

AŠER DELEON

33 QUESTIONS 33 ANSWERS

ON WORKERS' SELF-GOVERNMENT /
IN YUGOSLAVIA

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YUGOSLAVIA TODAY IS KNOWN BY MANY AS A COUNTRY WHERE WORKERS' COUNCILS EXIST AT ENTERPRISES, WHERE THE WORKERS MANAGE THE FACTORIES, MINES, CONSTRUCTION JOBS, AGRICULTURAL FARMS, FOREST EXPLOITATION, STORES, TRANSPORT UNDERTAKINGS, RAILWAYS, THE POSTAL SERVICES. HOSTS OF PEOPLE THROUGHOUT THE WORLD HAVE HEARD OF YUGOSLAVIA AS

THE COUNTRY OF BRAVE PARTISANS,

THE COUNTRY WHERE TITO LIVES,

THE COUNTRY OF WORKERS' COUNCILS.

AS A RESULT, ONE OF THE FIRST QUESTIONS THAT FOREIGNERS ASK OF YUGOSLAVS — WHETHER AT THEIR MEETINGS IN THE COUNTRY OR ANYWHERE ELSE ON THE GLOBE — IS: »HOW ARE YOUR WORKERS' COUNCILS DOING? OR: »IS IT TRUE THAT YOU HAVE LET THE WORKERS MANAGE YOUR ENTERPRISES?

THE QUESTIONS HEARD ARE MANY. THEY ARE PUT FROM THE MOST VARIED ANGLES AND ARE PROMPTED BY QUITE DIVERSIFIED MOTIVES, WITH EXTRAORDINARILY GRADED INTENTS. YET ONE FACT INDUBITABLY OVERSHADOWS ALL THE REST

— THAT THE GREAT INTEREST SURROUNDING THE PARTICIPATION OF THE PRODUCERS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF ENTERPRISES AND THE ECONOMY SPRINGS FROM THE WORLD-WIDE CONCEPTS EXISTING ALREADY TODAY TO THE EFFECT THAT THE WORKERS CAN NO LONGER REMAIN BUT THE EXECUTORS OF THE WILL OF OTHERS. NO WONDER THEN THAT A REALIZATION LIKE THIS YUGOSLAV ONE SHOULD BE PROVOKING SUCH CURIOSITY AND SO MANY QUERIES.

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HE QUESTIONS ARE SO MANY THAT
IT IS HARD TO ARRANGE AND SYSTEMATIZE
THEM;

IT IS HARD TO SEPARATE THOSE OF A MORE
GENERAL IMPACT;

IT IS EVEN HARDER TO ANSWER THEM SATIS-
FACTORILY FOR THE BENEFIT OF PEOPLE
WHO ARE LIVING UNDER ENTIRELY DIFFE-
RENT CONDITIONS, FAR FROM OUR REALITY,
SO DIFFERENT FROM THEIRS.

HOWEVER, HERE ARE SOME OF THE QUES-
TIONS THAT HAVE BEEN RECURRING MOST
CONSISTENTLY:

33

QUESTIONS ON WORKERS' SELF-GOVERNMENT IN YUGOSLAVIA

HOW OLD IS THE STRUGGLE FOR WORKERS' PARTICIPATION IN THE MANAGEMENT OF ENTERPRISES?

WHOSE INTERESTS ARE SERVED BY THE CREATION OF FACTORY COMMITTEES IN CAPITALIST ENTERPRISES?

WHAT ARE THE FUNCTIONS THE PRODUCERS ARE STRUGGLING FOR — CONSULTATIVE, CONTROLLING, OR MANAGERIAL?

"FACTORIES TO THE WORKERS" — DOES IT MEAN THAT FACTORIES SHOULD BECOME THE PROPERTY OF THE WORKERS?

AND WHY NOT "THEATRES TO THE ACTORS" AND "HOSPITALS TO THE HEALTH WORKERS" AND "SCHOOLS TO THE TEACHERS", AS WELL?

DOES "FACTORIES TO WORKERS" MEAN MANAGEMENT BY THE WORKERS WHO ACTUALLY WORK IN THEM?

