

# In the Shadow of the Plan

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## ABSTRACT

In the state socialist societies the plan told the managers what to produce and how much to produce. Managers took the plan more or less as granted. This kind of situation lasted even at the beginning of the 90's. If the manager and the factory managed to make the plan, they got the bonuses, if not their future was not so good.

Social division of labour measured by occupational structure was quite similar in state socialism than in the developed capitalist countries. At the end of the 80's the share of the managerial groups was a bit bigger than it was Eg. in western European countries. There were more female managers than there are in the capitalist countries. In average managers were a bit older than other main occupational groups. Managers were well educated, more than half of the managers had an academic degree.

Research on the labour process in Russian industry points at both change and continuity. In the Soviet Union the managerial labour process was based on functions imposed by the planning system. Today, the influence of market economy can also be seen in the work of managers. Managers are becoming real business managers involved in making important economic divisions. Factory managers are becoming business executives, though the change is very slow.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Socialism has always been an ideological, political, economic and social issue. Soviet Union was an attempt to put socialism to work in practise. If we think about Soviet Union and the classics of sociological thought, we may say that none of the early sociological visions concerning socialism did materialize. Marx anticipated that a socialist society would be a classless society where the state apparatus will wither away. In reality Soviet Union was a class society, where the state was a very powerful social institution. Durkheim saw socialism as a conscious combination of economy and other parts of society. This kind of conscious combination never appeared in any real socialist societies. On the other hand Weber was critical towards any socialist project.

He thought that socialism would only lead towards the rule of bureaucrats. From a perspective of an ordinary worker, there is no difference whether he who rules is a capitalist or a state bureaucrat.

Soviet Union was an industrial society, which also tried to be an affluent society and a modern society. Soviet Union was a special kind of an industrial society. When building industrial units main emphasis was put on heavy industries, the role of private consumption had only very limited influence on investments. In state socialist societies state had a strong control over citizens' social activities. We may say that the state was controlling social life, and what it could not control was prohibited. Civil society, as we understand it, was almost totally lacking. However modernization was an important political doctrine. Communist Party had an ambitious plan to beat the capitalist countries both in industrial production and in consumption. (Kagarliski 1992)

State socialist countries were industrial societies where means of production were not owned by private persons. Enterprises were actually owned by the state. Though formally factories were like factories in the capitalist countries, there were many differences between a socialist enterprise and a capitalist firm. Enterprises were more like branches or divisions of industrial ministries than independent economic units. This meant that ministries set the factories their annual production plans. Factories received their raw materials from above and the production was delivered to "customers" according to the orders of the ministry. On the other hand enterprises had broad autonomy in running the production.

In the Soviet context the state owned enterprises can be divided into four different groups. The most important firms were so called all Union firms. They had great strategic significance. They had their headquarters in Moscow, their staff was highly qualified, and the supply side was well organized. Republican industries served needs in different Soviet republics. Locally organized enterprises used local raw materials and were usually run by different cities. Fourth group was enterprises organized by non industrial ministries Eg. locomotive factory owned by ministry

of railways. Administration of industrial production was organized by branch ministries. There were all union ministries, which operated from Moscow, and had strategic plants around the country. Secondly there were republican ministries which were in charge of production of Eg. shoes in a certain republic.

Soviet ideology stressed that Soviet Union was a country where the working class is in power. This was not only pure ideology. In many respect Soviet Union was really a worker's state. Industrial working class was seen as a leading economical, political and social force. Working class had substantially large autonomy in their work, and they possessed a lot of power at the shop floor level. In spite of this industrial enterprises were organized as hierarchically as in west.

In the following article my intention is to discuss some features of the state socialist societies. Main emphasis is on the management of industrial organizations. First I shall present a historical view of the development of factory management. How was the factory management organized? Secondly I discuss theoretical approaches concerning enterprise management in socialism. What was the role of managers in manufacturing production? Finally I present an empirical investigation of managers at the end of the Soviet period. What kind of power recourses did the managers possess? Empirical analysis are based on representative survey data gathered in European parts of Russian Federation in spring 1991. (cf. Melin 1996)

## 2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF FACTORY MANAGEMENT

October revolution had radical consequences also for the factory management. Bolsheviks had no program concerning the reorganization of the management of manufacturing industries. After the revolution factories were simply given to the workers, who were allowed to direct them as they pleased. During the early 20's many new theoretical ideas were tried to put in practice. Old managers, named as 'bourgeois specialists' were replaced with revolutionary workers. Also collective forms of management were tried to use. On theoretical level the main focus was put to abolish the division between mental and manual work. However this idea was never put in practice in European state socialism.

