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ENTERPRISE BUSINESS WORK PARTNERSHIP AND ENTERPRISE INTEREST

Beginning with 1982 several kinds of small economic organizations, so-called small ventures can be founded in Hungary. More than 60 percent of the about 27500 new units coming into being till the end of 1984 were enterprise business work partnerships (VGMK according to the Hungarian abbreviation). The partnership as a legally autonomous unit comprises workers of an enterprise and is contracting with the enterprise to carry out some tasks with the help of the enterprise equipment but outside the regular hours. In industrial and service cooperatives similar communities, so-called specialized teams were formed. The two amount to altogether 72 percent of all new small organizations. When calling them into being, the assumption was that the new small units would operate as small ventures adjusting to demand and supply.

Two years of experience have proved that neither the VGMKs, nor the specialized teams are real ventures; they operate characteristically as work brigades, substituting for overtime work.

The article examines on account of what interests of theirs the industrial enterprises dismissed the possibility of creating real ventures and squeezed the VGMKs into the hierarchical order of the division of labour. The VGMK has necessarily become one of the forms of buying labour power. The enterprises availed themselves of other forms also earlier to a considerable extent (by contracting outside firms and giving them their own materials for processing, by concluding contracts for second, part-time, jobs with their own employees, by employing guest workers). According to the authoress fundamental enterprise interests must change if the VGMKs are to become real small ventures as it has originally been intended.

When the legislative statutes launching small enterprises were in the process of preparation in Hungary, the competent authorities included in the provisions concerning work partnerships also the possibility of creating joint ventures between the enterprise and its employees, the so-called enterprise business work partnership (henceforward: VGMK, using the Hungarian abbreviation of the term)*.

At that time nobody assumed that this form, outlined in a few sentences and held to be just one of the possible forms among the various small ventures, would become the dominant type. Moreover, nobody realized that this form put into practice together with the other entrepreneurial forms would eventually become merely a *work brigade* performing surplus (overtime) work.

*In other English publications also the term *economic workteam* or *community* can be found. The terminology is not yet final. *Ed. note.*

This paper is concerned with one single question: Why did the VGMK become a work brigade? (Hence, I am not going to explore why the other forms of small ventures spread at a comparatively slow rate and how the VGMK gained dominance among them.)

I shall try to provide an answer to this question by analysing *enterprise interest*.

The answer is of relevance, as I suppose, not because of the VGMKs. It is much more important because it exemplifies that as long as enterprise interest remains unaltered even the changes held to be the best will be subordinated to it, and the most promising initiatives will only be realized to the extent allowed by enterprise interest.

For lack of the necessary data and of the computations that have not as yet been possible to perform, I shall just begin to find out the reasons. I shall hardly come to identify a great many interconnections, and what I mean to take notice of may merely be the surface. In addition, I can state about a great many things only what *appears to be*, and not what can also be *proved*. But my statements may be confirmed by the fact that what we can witness again today are, despite the multitude of changes and of new phenomena, regularities of an old, repetitive process.

In what follows we shall be concerned with industrial enterprises and with the VGMKs operating in them. Despite their identical traits, I shall not discuss VGMKs established in other sectors of the national economy, nor the industrial and the cooperative specialized teams.*

Before describing the phenomenon, let us survey in brief why the VGMKs came to be established.

Expectations

The VGMKs—as it is, in all probability, already common knowledge today—is a partnership of at most 30 members recruited from the own active employees and pensioners of an economic organization. To set up a VGMK, it is necessary to obtain the previous approval of the enterprise manager.

The VGMKs can undertake work in the sphere of activity chosen within a statutorily approved framework and filed with the Court of Registration. On the income earned by the work done, earlier a 3 percent, from 1985 on generally a 6 percent corporate tax (or, above a certain limit, an even higher one) has to be paid. The sum after taxes is distributed among the members as personal income (which is also liable to taxation).

As can be seen from the preparatory documents and mainly from the writings published subsequently by those who took part in the preparation [2, 3, 4], the legislative bodies wished to serve various objectives with this form.

*Attention to the basic identities of the VGMKs and specialized teams was first called by György Varga in his article [1]. His predictions have since been repeatedly confirmed by practical experience.

