 64%. The number of respondents who think that cooperatives enjoy the support of population, made in these cities only 8% and 6% respectively.

In Leningrad the attitude to cooperation seems to be a little more favourable. Here 52% of those questionaired said that the majority is aganist, and 15% see their support.

Such a high rate of negative attitude, even taking into consideration the historical stereotypes, undoubtedly causes anxiety and concern. There must be some additional, more definite reasons, and they should be investigated. If they are serious and well-grounded, it might mean that it is necessary to revise the policy of development of the cooperative sector. One cannot but take into account such wide public opinion. Therefore we did our best to carry out thorough enquiries into the grounds of this phenomenon.

First, it turned out that the opinions of respondents on cooperatives are often formed under the influence of rumours and talks but not through personal experience, as 76% of them have not personally applied to cooperatives at all (36%) or applied very seldom (40%).^{*1} The contacts which they have, as a rule, refer to trade or public catering cooperatives which give most cause for discontent. It is just against them that most sharp and emotional reactions are directed. It is clear that on the scale of the whole cooperative movement this sphere is neither important nor significant ^{*2}, but it is most of all in the public eye, and

*1. These opinions can be identified with the public opinion as the selection was made from representatives of the same population.

*2. In the whole sphere of cooperative public catering there are engaged less than 5% of the total number of those employed in public catering in the country.

judging by this sphere people treat cooperation on the whole. Unfortunately it is exactly the case (for example: phenomenon of Rizhskij market for Muscovites, or ill-fated shashliks).

Second, perhaps even more important factor is the position of official administration organs and organizations in respect of cooperation. The public opinion keenly responds to the inconsistency and uncertainty of this position. Supporting the cooperative movement by word of mouth, government administration organs in fact lay obstacles in every possible way to its full development. Contradictory resolutions, the easiness with which the agreements are infringed or cooperatives can be liquidated without any grounds, all this illustrates that the attitude of the administration organs to cooperatives is not serious. For example, The Chairman of Moscow City Council of Trade Unions can state at the Congress of People's Deputies that the activities of cooperatives "aggravate the deficiency of commodities, devastate shop counters, increase corruption, bribery, speculation..." It is clear that such circumstances do not promote the increase of respect to cooperatives in the public opinion.

And furthermore, the press which at first started enthusiastic campaign revealing the extraordinary usefulness and efficiency of cooperative activities, substituted it afterwards by indignations in respect of illegality and criminality of the same activities. The abundance of scandalous events has also made its contribution into discredit of cooperative movement in the public opinion.

Most favourable situation for development of cooperation exists in the Republic on Baltic Sea. It is clearly evident both basing on the results of our public-opinion poll and by publications.

It can be accounted for by the lack of prejudice against such forms of activities, and by the actual and not only formally declared support from the official administration bodies.

For example, in Tallin the percentage of persons observing opponents or supporters of the development of cooperation proved to be practically the same - 30% and 31%.

Cooperatives are most successfully established in the rural areas. The memory of the formerly existing khutor (separated farms) forms of economy is still alive in people. If in Russia there are already two generations of rural population which in fact cannot have a proper individual small holding, in the Republics on Baltic Sea there are still a lot of people who in their childhood lived in the farms of their parents, which is connected with traditional peasants' life. Therefore it is just in these Baltic Sea republics that the urban population (even young people) started to move to the rural areas. They leave their occupation in towns and start arranging family farms. Out of the total number of newspaper publications during the year 1987 on the subject of family contract, not less than 40% tell us about the movement of the town population to the rural areas as permanent residence. (Sov.Molodezh, 14 August; Sov.Litva, 10 November; 30 October, Trud, 9 September, Sov.Latvia, 16 September, 30 November).

Non-formal attitude to cooperatives is also proved by the fact that in the Republic on Baltic Sea there are sold various articles of creative work of people. There are cooperatives of roofers, educators, confectioners, gardeners, etc., whereas in towns of the central regions the matter is hardly advancing farther than cafe and shops.