During the 1920's a living debate was taking place concerning the work organization. Several

theoretical approaches were presented (cf. Kiezun 1991). Main emphasis was put to decrease the use of raw materials and human labour and to increase the productivity. Soviet efforts were in many respect quite close to taylorism. Soviet theorists and innovators, also tried to increase the use of scientific methods in work organizations.

Stalin's 'revolution from above' during early 1930's caused great changes in the whole society. It also effected industrial management. First of all forced industrialization increased the number of enterprises, industrial workers and industrial managers rapidly during the late 20's and early 30's. New workers had their roots in the country side, many of them were reluctant to work in factories. Managers were mainly young and a great deal of them had no formal education for their work.

The principle of democratic centralism was adopted also in the enterprises. This meant that factories were administered according the system of 'one man management'. Managers had formally all the power at their disposal. The decision making power and responsibility was given to the factory directors. In theory the director had the power, but in practise the enterprises were functionally divided, and different sections and units operated very independently.

Centralized production system caused many kinds of problems in the everyday life of enterprises. The biggest problems were connected with the supply side of the production. There was a constant shortage of machines, raw materials and labour force. Plans made in Moscow could not meet the needs of a single machine building factory Eg. in Murmansk. Managers tried to solve these problems in different ways. In many cases the only way to solve urgent problems was to use various kinds of unofficial channels. The concept of "blat" describe this. Blat means that managers used their personal networks, extra money or barter exchange to get Eg. spare parts.

During this period developed also one of the biggest bottle necks of state socialist industrial production: bonus systems. Workers, and managers as well, received bonuses if the plan targets were fulfilled. You had to produce 100% of the plan to get the bonus. There were a lot of cheating due to bonuses. Factories reported to the planning organs that they have produced all the bits and pieces that the plan said, though in reality they had done only 80%. They did the rest of the required products later. Sociologists have used the concept of 'storming' to describe this.

Storming means intensive working during a short period to fulfil the plan.

Stalin's victory started turbulent times in the society. Nobody could be sure about his/her position. In factory management the old generation was replaced with 'the red executives'. Red executives were young, more educated than factory managers used to be in the 20's and they were loyal to the stalinist regime.

In principle the communist party was in charge of all spheres of the Soviet Society. The party had the leading role in politics, in state administration, in art and in science. The party controlled also manufacturing industry and factory management. The party was present in the enterprises. Each factory had its own party secretary, and on the behalf of the party he controlled the whole factory. However party secretaries were usually 'company men'. They were more loyal to the management than to the party organs. Reason for this was, that their own well being was partly depending on the results of the factory. They got their bonuses if the enterprise fulfilled the production plan.

Third corner in 'the power triangle' was the trade union institutions. Soviet trade unions were not a part of the working class movement as is the case Eg. in the Nordic countries. Trade unions were not independent. They were more like servants of the regime than independent social actors. Trade unions worked actively in order to get the workers to fulfil the plan. Unions had influence in the matters dealing with social policy issues. They delivered flats and holiday tours. Unions organized kindergartens and other related services. In practise unions had no power in questions dealing with collective agreements and wages. Wages were set in negotiations between the enterprises and planning organs. (see Ruble 1981)

We can say that at the edge of the second world war Soviet Union was an industrialized country, but industrial management was very different from the management of capitalist enterprises. Industrial ministries together with central planning organs, of which Gosplan was the most important, were leading the industrial production. Managers at the local level were executors of the plan, who had nothing to say about products or about markets. But they had all the power in questions concerning the running of the production.