Thus, by the joint venture of the enterprise and its employees, it is possible for the enterprise to use its underutilized means of production for the manufacture of commodities in short supply: either the enterprise or the employees find out the demands; the enterprise leases machinery to the VGMK, sells—or helps to buy—the necessary materials; the enterprise guarantees the buyer the quality of the work done by the VGMK and the returns are divided—in an appropriate proportion—between the enterprise and its VGMK. This presupposes the VGMK members' material contribution to creating the conditions for the activity concerned (purchase of materials, rent, etc.). Over and above the profit of the enterprise and the VGMK, the beneficiary of this activity is the national economy as a whole as the multitude of the articles in short supply can be manufactured with the existing means of production of the enterprises to satisfy the needs of both the producers and the population.

The processing of the enterprise's waste materials within the framework of the VGMK may be a gain for the national economy and serve the common interest of the enterprise and its employees.

Associated with the implementation of these objectives the best expectations were attached based, primarily, on the assumption of work partnership as a new type of community of interests.

It could be hoped that with the diffusion and the utilization of the experience of these enterprise forms, a novel kind of cooperation would be established between the enterprise and its employees, and that the wage-labour relationship would be replaced by partnership relations between those who established business cooperation with the firm.

This also means a different attitude to *work*: it was hoped that with the employees directly interested in the profit, manipulation with work performance would be put an end to, and better forms of work organization based on individual capabilities and endowments would be created. The performance reserves thus disclosed would also react upon the usual activities of the enterprise and gradually transform the internal work organization. All this might also give a new content to socialist ownership: the employees would become really interested in the protection of the means of production.

These objectives, attractive in themselves and equally serving the interests of the employees, the economic organizations and the national economy, were heavily urged by the sinister recession in 1980.

The diffusion of the VGMKs

In spring 1982, I took part in a conference organized by the Centre for Extension Training of the Ministry of Industry on the "Role of small-scale and auxiliary enterprises in the national economy". Invited to participate in the conference were managers of 40 industrial enterprises, those in which "some initiatives had already been manifested". Instead of the general managers and department managers invited by name, often only second-rank executives participated, but many of them complained that they were fed up with the innumerable discussions and information about small enterprises (ventures).

In the discussions following the presentation of papers a great many fault-finding, fastidious and sceptical comments were made: "The general manager of the trust first opposed the small enterprises, and gave voice to his opinion everywhere. The authority in competence rebuked him and then he said: "Well, then we shall organize them if an enterprise manager can be called to account for such a thing!"—"I was also publicly criticized by our party secretary as we had as yet no small enterprises." The account of the chief engineer of organization at the Danubian Iron Works—where already 20 VGMKs were in operation—raised some interest, but the interruptions and comments were indicative of resistance: "We had better not let us deceive. The whole VGMK business is nothing else but a means to substitute for overtime. This is how income can be doubled. This view is shared by everybody with whom I have had the opportunity to talk about small ventures." (Interruptions: "He is right!")

A great many serious or only far-fetched arguments fostered by the strictness of the dependence relationship, by the accounting practice of industry and legal prescriptions, but definitely indicating the lack of enterprise interest were voiced.

By way of example, I am quoting just a typical argument: If there are too many VGMKs, then the whole enterprise administration has to adjust to them, but if the enterprise structure is transformed in this way, then things will become impossible to follow and survey. What happens if in such an unsurveyable organization, for example, the accident indicator is deteriorating? The managers already lose their bonuses not only in the case of an industrial, but also a traffic accident. . .

And the most obvious question was repeatedly posed: Why is it not the enterprise wage regulation that is changed? Why can the enterprise not simply use more overtime? If the enterprise used the money it paid to the VGMK for activities that could be performed in regular working time, it would perhaps attain even better results than those of the VGMKs. The competent official of the Ministry of Finance answered: "Wage regulation cannot be changed in the prevailing conditions of the economy."

The industrial enterprises—as it appeared—were reluctant to adopt the idea of the VGMKs, even in cases where "there was already something", where at least some interest was shown in them, or where possibly a few VGMKs had already been established.