IS IT MANAGEMENT BY THE PRODUCERS, OR BY THE TRADE-UNION MEMBERS AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES?

WHO MAKES DECISIONS — THE WORKERS' ORGAN OF MANAGEMENT OR THE UNION?

WHO HAS SENIORITY — THE WORKERS' COUNCIL OR THE DIRECTOR?

WHAT ARE THE RIGHTS OF THE ORGANS OF MANAGEMENT AT ENTERPRISES?

WHAT IS THE PLACE OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE ENTERPRISES?

IS WORKERS' MANAGEMENT FEASIBLE BEYOND INDUSTRIAL ENTERPRISES ALSO?

WHAT IS THE METHOD OF ELECTING THE WORKERS' ORGANS OF MANAGEMENT?

IN WHAT WAY IS THE DIRECTOR APPOINTED?

DO THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE EXECUTIVES AND THE WORKERS CHANGE?

WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN WORKERS' MANAGEMENT AND INDEPENDENT DISTRIBUTION OF EARNINGS?

IN WHAT WAY IS THE CHARACTER OF WORKERS' EARNINGS IN ENTERPRISES CHANGED?

ARE THE TRADE UNIONS ALWAYS BUT THE SUPPORT OF THE ORGANS OF SELF-GOVERNMENT?

ARE THE WORKERS GOING TO ENLARGE AND MODERNIZE THEIR ENTERPRISES?

IS ANY FACTORY INTERESTED IN THE ERECTION OF A NEW FACTORY?

ARE THE DIRECT GOVERNING RIGHTS OF THE PRODUCERS CONFINED TO ENTERPRISES?

HOW IS THE COUNCIL OF PRODUCERS ELECTED?

DO THE INDIVIDUAL ENTERPRISES ENTER INDUSTRIAL ASSOCIATIONS?

WHY IS WORKERS' SELF-GOVERNMENT IN THE ECONOMY AN INSTRUMENT OF STRUGGLE AGAINST BUREAUCRACY?

IS IT POSSIBLE FOR BUREAUCRACY TO APPEAR IN THE WORKERS' ORGANS OF SELF-GOVERNMENT ALSO?

HOW IS PERMANENT CONTACT MAINTAINED BETWEEN THE ELECTORS AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES?

WHAT IS THE IDEA OF HOLDING REFERENDUMS?

IN WHAT WAY ARE THE INNER RELATIONS IN THE ENTERPRISES REGULATED?

HOW DOES ONE GET TRAINED TO MANAGE AN ENTERPRISE?