After Stalin's death the management of industrial production was reorganized. Khruchev's reforms were aimed to decrease the power of in-

dustrial ministries and planning organs. Decentralization of power was the key idea. As a consequence of this during late 50's and early 60's regionalism flourished in the Soviet Union. Republics, and regions within the republics, had the possibility to lead the industrial production. Also enterprise managers got more power. As a consequence of these changes regional planning committees were more interested about the needs of their own republic than about the requirements of the national plan. This in turn caused serious problems for the functioning of some other plants in some other republic, because in the Soviet system enterprises were very dependant on each others.

Khruchev's reforms did not last long. In mid 60's a new wave of reforms in industrial management started. Academician G. E. Liberman (1976) initiated a program which purpose was to increase the role of profits in the thinking of industrial managers. Since the victory of the Bolshevik revolution profit were connected with the capitalist exploitation. In socialism firms had nothing to do with profits. Liberman's idea was to motivate managers with profits and to increase the productivity of factories with profits.

However the most important results of the reforms in the mid 60's were the restoration of the system of industrial ministries. Also the role of Gosplan became more and more crucial in management. One can say that the managerial system that was built during the period of forced industrialization was reinvented in the circumstances of the rapid technical change of the 60's. What comes to managerial power, managers at the plant level did not get any new power resources.

The period before the Perestroika is often called as the period of stagnation. Indeed, in the 70's and early 80's, the old structures and old ways of doing things remained unchanged. Soviet Union in themid 80's was a 'ministerial society'. Economic power was in the industrial ministries and in the planning organs. An other important feature was a certain contradiction in power relations. In one respect enterprise managers were powerless: they had nothing to say about the frames of the production. On the other hand managers were important social actors at the local level. They were a part of the local power elite, and they run the enterprises.

Within the Soviet work organization could be found almost exactly the same hierarchical positions than there were in the capitalist work organizations. Soviet managers had both decision

making power and authority. But the production plan set the over all limits to their power. Also other matters restricted the managerial power. Wage differences were much smaller in the Soviet Union than in the west. Constant shortage of qualified labour force, together with labour legislation that was heavily pro workers, quaranted the blue collar workers a strong position at the enterprises.

Enterprise managers were an important part of the local power elites (see Andrie 1976). Together with the leading party functionaries they were the real leaders of industrial towns and regions. Their social situation was based on totally different structural elements than the situation of their subordinates. Via different kinds of social networks and via their formal positions some of the top managers made fortunes during the 70's and early 80's. They were not any capitalists, but in the Soviet context they were really rich people.

One important aim of the Perestroika was 'revolution from above' as happened already in Stalin's time. In concern for the enterprise management main ideas of Perestroika was, once again, to increase the power of factory managers. Bureaucratic control over the functions of enterprises had grown a lot since the Liberman reforms started. Computerized planning systems together with grown resources of the planning organs had created a thick net of instructions and rules for the firms. From this point of view both managers and workers were considered as parts of the industrial machinery. All this caused loss of initiative, decreasing productivity and growing pessimism in respect of future perspectives.

Perestroika tried to save state socialism by vitalizing the manufacturing production and by creating totally new service sector. Political authorities paid more attention to managers than for decades. The rule of the plan was made not so strict as it used to be. Companies could for example sell a part of their production as they pleased. More emphasis was put on research and development activities. Marketing departments were created and firms started to sell their products.

In spite of all changes the basic element of state socialist mode of production did not change. State owned the factories and state authorities had the final word over the major decision concerning the enterprises. Managers were still subordinated to the political and administrative authorities.

In principle there were "universal" work organization and managerial strategies prevailing in the

entire Soviet Union. This concerned Estonia as well as Armenia. In spite of the "in principle" homogeneous and universal work organization different regions and different branches of economy adopted their own practices. These practices differed very much from each others. In the western literature Soviet Union is often describes as a monolith, however Soviet Union had huge regional differences. These differences concerned the level of social and economical development as well as all kinds of administrative and managerial practices. Baltic Sea region was one of the most developed parts of the Soviet Union. Estonia and Latvia were among the most modernized and industrially most developed parts of the country.

There were a lot of social mobility in the Soviet Union. People moved from the country side to urban areas, from agriculture to industrial work. Millions of workers, experienced upward social mobility via education. The Baltic republics got a lot of immigrants from other parts of the Soviet imperium. All union corporations invested huge sum of money to Estonia and to Latvia. And as result of this almost half of the labourers in Estonia and in Latvia were immigrants at the end of the 80's.