A year later, in May 1983, when the VGMK had become the most general form of small ventures (of the 10,000 small ventures registered at that time in the national economy, almost 6,000 were VGMKs), the majority of industrial enterprises were—contrary to public opinion—still opposed to the VGMKs. In the about 1,600 economic units of socialist industry (enterprises, cooperatives) VGMKs were established in only 290 (18 percent). True, by the end of 1983, the number of industrial economic units with small ventures had almost doubled and 539 industrial enterprises (34 percent) had already operated their VGMKs. If we also include the specialized teams operating in about 130 cooperatives then the proportion of the "parent" organizations of the socialist (state-owned and cooperative) industry will be 41 percent. A turn came in 1984 when already 65 percent, i. e. the majority of industrial enterprises and cooperatives already had VGMKs or specialized groups (teams).

The distribution by sectors of the national economy is shown by the table below. By way of comparison, we also included in it the proportions of the independent business work partnerships (called GMK in Hungarian), originally destined to constitute the main form of partnerships, and the ratio of the specialized teams, too.

Although more than 60 percent of the VGMKs were to be found in the industry, the membership of these teams only amounted to 9–10 percent of total industrial employment. In addition, the VGMKs operate in several thousands of plant sites of the enterprises in such a way that at most one to three VGMKs are working in more than half of the enterprises concerned. Only in one quarter of them do more than ten operate. More than 50 VGMKs only work in 19 enterprises.

Numbers and percentages of VGMKs, specialized teams of cooperatives and GMKs by economic sectors as of December 11, 1983

Sector of the national economy	VGMKs		Specialized teams of industrial and service cooperatives		GMKs	
	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent
Industry	5 324	54	704	57	1 212	27
Construction industry	2 237	23	413	33	1 178	26
Agriculture	70	1	2	—	91	2
Transport and communications	110	11	22	2	101	2
Commerce	21	—	5	—	75	1
Water economy	70	1	—	—	27	—
Personal economic services	1 846	19	96	8	1 652	35
Health, social and cultural services	28	—	—	—	145	3
Communal and other budgetary service units	96	1	1	—	207	4
Total:	9 802	100	1 243	100	4 688	100

Source: Central Statistical Office

Thus, in a part of industrial enterprises and cooperatives there were no VGMKs or specialized teams even in 1984. (There has been a general manager who openly declared in face of the public: "I do not agree to establishing work partnerships." [5]) To know the causes of their reluctance would be at least as important as to know the interest attached to the foundation of the VGMKs. What will be discussed in this paper, however,

is, as already indicated, how and why the *founders* rejected the possibility to set up small enterprises, how and why they forced the VGMKs into the hierarchic order of the division of labour. I am searching for the answer—as also indicated—in the action determined by enterprise interest.

According to organization sociology, enterprise interest is shaped by the interaction of two factors. One is the objective endowments of the socio-economic environment determining the conditions of operation (the elements of which are the geographic location of the country, its social traditions, the demographic characteristics of the population, the development level of the management system of the economy, etc.) The other is, amidst the environmental factors, the group interest, integrating into community interest of the members of the organization based on their organizational, societal status. In several works of mine I have made attempts to prove that, despite the interest-diverting effect of the dependence relations and of the regulatory system, the organizations have a more or less autonomous freedom of movement to enforce their interests.* In the Hungarian economy, a multitude of examples have already demonstrated that the enterprises can divert important processes from those that have been planned or assumed. (Such are, for example, transgression of investment limits in spite of the intended curbing of investment, purchasing power illegitimately flowing out despite regulations designed to control the wage outflow and despite the regulation strictly sanctioning the transgression of the planned amounts, etc.)

What we shall discuss here are the interests in shaping the present-day form of the VGMKs, more exactly, such elements of these interests as have—in my judgement—played a determining role in the process.

First, I shall examine the causes of the dismissed possibilities of the enterprise, then, what is closely linked to them, the interest in transforming the VGMKs into work brigades.

The dismissed possibility

Industrial enterprises have never liked the saying, however fashionable it has become, that “the VGMK is the household plot of industry”. Beyond the aversion of industry to accept agriculture as a model, the rejection of the “household plot pattern” to be followed subsists, basically, upon the simple enterprise interest in preserving the established pattern of the big-enterprise organization. Small-scale business, closely connected with the large-scale production structure, and the related changes in management and the real processes, the new forms of contact necessarily established with such cooperation, exert a rather deterrent effect.

The great majority of enterprises do not want a change—if only a temporary one—in which “things may become impossible to trace and survey”, or could only be followed at the price of a great many internal transformations.