The public opinion in Georgia occupies the intermediate position between Russia and Baltic Sea Republics. In Tbilissi 41% of those questionaired said that the majority of people are against cooperatives, and 14% - that cooperatives are supported.

Here cooperation is treated more optimistically again in villages, in rural areas.

Besides the population, there were also questionaired cooperators on the same cities. The aim was to find out, in particular, the attitude of the public to cooperation from the point of view of cooperators themselves.

Their assesment can be regarded as a result of some kind of "specific observation" as they themselves experience public opinion in the course of contacts with consumers. To the question: "How would you evaluate the attitude of population to cooperative movement at present?" - cooperators' reply in the average was quite close to that expressed by population, and namely, that about half of population regard them as opponents. However, the deviations in opinions vary from city to city. In Moscow and Leningrad the evaluation of public opinion of cooperators and population differ slightly.

In Moscow 65% of cooperators and 68% of population are of the opinion that the majority is antagonistic. In Leningrad: 54% and 52% respectively. Such coincidence of evaluations evidently testifies to the fact that such opinions are close to the real situation. The highest deviations between the opinion of population and that of cooperators were obtained in Kharkov and Tbilissi. Judging by the replies, cooperatives in these cities are working

in more favourable conditions and their impression of the public opinion is much better.

In Kharkov, as it has been already stated, out of the total number of people questionaired - 64% are of the opinion that the public is against cooperatives and among the cooperators such attitude is observed only by 33% of those questionaired. As we see, these data are twice as different.

The same deviations are observed in Tbilissi - among population - 41% and among cooperators - 20% see the antagonistic attitude towards cooperatives. In Tallin the difference in public opinions is also considerable but it is - one and a half times - less because of more favourable data on the whole (30% and 20% respectively).

Such lack of coincidence of evaluations reflects the contradictory and inadequate attitude of population to cooperation. The influence of stereotypes which has been mentioned above, and ascendancy of the means of ideological influence on the masses establish the guidelines which fill the social atmosphere with discontent. However, this discontent is characterised more by ideologically abstract or "inspired" features and exists in the forms of opinions and statements. In fact the cooperators in these cities enjoy good will attitude to the cooperative movement. Especially favourable is the situation in Tbilissi, where half of those questionaired cooperators - 49% - are of the opinion that they are recognized and enjoy support, and 25% point out neutral attitude. Such results even more confirm our conception that the public opinion depends on the influence of the guidelines. As it is evidenced by the results of tests of the press the negative

influence here is minimum. There is no forcing of hostility against the cooperative movement both : on the part of the administrative bodies, and on the part of the local press; there the attitude to it is much more natural and calm. In Tallin cooperators also speak about favourable attitude of population but they stress more restraint in this question. Here, on the contrary, 27% of those questionaired presume that their movement is supported, and 47% - that it is treated neutrally. In Kharkov, although cooperators do not have considerable opposition, they do not see any proper support either. Only 15% said about it.

On the basis of thorough analysis of these investigations and of the press publications, the conclusion should be made that strictly in scientific meaning the attitude of population to cooperation in the above cities cannot be regarded as adequate to the reality, as for the reasons stated above this attitude is formed not in the objective circumstances. It is rather, to a higher or smaller extent, the reflection of those influences which are made on the public on the part of official administration bodies and the press. In accordance with the tactics of the directive influences, the public sentiments are also changing. However, the degree of dependance in various cities is different. In Moscow and Leningrad it is the highest in accordance with better system of information and activity. In Kharkov, along with strong negative factor, there are more contradictions and the actual attitude to cooperation is worse. In Tallin and Tbilissi the situation is accordingly better.

Besides, in the public opinion there is an element of

higher emotionality, which is also acting in the prejudice of unbiassed attitude. Evidently it should be taken into consideration, when evaluating the degree of importance of the public opinion in the questions of cooperation. In other works, at present, the situation of the public opinion in this respect is such that one can not be guided by it when taking a decision on the expediency of development of cooperative sector.