### *The role of the plan*

In capitalism managers have a special role in the management. In modern large scale corporations managers have at least four different functions to fulfil. According to A.W. Teulings these functions are:

1. The ownership function (accumulation of capital)
2. The administrative function (allocation of investments)
3. The innovative function (product market development)
4. The production function (control of the direct labour process)

(Teulings 1989, 16)

In capitalism managers are in an authority position, and they act as decision makers at the same time. This type of social actor was not existing in state socialism. The plan told the managers what to produce and how much to produce. When the plan was finally accepted, it was formally like a law. The firm should follow the lines it gave. Soviet managers took the plan more or less as granted. They did not question its legitimacy. Red directors negotiated "stormed", cheated and did the most peculiar tricks to fulfil the

plan targets. This was mainly due to the fact that until late 1980's the whole industrial community was more or less dependent on the plan. If the manager and the factory managed to make the plan, they got the bonuses, if not their future was not so good.

It was manager's duty to make the plan. He could negotiate the plan, but the actual decision was made in higher organs. The way how the plan was fulfilled was in the hands of the management. In many questions managements power was bigger than it is in the capitalist countries. For example economical rationality was not any issue in the Soviet Union. Though management was controlled both from above (the party and ministries) and from below the party and trade unions), this control was in practice weak and ineffective. Actually the plan in it self was the most important means of control

Many western sociologists have criticized the role of the plan in state socialism (cf. Rutland 1985, 56–63). At the enterprise level the centrality of the production plan caused many difficulties. Firms produced products with technologies and methods that were not rational from the firms point of view. Accounting systems were undeveloped. Accounting was more a means of control from above than a tool of the management. "Soft budget constraint" made it possible to produce goods that were too heavy and too expensive year after year. The price system had nothing to do with actual production costs.

According to the principles of democratic centralism all the power in the enterprises were given to the factory directors. In spite of this, different units and departments operated in practise very independently. At the shop floor level workers had broad autonomy concerning the labour process.

What concerns the centralization of power and the power recourses of different managerial groups, Mladen Lazic (1992, 8) has emphasised the importance of nominations. According to him the most important power resource of the management was the right to nominate their own subordinates. If this right is given to some one else, also the manager is in a subordinate position. Only a possibility to nominate your workers gives you concrete power.

### *Manager's job*

Upper groups of enterprise management were a part of economic and political power elite. They

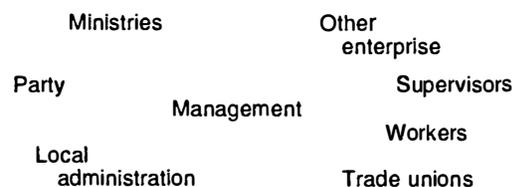
were also members of different regional and local elites. In the Soviet Union political positions were more important than economical positions. This was the case also at the local level. However the position of a single manager was very different in the context of Eg. Magnitogorsk or Togliatti than in the context of Moscow or Leningrad.

The most important incentive in the Soviet economic system was money. Economic activity was based on bonus. In the core of the incentive system were different kinds of bonuses paid to the management and to workers. In the case of management, this was a real problem, because any other systems of incentives did not exist.

The societal role of the manufacturing industries was not only in the production of goods. In most cases factories formed the heart of industrial towns. The towns were built around the factories, by the factories, and they lived of the factories. A factory could produce tractors or missiles, but it also was responsible for the reproduction of the entire community (Grancelli 1995, 16). These features of the very special role of factories in the Soviet system is described in exiting way in Stephen Kotkin's book concerning the city of Magnitogorsk.

Managers operated in the networks of multiple inter dependences. The future of the whole factory, not to mention their own future, was depending on the action of different partners in these networks (Crowley 1994, 594–595). In the networks, managers had influence in making decision concerning production and allocation of apartments, holidays etc. At the same time they depended on the work performance of the central work collectives in the factory. The results of the factory was also depending on suppliers, and their work was depending on the performance of some other unit etc. So one of the main tasks of the managers was to sail successfully in the networks of multiple interdependencies.