*See e. g. [6]

And "entrepreneurship" would undoubtedly establish relations significantly deviating from those accustomed to. The possibility was already inherent in the prevailing forms of the VGMK, but this was exactly what the enterprises did not want to take advantage of.

Moreover, I hold the view that the *possibility* of VGMKs becoming an enterprise is one of the major reasons for the *reluctance* already experienced earlier and of the ambivalence repeatedly surfaced already by the founders.

And, although the classical concept* can only partially be applied to both the enterprise (as it now exists) and to the VGMKs, yet even the elements interpreted only in a partial and modified way require the existence of conditions missing today and it is not sure that they can be created. Moreover, they involve consequences that are not desirable for the time being.

Entrepreneurship—in the classical interpretation of the concept

a) presupposes autonomy: both organizational independence and autonomous choice among the activities; and that, in addition, as a function of profits (defining here profit very broadly, not only in terms of money but also in the interpretation of the participants of the enterprise);

b) presupposes *risk-taking* in the hope of reaping profit, the risk partly of losing the capital invested, partly of a decrease, or even absence, of business proceeds (and of personal income);

c) presupposes the right of autonomous decision-making about the future of the enterprise as a whole: whether the returns will be invested or not; whether they will be invested in the own or in another enterprise; whether the whole enterprise is possibly wound up.

The original concept of the VGMK involved all these possibilities, if only in a modified way, under the prevailing Hungarian conditions. The VGMK has been, after all, an autonomous organization in its legal sense—from the very outset. So it is even in its present-day form (and it is immaterial that its members are full-time employees of the enterprise concerned). In principle, it might invest money (capital) in the enterprise through buying materials, leasing machinery, covering overhead costs. (This actually occurs in the building industry, where the VGMK undertakes building activities for the population and other work; for this purpose it takes the machines of the enterprise on lease, pays rent for their use, and thus—in a kind of partnership with the enterprise—lets it draw benefits from the better utilization of its equipment.)

But these possibilities have, in principle, been made unviable partly by the lack of interest, partly by the unambiguously opposed interest of the enterprises. Without analyzing the components of this phenomenon in detail, I only want to quote a few characteristic examples.

*For definitions of the concept see e. g. [7, 8, 9].

A great many conditions, for example, economic incentives, have been missing from the very outset. The enterprises are not responsive to the modest profit accruing to them from the activities of the VGMKs. (If they know at all that they would draw benefits or sustain losses from the work of the VGMKs, because cost calculation—as has been long regretted by those working in accounting—is a highly uncertain business.) They are not interested in manufacturing goods in short supply, in eliminating shortage situations, on the contrary, they are, occasionally, interested in maintaining shortages and in protecting their sales position. Therefore, they have no inducements to find out possibilities for the “enterprise”.

And as regards the existence of the VGMKs as partners in entrepreneurship, they exhibit a directly reversed interest. This is because an autonomous choice from among the activities, such as, for example the decision on the use of the venture as an economic unit, no longer presupposes the employer-employee relationship, but the common decision-making of equal partners, taking risks and responsibilities jointly. This would mean at the same time that in the big-enterprise organization, set up in compliance with the strict rules of hierarchy, a whole system of small organizations, independent of these rules, having the right to take decisions of their own and restructuring the income hierarchy, would be brought about. Unless compelled by the vigorous constraint of market competition, large enterprises all over the world defend this hierarchy and the obviously related sub- and superordination relations. Even if we leave out of account the other consequences, protection of the organizational hierarchy is in itself a sufficient reason for rejecting joint ventures with the VGMKs. (It is not accidental that enterprises with a strong hierarchy often refer to the economic units operating the VGMKs as firms in a messy, confused situation, in which “anything can be done”.)

What appears from all this at the surface is that the enterprises have restricted the chances of establishing “undertakings”, “ventures” in all possible ways. They have limited the activities of the VGMKs primarily in two ways: On the one hand, most economic organizations insist on keeping the activities of the VGMKs for themselves, in other words, they do not want them to undertake “outside” jobs.

Several enterprises have even forbidden their VGMKs to do such outside jobs. Beside their own interests, they were forced to do so also by legal regulations which devolve practically all responsibility upon the parent enterprise. (In the “small-enterprise” section of the Yearly Itinerant Meeting of Hungarian Economists held in 1983, a long-drawn out discussion was conducted on the question whether enterprises can be prohibited or not to restrict the outside work of the VGMKs. Enterprise managers and the officials of higher authorities alike arrived at the conclusion that such a ban would mean the winding up of the VGMKs.)

