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**ECONOMIC REFORMS IN THE UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS AS SEEN
BY THE WORKERS OF COOPERATIVE AND STATE ENTERPRISES***

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Gorbachev's economic reforms began in 1988 on the basis of the law on state enterprise (association) and the law on cooperation in the USSR. To what extent did the changes caused by these legal acts, influence ordinary workers? Did they feel their own everyday working life as changing and what are the changes? Do socio-economic changes differ at the state and cooperative enterprises and do these differences predominate over similarities?

Let's apply for the answers to these and some other questions to the materials of sociological research held in Moscow at the end of 1988¹. The subjects were workers of two state enterprises and one cooperative plant which was founded on the basis of the former state enterprise. The labour team of the cooperative plant has remained the same as it was at the former state enterprise, so the divergence of opinions and estimations between the two groups of respondents does not depend on the procedure of workers selection. To the moment of the survey two state enterprises had been working in the new economic conditions for one year, and cooperative plant - for about six months.

¹This research was done by the authors together with V.V.Komarovsky.

First changes. First of all the majority of workers say that most job facets have not changed during past year both at the state and cooperative enterprises. But many cooperative and state workers say that changes of working load and wages did have taken place. These changes are more evident at the cooperative plant: the working load has increased at 91% of cooperative workers compared with 62 - 72% at state enterprises workers; wages increase was mentioned by two thirds of the cooperative workers and only by one third of state sector workers¹. Additionally, changes of working load were more in concord with changes of pay at cooperative plant compared with state ones. That is why cooperators more often than state workers declare that fairness of their pay distribution have increased and that their wages correspond to their work output now. On the contrary, the workers at state enterprises more often than at cooperative one believe that they "give away more than receive in exchange".

Other differences testify to more favourable pattern of changes at the cooperative plant than at state enterprises also. A considerable amount of cooperators say that public organizations at the plant function better, became more useful for workers now than before reforms start and that management became more competent. More cooperators than state workers say about the increased participation of rank-and-file workers in solving production problems also, and so we come to conclusion that cooperative

¹Most of the differences mentioned below are statistically significant ($p \leq 0,05$; $p \leq 0,01$; $p \leq 0,001$). The analysis is being undertaken in four subgroups: men (I) and women (II) from state enterprises and men (III) and women (IV) from cooperative plant.

mechanism is better than state-administrative one not only in mobilization of executive skills of ordinary workers but in the mobilization of the initiative of managers, leaders of public organizations and ordinary workers also. In addition the workers at cooperative plant complain on deterioration of labour conditions and slackening of managers attention to employers needs not so often as workers at state enterprises. So, judging to workers evaluations more evident increase of labour output at cooperative workers during last year reforms has been accompanied by more evident improvement of their own well-being and by less evident losses that at state enterprises workers.

Seeing - or not seeing - changes by workers is a way for economic reform-makers to test which of changes planned by them did reach rank-and-file workers during past year. Judging to our survey results there are visible intended changes in the working load, wages and self-management; they were marked by 20% or larger share of surveyed workers in each subgroup. But only increase in working load (both at state and cooperative enterprises) and wages (only at cooperative plant) which was mentioned by more than 50% of respondents may be considered to be widely spread.

There are also such intentions of economic reform-makers which to workers opinion have not been fulfilled yet. Unfortunately the intention to accelerate innovation processes has not been fulfilled: workers do not say about acceleration of new techniques and technology introduction and of mastering new products. These processes have turned out to be the most inert probably because of their labour- and resource-absorbing character.

Some unintended and undesirable changes which aggravate our previous deficits have taken place also. First of all as men

workers pointed out the deficit of production supply has increased and that is an inevitable price for slowness of economic reforms. Disrhythmia in supply leads to increase of monthly wages fluctuation and this last change is mentioned by appreciable part of cooperative and state workers, both men and women. Secondly, the wages growth leads to increase of inflation and growth of consumer goods and services deficit, which partially depreciates pay increase. Thirdly mentioned by the majority increase of working load has aggravated lack of rehabilitation employees labour capacity conditions in our society.