### *Figure: An example of a managerial network*



In a planned economy managers had no role at all as an "investor", "innovator" or "sales man". The plan included all these managerial tasks. Not

to add that a part of these duties were taken care by the industrial ministries. Also in the Soviet Union managers were often seen as passive executors and not as active policy makers. (see Gimpelson & Nazimova 1992, 73)

In the Soviet understanding of management there was an immanent paradox. The idea of 'one man management' said that managers hold a position with power. On the other hand managers were not seen as responsible for the results of the enterprise. Instead managers were seen as a part of the ministerial bureaucracy. Historically Soviet enterprise managers can be divided into three groups. During the first years of the planned economy a manager was more like a leader of industrial troops and a director without any professional education. The second type was an engineer. A leading figure from a supervisor up to a minister was an engineer who knew all the necessary technical details, but who had no economical education what so ever. The third type is something that should have followed the engineer: scientific-technical progress requires also knowledge concerning economical matters and leadership knowledge. However this kind of a manager type did never emerge in Soviet management (see Smeljov 1990, 59–60)

The Soviet management literature presents an idealistic image concerning the possibilities to manage the whole society via centralized administrative apparatus. This kind of an image is based on a strong believe in planning. Soviet researchers made generalizations which were based on experiences drawn from the most developed enterprises or regions. They also denied the existence of all other social interests than so called general interest. Soviet thinking stressed the unity of the society. Sociologists did not put emphasis on the interests of different occupational, ethnic or other social groups that could be found in the factories. Factory management was not so easy task as Soviet planning system expressed it to be. During the last years of the perestroika managers faced problems that they could not solve. They had no answers to new questions raised by very rapid social change.

### 3. RUSSIAN MANAGERS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 90'S

Social division of labour measured by occupational structure was quite similar in the Soviet Union than in the developed capitalist countries. At the end of the 80's the share of the manage-

rial groups in the Soviet Union was a bit bigger than it was Eg. in Finland (Melin 1996, 108) Among the Soviet managers there were more women, than the share of female managers in the capitalist countries. In average managers were a bit older than other major occupational groups. Managers were well educated more than half of the managers had an academic degree.

In the official Soviet class theory there were two social classes, the working class and the peasantry. Intelligentsia was seen as a social strata. Managers were a part of the intelligentsia. Soviet thinking accepted only one internal division among the wage labourers. That was the division between mental and manual labour. Communist ideology maintained that no divisions based on power resources existed. Society was already at the stage of developed socialism, and such divisions had disappeared. This assumption means that hierarchical power divisions did not belong to the Soviet society.

In the following I'll present empirical analysis concerning the social position of enterprise managers in Soviet Union. The data was gathered at spring 1991 from European parts of the Russian federation (Hout et al 1992).

Economically active population can be divided into class groups based on there formal position in work organization. Education or incomes can also be used as the main criteria for stratification. I consider this kind of analysis improper in the case of state socialism. In stead I've divided respondents into different class groups on the basis of their actual decision making power (power concerning the whole plant), their supervisory power (how much they can influence the work of their subordinates) and their autonomy at work (how large autonomy they have in the work).

By using this kinds of criteria we can say, that at beginning of the year 1991 half of the Russians (N= 1 495) were workers, one fifth were professionals and a bit more than a quarter belonged to the managerial groups. A half worked in the manufacturing industries and the rest in services and in administration.

When looking more closely at the middle class, or professional and managerial groups, we can make the following generalizations:

- the share of women is a bit bigger than the share of men,
- men are clearly more often in top managerial positions than women (1/3 vs 1/5),
- the share of men in middle management is a bit bigger than the share of women,
- there are as many women as men working as supervisors (1/10),

- half of the women and a third of the men are working in the professional positions,
- women in middle class positions work more often in services or in administration while men work in the manufacturing industry.

(Melin 1996, 120)

One of the first declarations that communists made after the October revolution was that women and men have equal rights and duties in the society. In spite of heavy ideological emphasis on gender equality, men and women did not have similar positions in the Soviet society. All the really important positions were occupied by men. Though there were a lot of female managers, they did not work at the higher positions. This segregation was not due to education. In general women had better educational qualifications than men since the late 60's.