On the other hand, the VGMK cannot decide on the sort of job it can and cannot contract to do. In the “market” it is faced with one single “buyer”, its own enterprise. Thus it is entitled to take a decision—and in this it can bargain with the enterprise—on whether it undertakes to perform the job offered and for what price. Hence, the alternative is not simply a yes or no; in this case, it may somewhat increase the contract

price, but this is far from being an autonomous option depending on profit. Moreover, if the enterprise does not need the activity of the VGMK, it will not offer it any opportunity. (At an enterprise of the instruments industry a VGMK was founded with the aim to rapidly satisfy the special demands of the domestic buyers by a transformation of the instruments stored. But this activity was urged only by the VGMK and not by the enterprise, which was interested in keeping up domestic excess demand. It did not want to keep the VGMK engaged, and it was soon dissolved. [10])

The VGMK membership was nowhere expected to invest money—which was, by the way, neither possible nor necessary.

The members do not take the machines of the enterprise on lease, do not buy materials,—all this is completely superfluous as the enterprises only claim their working time and labour power. (In this situation, all central instructions relating to how to account the leasing rent and overhead costs become meaningless and only complicate administration.) Therefore, the members of the VGMK only collect the costs needed for the establishment of their partnership (typically 1.000 forints* per head). Nobody expects the VGMK to take risks. Even in the case of personal income, only the *measure* of using surplus working-time is risked. (It is characteristic that those having an extra income considered to be appropriate have not even entered the VGMK.)

Exceptions to the general practice are just a few dozen examples. Such are waste recycling and all cases—sporadically occurring—when the enterprise undertakes for its employees (for example for its workers and designers engaged in its plants of tools manufacture) orders *from outside*. These are invoiced by the enterprise, which lets its employees, performing extra work, have a share in the returns—in the form of a contract fee paid to the VGMK.

The establishment of work brigades

At least as many circumstances made the enterprises willing to support the organization of work brigades as those which made them reluctant to do the same with the “ventures”. This and not more did the enterprises want to realize of the VGMKs without reservation.

The interrelated and mutually reinforcing *environmental* factors—of which we shall explore the labour and wage situation in more detail—show, despite a variety of changes, *a virtually constant state of the conditions of enterprise operation. The VGMKs have, in fact, become work brigades because the enterprises have remained interested not in establishing work partnerships but in the results that can be attained with the accustomed endowments and operations within the prevailing dependency relations and the narrow limits set to enterprise autonomy.*

The assumption of the invariability of economic circumstances can be rejected primarily by those economic organizations which fight a permanent struggle against

*Less than \$ 20 at present exchange rates Ed. note.

import restrictions, against the difficulties of selling products in foreign markets, while the taxing away of profits, the frozen funds, the lack of development resources and the constraints of the strictly regulated wage rates greatly narrow down their scope of movement. The circumstances, however, even if they are more difficult than before, have remained *the same*.

This becomes evident if we think of the expected effects of recession. In the early 1980s, the world-market situation, the extraordinary difficulties of repaying debts, and, consequently, the declared decrease in the growth rate and with it the curbing of investment anticipated the possible perspective of a significant decline—occasionally of a frightening proportion—of economic activities in Hungary.

But the recession was not accompanied by the expected effects. Although economic growth did fall significantly, it was *output* rather than *demand* that declined and thus augmented the shortages. The long-lasting non-satisfaction of domestic demand kept occasionally surviving the sellers' position even of the loss-making enterprises. Certain enterprises in the crisis-ridden sectors—metallurgy, for example—were not able to fulfil domestic orders. In the building industry, despite a significant cut in investment, the volume of unsatisfied demand was still conspicuous. In industry, it was the manufacture of import-sensitive products that declined in the first place. But the irregular delivery of imported materials also made it necessary to keep the workforce at the level needed for full-capacity production. As a well-known concomitant of short supply, the belated arrival of many other materials also gave rise to the same effect. Domestic excess demand was strengthened by the export compulsion of the economy. Various allowances were instituted to stimulate the boosting of exports to a steadily growing extent.