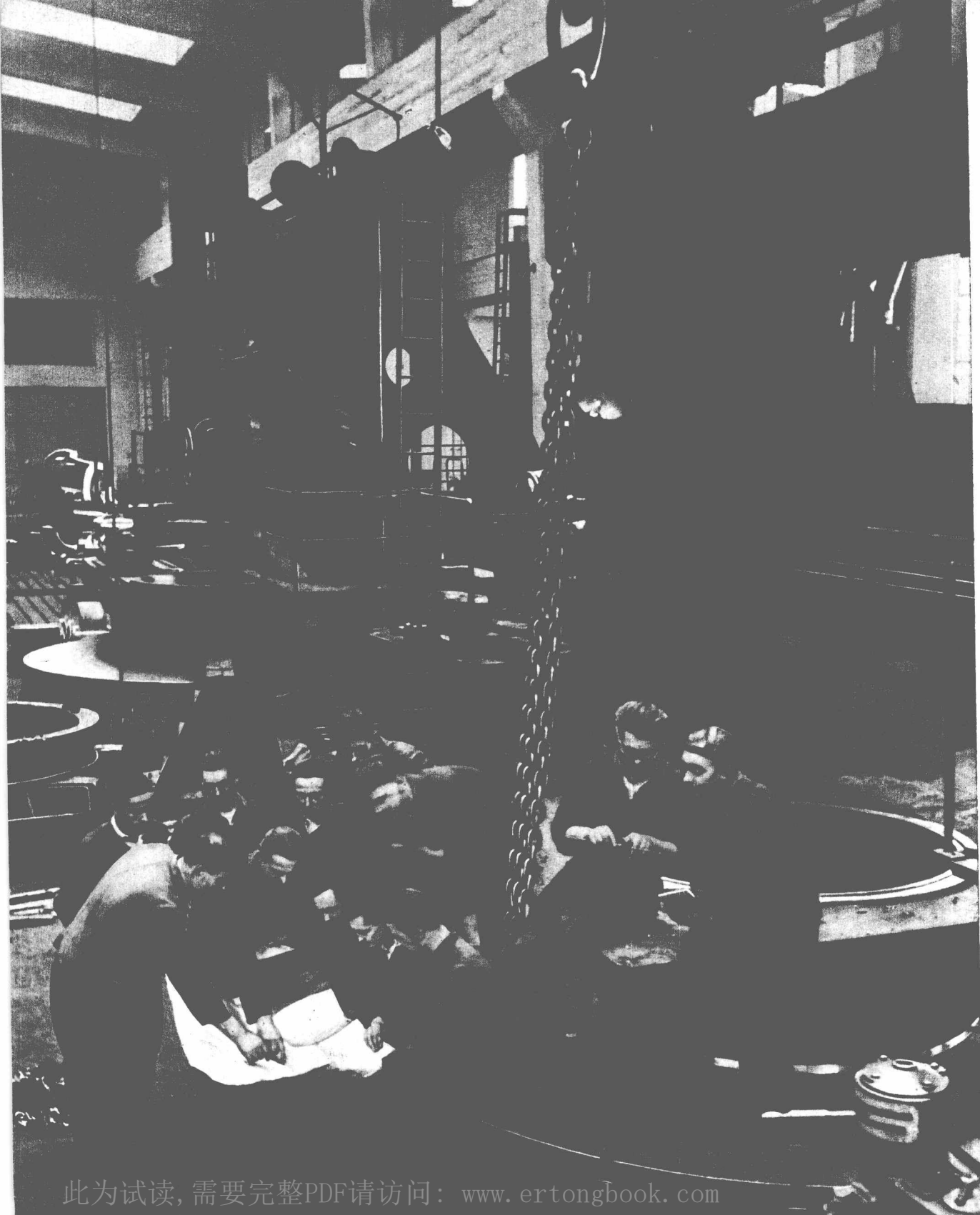
WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF WORKERS' MANAGEMENT ON HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY?

WHY IS IT THAT THE YUGOSLAV WORKERS DO NOT STRIKE?

WHAT DOES MANAGEMENT OF THINGS MEAN, AS AGAINST MANAGEMENT OF MEN?

WHAT IS MEANT BY DIRECT DEMOCRACY?

AN EFFORT TO ANSWER THOSE
QUESTIONS IS MADE ON THE SUCCEEDING
PAGES...



HOW OLD IS THE STRUGGLE FOR WORKERS' PARTICIPATION IN THE MANAGEMENT OF ENTERPRISES?

The origins of modern capitalism go back well over a century. Just as old is the aspiration of the working class to emancipate itself and take the guidance of society into its own hands. The basic condition for this emancipation is that the means of production be converted into common property and that their management be made into common management. Even in the dreams of utopian socialists and the primitive Co-operative societies of the first decades of the 19th century there became manifest the aspiration that management of common property be centred in the hands of those who actually were producing. For what else are Fourier's falansteries — the free associations of capitalists, workers, and managerial talents who would divide the products of labour among themselves in the ratio of 4 to 5 to 3 — if not an effort to find some possibility of common management. What else is Louis Blanc's anticipation that the state was going to organize workshops which would be managed by the working collectives, and would elect their directing personnel on democratic principles, than that self-same desire developed to the point of understanding and predicting the role of the state in the further development of the economy. The producing Co-operatives also, and other forms of collective ownership, which had corresponded to the level of economic development in the middle of last century had stood at least for partial realization of the idea of workers' own management of enterprises and the emancipation of the first from the tutelage of the private owner. Not all of this had been marked by complete clarity and steadfastness — for that matter, it also would have been naive and unrealistic to have expected the opposite from the then still undeveloped working class — yet it is certain that a deep inner aspiration and spontaneous conviction had obtained that freedom of the working class also depended on who managed the enterprises in which that class was engaged.