Dissatisfaction is growing. Dissatisfaction with process of changes predominate over satisfaction with it both at cooperative and state enterprises. The workers dissatisfied with the rate of economic reform and believe that it could go on faster and more radically. This conclusion from our data is confirmed by demands content which have been putting forward during miners' strikes in summer 1989. It is known that the strikers demanded neither return to old economic system nor slowing the movement forward, but on the contrary they demanded more successive and urgent realization of economic reform main ideas.

Women at cooperative plant are more satisfied with all job facets than at state enterprises. As to men cooperative workers are more satisfied with their salary, with process of changes at their plant and with work as a whole. These comparisons make evident the advantage of cooperative economic mechanism over the state one which conclusion coincides with results of our analysis of changes perceived by workers at cooperative and state enterprises. But the story will not be complete if not to tell that men at cooperative plant do not feel more satisfaction than men at

state enterprises with their foremen and feel less satisfaction with possibilities for self-development at work.

To evaluate the present state of affairs we compared our data on satisfaction with data of sociological team headed by V.A.Jadov which were received at twelve industry state enterprises in Leningrad in 1976. The same job facets and the identical questionnaire items were used in 1988 and 1976 and in both cases the data describe the industrial workers of large city.

It appears that satisfaction with all job facets at our respondents working both at cooperative and state enterprises is lower than in Leningrad investigation. These differences are statistically significant and in most cases their absolute values vary from 0,8 till 1,7 (with 5-grade scales).

Satisfaction decreased and dissatisfaction increased in some cases in spite of real situation improvement. For example, in 1976 when there was no question of workers' real participation in management 36 - 37% of those polled were satisfied with the opportunity to participate in the management of production that was available to them at that time. While nowadays when real opportunities to participate in management have appeared these figures are reduced to 14 - 20%.

This is explained by the fundamental psychological changes caused by perestroika in workers' minds - the awakening of self-respect, level of aspirations increase, overcoming the estrangement from production process and from the world of social relations. Almost all satisfaction data received in our polls at industry enterprises in different soviet cities in 1988 - 1989 turned out to be lower than in 1976 also.

The social function of dissatisfaction increasing in present situation in our society is very important. The increase of workers' discontent and free expression of this discontent stimulate changes and so this feeling is a necessary premise for real changes not only in economics but in society as a whole.

Is it possible to work more? Judging their own job productivity and productivity of other personnel categories at enterprise many respondents admitted that they themselves, workers of their team, workers of other teams and shops and enterprise management also do not work as hard as they can.

The opinions of men and women both at cooperative plant and at state enterprises are sharply different: while estimating themselves men prefer to say "I work in a normal way but could work better" and women prefer to say "I work with full energy". So most of the women think that they have no resources for the future increase of job productivity using their own forces, but most of men in spite of working load increase in past year think that they do have such resources. This distinction is expressed not only in different self-estimations of men and women but also in their different estimations of their coworkers, respondents probably project on them their own self-estimations.

Respondents at cooperative plant estimated their own and other workers' output higher than respondents at state enterprises. That means that because of more universal increase of working load at economically independent cooperative enterprise during past year the cooperative workers realize their capacities more fully than state ones and their resources for further increase in labour output are less. But differences due to degree of economic independence (cooperative vs state property) influence the estimations of

output less than gender differences and so the means of output estimations rank as follows (in the direction from large unused resources to small ones): men at state enterprises, men at cooperative plant, women at state enterprises, women at cooperative plant.

The workers' ratings of management job output differ sharply from all others: these mean ratings are approximately 1 point lower (using 3-grade scales) than workers' mean self-estimations and substantially lower than mean ratings of other workers. It is enough to say that 42-70% of workers in different subgroups are sure that managing board of their enterprise works "very far from full force". Compare this figures with 21% or less respondents who express such opinion of their coworkers and with 7% or less respondents who think so about themselves.

Of course we are talking only about opinions and not about objective measures of output. But whether these opinions are adequate to reality or not the impression of most of the workers that the staff works worse than rank-and-file workers indicate to a serious social conflict which exists at industry enterprises today.