In the modern societies vast majority of economically active population get their means of living in the form of wages or salaries. Wage is also a good indicator of the class situation. Wage level tells us about the importance of a certain occupation/position in a given society. It may also tell about the division of prestige. In general income differentials were much smaller in the Soviet Union than they are in the capitalist societies. Measured with official monthly incomes top managers did earn only about 35% more than wage earners in average.

There were remarkable differences between the incomes in different branches of the economy. Wages in the manufacturing industry were higher than wages in services. In average women earned less than men. In the managerial positions the gender difference was almost 50%. In professional occupations it was about 35%. This means that equality in the ideological level do not necessarily correlate with real social situations.

Monthly wages do not tell the whole truth about a person's total incomes and life situation. State socialism was a shortage economy. The problem was more often that you could not buy certain goods, because such goods were not available, money was not a problem. The best companies had their own farms and green houses. There were company owned shops, restaurants, cinemas etc. Firms also had their own networks and channels to get access to rare consumer goods. Rare goods were usually used as rewards. In general managers had the best possibilities in the firms to benefit this kind of arrangements. All in all managers' living conditions were much better than the living conditions of an average Soviet citizen.

Soviet sociologists often criticized western

mobility researchers for the reason that they overestimate the prospects for upward social mobility and neglect the inevitable downward mobility that also takes place. In the Soviet Union social mobility was a visible phenomena. In fact Soviet society was very fluid. Soviet sociologists understood mobility as a voluntary phenomenon, workers moved both horizontally and vertically (Aitov 1986, 255).

At the beginning of the 90's working class was still the most common social background even for managers and professionals. However all managerial groups deviate from the working class, but the differences were not big. About 3/4 of workers are coming from the working class origins, while about 60% of managers come from the working class origins.

Career mobility is an other aspect of social mobility. Managers had managerial careers. More than 3/4 of the top managers have had a pure managerial career. In average about half of the cases in managerial groups were in some kind of managerial post also in their previous job. There were some interesting differences between branches. In industry the number of people who have got promotions was smaller than in services. Especially the top management in industry used to have promotions more seldom than managers in respective posts in the service sector.

Job autonomy is an important power resource at work. The question of autonomy is always connected with the relation to concrete work. In sociological theorizing autonomy of work has been used as one criteria for class divisions (Wright 1978). Compared with capitalist countries all occupational groups in the Soviet Union had quite broad autonomy at their work. In the Soviet work organization differences between managers and manual workers were not so big as they are in the west. In relative terms workers had a better position than managers. In spite of this managers had a lot to say about their work.

Though managerial power was restricted in many ways, Soviet managers held the keys of their enterprises in their hands. They were real leaders and decision makers, who could rule the factories. In spite of the plan, as a general frame, managers were autonomous actors in the state socialist production system.

#### 4. SOCIAL TRANSITION

Research on the labour process in Russian industry points at both change and continuity. In

the Soviet Union the managerial labour process was based on functions imposed by the planning system. Today, the growing influence of market economy is also seen in the work of managers. Managers are now becoming real business managers involved in making important economic decisions. Factory managers are becoming business executives, though the change is a slow process. They have to learn many new skills. Marketing or accounting, for instance, were more or less unknown or even ignored skills in state socialism.

The future of Russia remains wide open. We may see a further strengthening of economic and political democracy, but on the other hand the growth of more authoritarian political relations is also a possible future scenario. In the free market economy scenario the role of the state is reduced to a minimum. The only task remaining for the state is to provide legal guarantees that private actors can compete according to same rules.

The latest indications are that Russia is not heading towards free market economy. Rather the development seem to point at the growth of new industrial feudalism. In this model the role of landlord is taken up by major corporations, with workers as their subordinates. In a sense this is a type of 'socialist feudalism' which existed in state socialist countries. Although there it was a model of 'negotiated feudalism' where heavy emphasis was placed on the redistribution of economic results.

In the new industrial feudalism, company managers will be part of a new ruling bourgeoisie. This may mean a dramatic increase in social conflicts. However, this is by no means the only future scenario for Russia. The collapse of the centralized state apparatus could also lead to the growth of strong regions where different kinds of social orders may appear.

The future role of managers in Russia is just as wide open as the future of Russian society at large. Managers may emerge as agents of modernization, but they may also try to stand in the

way of change and in this way keep hold of their old positions.

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