This century-old struggle of the working class has been replete with social shifts and stormy periods. Over the past century there have existed periods of ebb and flow, shorter or longer spells of turbulent social conflicts and discharges of the social antagonisms generated. And every time when it came to major clashes, when the working class succeeded in realizing its aspirations and its dreams for shorter or longer periods of time, its banners bore the demand for the participation of workers in management, a demand embodied by the same aspiration in the social and economic practice as well.

It was thus in that stormy year of 1848, too, when, in days that have rocked Europe, the demand was raised for the participation of workers in the election and appointment of foremen in factories and workshops.

It also was thus in the days of the Paris Commune, that brilliant page in the history of the Paris working people, during those 72 world-inspiring days when not only a bitter combat had raged on the barricades but new forms of the life and state organization were being created, days when the first Workers' Council was established at a factory, one elected in democratic mode, relievable and subject to the constant control of the whole working collective. Such were those historical hours when the Paris Communards visionally addressed themselves to the surrounding rural population with their familiar manifesto: »Remember well these words, for revolution will go on in the world until such time as they are consummated: „Land to the peasant, tools to the worker, work for all!“

And thus it also was at the time of the Russian Revolution which brought with it not only nationalization of industry and other economic branches but full workers' control over enterprises and the economy integrally as well.

That is how it went during those fateful, crucial events and years. And not only then, for every stormier motion in Europe has in fact also been accompanied by demands for workers' participation or coparticipation in the management of the economy. Beginning from the Hungarian Commune of Bela Kun, from the Austrian Law Relating to Enterprise Councils of 1919, from the stormy days of the Weimar Republic and the workers' committees in Italian enterprises, which in 1920 the workers took over and themselves managed, then by way of the Spanish Civil War in which workers' councils were created at enterprises while bloody battles raged in Catalonia and directors were elected on the part of the working collectives there, and all the way through to the workers' councils in China, where indeed from the struggles for social transformation and emancipation from social backwardness the idea was actually born to grant certain rights to the producers, and the little country of Burma, where from her own struggle for social transformation the idea of having the management of enterprises taken over by the representatives of the consumers and by the workers themselves, had also emerged.

And more than elsewhere, the events and practice of Yugoslavia have indicated that workers' management of enterprises arises as the postulate of a radical social transformation and struggle for emancipation from economic and political backwardness and its relics, that workers' management is becoming a real, living and daily practice in the economy and social relations of a country in quest of new paths for the realization of old ideals.

Thus, the strivings of the direct producers for participation in the management or control of enterprises and the economy have formed an uninterrupted thread throughout the past century, a century of momentous developments and new, epoch-making accomplishments in that direction.



WHOSE INTERESTS ARE SERVED BY THE CREATION OF FACTORY COMMITTEES IN CAPITALIST ENTERPRISES?

This question has kept recurring with some frequency. And yet the very fact of its raising implies a serious misconception. For factory committees are created not as the result of someone's sweet wish, nor merely because such would be someone's interest, but, alike to many another social-economic phenomenon, they arise as an imminence in the first place, as an inevitability at a determinate moment of historical development.

It is legitimate to say that the factory committees, too, come about there where for any reasons it is impossible to do without them, better said, where stagnation would ensue in their absence, and quicker development with their aid. Factory or workers' committees appear then when it is incumbent to take over enterprises, to assume control over them, or when the workers and their organizations feel that they possess sufficient strength to proceed to the solving of their problems through this highly efficacious way as well. Factory or workers' committees are created then when the employer, be he a private individual or the state, is in straits, hard-pressed or at a loss to develop production any further without relying upon those taking direct part in production. And especially, such committees are created then when nationalization of the economy and/or the interference of the state in economic life begins to assume increasing proportions, when nationalization tends into etatization, seeing that administrative management of the economy presents the danger of red-tape and bureaucratizing. Socialization of the economy and the passing of the means of production under common ownership always give rise, in every social community, to the peril of bureaucratization of the management of the thus socialized means, due to which the granting of self-governing rights to the producers and making the enterprises independent provide the sole way for having nationalization of the economy conduce to socializing and not etatizing, for suppressing bureaucratism and administrative, centralized management of the economy, it being obvious that every bureaucratism and administrating and centralism in the economy constitutes a danger not only to the economy and its development but to political freedoms and generally democracy.