So as it appears most workers blame for their dissatisfaction those who have freedom and power to decide. It was revealed not only in the workers' negative estimations of the staff job output but also in their conviction that it is "resistance of bureacrats that prevents elimination of serious drawbacks in our economy". This particular reason has come to a first place out of a long list and is mentioned by 42-59% of respondents in various subgroups. It worth mentioning also that nearly half of the workers consider a strike to be an acceptable method to solve conflicts with administration. Our data demonstrate that even the change of state enter-

prise into a cooperative one could not reduce the tension accumulated in relationships between workers and administration.

Alternatives for tomorrow. Workers dissatisfaction with current situation combined with their admission that they could work more make them to think what to do for situation improvement. Supply improvement, material stimulation, technical renewal, debureaucratization and production organization improvement are most popular programmes for productivity increase among workers of both cooperative and state enterprises. Each of them has won one third or more voices and exceeds in popularity every other programme suggested for choice.

The high popularity of idea "to give people possibility to earn more than now" indicates that this way is one of the most effective for productivity increase. At the same time such a popularity demonstrates that restrictions on workers wages (they are called "ceilings") have not cancelled yet. So it is natural that 60-70% of respondents (among state enterprises employees more than among cooperators) are convinced that however much they work they will not be paid more than a restricted sum of money.

It worth mentioning that workers aspirations are rather modest. The answers to the question "what wages per month would you consider to be enough for you?" vary from 320 roubles (an average sum asked by women at state enterprises) to 440 roubles (an average sum asked by men at cooperative plant). If we even rely on very overstated soviet official rouble's rate, it will turn out that desired 440 roubles are more than twice lower than real wages of workers in United States, Great Britain and Federal Republic of Germany. So even if our workers get the desired money our labour force will stay a cheap one.

The popularity among workers of the programme "to improve production supply" is not surprising. This proposal is directly linked with workers complaints on production supply deterioration through the past year. The fact that this programme is put forward more often at the cooperative plant (among men) is explained by a higher price of labour time here. So the same breake in supply leads to higher damage for workers wages at cooperative enterprise than at state one. Respondents at cooperative plant more often than at state enterprise say that fluctuations of their wages depend first of all on the variations in supply.

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To define more distinctly comparative popularity of different renewal programmes we asked respondents to choose "only one, most important way to labour productivity increase at your enterprise". There were four alternatives - one "technical" ("introduction of new techniques and technology") and three "motivational" ("effective material stimulation", "tightening up the discipline" and "faith, great idea, enthusiasm") - in the list offered to our respondents.

The results of this "voting" appeared the same both at cooperative and state enterprises. Programme of technical renewal as a way to increase labour productivity predominates in popularity over every motivational programme. Most of the workers set all their hopes on technique (on "iron" as people called it) and not on the changes that could be obtained by impact upon human being through its motivation.

The technical alternative is preferred because it would be machines' but not workers' working load which increases in this case; and on the contrary, in case of productivity improvement by

motivational methods the workers' working load would necessary have to increase. As for responsibility for equipment purchasing and installation workers put is not on themselves also, but on specialists and the staff.

Motivational programmes of labour productivity increase which presuppose further increase of workers' working load received more than one third of voices. It became possible because as it was shown hereabove many respondents (especially men) admit that they have unused resources of work energy.

The workers support to different motivational programmes differs remarkably. The programme of material stimulation for which each third man and each fifth woman votes got the majority among motivational programmes. As to traditional for our recent history administrative-discipline ("tightening up the discipline") and ideological ("faith, great idea, enthusiasm") methods - they do not receive a wide support from the workers both at cooperative and state enterprises.

The cooperative and state workers prefer the programme of material stimulation to programme of ideological one refutes an opinion rather widely spread in current soviet literature and expressed for example by publicist M. Antonov. As he wrote "it is difficult to raise people, especially Russian people, to struggle for extra 10 roubles. It is necessary to suggest them a great goal" ("October" 1987, N 8, p. 53). Our data indicate that giving the people opportunity to improve their well-being and well-being of their families has more chances to increase their job productivity than offering them "a great goal" in its traditional meaning. And by the way why better life of every worker and his (her) family is not a great goal?