Of course, this is not to say that under capitalism as well the creation of workers' or factory committees is not of interest to the different social factors. In the creation of factory committees the workers see not only an additional possibility for their intensified influence but a new element in the bosom of the old order, a socialist element within non-socialist frames. In the creating of factory committees, the employers and the state, when constrained to reconcile themselves to the fact, see a possibility for mitigating social antagonisms, for improving the »social climate« and raising labour productivity. If one adopted as accurate the concept that social development in every country blazed new trails and that the elements of a new society were developing not only on the substratum of, but partly within the framework of the old, suppressing with their growing forms the old and outlived forms — then the workers' organs of management or codeciding would be found to assume a fresh importance, then it would be impossible to deny their historical mission of harbingers and active factors in the birth of a society of common ownership and common management. Hence the today's frequency of the struggle to take advantage of the imminence arising from the contemporary conditions and extend support to the elements of the new which are penetrating into the old. And of the new there is aplenty, and in multifarious forms, with the workers' organs of management being one of the frequent, pronounced and momentous aspects in which the new appears.

In Yugoslavia, too, management of enterprises has been turned over to the working collectives. Workers' Councils and Managing Boards were created then when the nationalized economy could no longer be managed in administrative fashion, when such management had harboured the peril of bureaucratism and a threat to the free development of productive forces and democratic relations among men. The creation of bodies of workers' management, then, here, was a necessity of a determinate historical moment and the desire and readiness to meet the necessity with the best solution possible.

Alumine and aluminum factory „Boris Kidrič“ in Strnišće



WHAT ARE THE FUNCTIONS THE PRODUCERS ARE STRUGGLING FOR — CONSULTATIVE, CONTROLLING OR MANAGERIAL ?

If the struggle for workers' participation in the life of enterprises has been a decades-long one, it follows that the experiences and individual forms realized along that path equally have decades-long antecedents today.

A great variety marks the names which were given to the relevant bodies as created in different countries during different periods. They have been called Workers' Committees, Workers' Councils, Enterprise Committees, Enterprise Councils, then Mixed Committees, Control Committees, Supervisory Committees, Betriebsrat, Arbeiterrat, Joint Production Committees, Whitley Councils, then Production Raising Committees, Work Committees, Joint Consultation Committees, Stewards Committees, while others still have included such appellations as Le comité d'entreprise, Le conseil d'entreprise, De Ondernemingarde, Verweltungerat, Labour-Management War Production Drive Committee, Commissione Interna nell' Industria, Commission Ouvrière, Consejos de Salarios and who knows what else.

But in the main their role has taken three forms: consultative, or controlling, or, at least in part, managerial. The sphere of operations of these bodies was more often restricted to social issues and labour relations, and less often it has also extended to the economics of enterprises. The scope of the workers' demands had first of all been conditioned by the level of development of the labour movement in its entirety, then by the economics of the individual countries and the degree of consciousness of the working class in the different periods and among the individual nations. And the scope of the rights and functions of the joint bodies has depended upon the organization of economics in the individual countries, upon the power of resistance of the forces opposing workers' participation in the management of enterprises and, notably, upon the strength of the working class and its own organizations.

Very often, too, the rights of such bodies had been restricted, or still always are, to consultative functions. The workers' or enterprise committees, regardless of whether composed of workers exclusively or including also the representatives of the employers, sometimes have no greater rights than to offer non-binding advice to the proprietors of the enterprises, to the joint-stock companies or to the state organs concerned. Such consultative committees, even though representing but the seed, better said, the embryo of producers' self-government, nonetheless are of mutual advantage: to the direct producers they afford the possibility of influencing the management of the enterprises employing them and/or a potential possibility for them to influence the solving of certain matters to their advantage, while for the owners or managers of the property they provide a possibility to enhance the interest of the workers and arouse