In this situation, the yardstick of economic efficiency did not, understandably, become stricter (indeed, it got looser in the case of many export products as it was at least possible to sell them, even if at a price lower than effective inputs). Many deficiencies of the range of domestic products (of both producers' and consumers' goods) ran—for lack of alternative sources of procurement and independent again of economic efficiency—counter to the abandonment of production. And the closing of workshops, of plant units, was out of the question.

Accordingly, instead of the assumed reduction of the workforce, the shortage of personnel perpetuated in several fields. The economic organizations were not only unable, but also unwilling to renounce their employed personnel, and the demand for skilled workers—especially in the shortage trades—became permanent.

The labour situation

The slow-down of economic growth in 1982 brought about some change in the labour situation: the general demand for labour, which had not been met for several decades, was mitigated to a certain extent and concentrated in a few well-definable areas (Budapest and the regional industrial centres). In a few—least industrialized—counties, a

labour surplus made its appearance, and there still are some strata, whose members (unskilled women, young people with secondary school certificate) find it hard to obtain a job.

Part of the enterprises—especially in the provinces—held their workforce to be sufficient. (But nowhere did they consider their employees to be “too many”.)

In 1983, the labour troubles became more accentuated. Primarily, because—as a result of the trend experienced ever since 1975—the number of active earners fell by 12 600 in 1982 and by a further 35 000 in 1983. At the same time, in 1983—partly owing to the population flow into other sectors of the national economy—the loss of the workforce employed in industry was almost the same, 34 800, while that of the construction industry was 10 800.

Enterprises with labour shortage can be divided into two large groups.

One of them is made up of the economic organizations of the above-mentioned industrial centres in Budapest and the provinces, where labour of all kinds is really in short supply (at least under the given conditions of management). The other group—in all parts of the country—consists of enterprises in which only a few, but specially qualified workers are missing, typically the experienced skilled workers of the maintenance trades (locksmiths, electricians, set-up men, etc.).

In this situation surplus work performed by competent specialists organized in VGMKs meant a multiple advantage. First of all it amounted to a replacement of part of the missing workforce. If we assume—and this assumption seems to be justified in the light of experience—that the VGMK members perform 60 hours of surplus work a month, then this is equivalent—reckoning with the work done by 65 000 members on a yearly average—to 3.9 million hours' work done by 24 375 people (assuming 160 hours' working time a month) in all sectors of the economy in 1983. Surplus working time means in the case of specialized teams in cooperatives—applying the same method of calculation—an additional workforce of 6 600 employees at the same time.

Hence, the additional labour gained through the VGMKs (and specialized teams) and even through all the other forms of small ventures could not cover the fall in the number of active workers in the years 1982–1983. According to estimates, they make up all in all, for about 30 to 33 thousand workers out of the 48 thousand missing.

Thus, industry was able to replace about half of its missing workforce in 1983, and in 1984, approximately, the other half. Construction which more or less managed to replace its loss of labour in 1983, hardly increased the number of VGMKs in 1984. But the demand for *increasing* staff persisted: enterprise plans envisaged an increase in employment of 70 to 80 thousand workers even in 1983. (11)

It is a different question whether the interest of the economy really needs this increase of labour in the given activity spheres. Economists and official circles have been emphasizing for a long time that “our industry, compared to its achievement, still

employs—also by international standards—more than the necessary number of people.”* But besides voicing the wish, nothing worth mentioning has been done as yet to reduce the demand for labour. The pursuit of extensive economic activity with an increase (and waste) of the available labour force is a consequence of the unchanged system of interests of economic organizations.

The enterprises began to employ additional labour not with the VGMKs. For several decades now, subcontracting work done by outside firms (mainly complementary or auxiliary units of cooperatives in agriculture), part-time subcontracts concluded with own employees in recent years (as long as the practice to cover their charges were not changed) and the employment of foreign guest workers have provided additional sources of labour.

The VGMKs have only added new possibilities to all this, and their share is only a fraction of the surplus labour gained by the “traditional” inclusion of labour sources. (Recent examples, resulting partly from our own explorations although not of a conclusive force, can be regarded as typical [12]. There are case studies prepared at the Institute for Labour Research by Ildikó *Bakcsi*, László *Neumann*, János *Póta* as well as by Károly *Szabó*. According to our findings, about 80 percent of the working-time fund (total man-hours) used by the enterprises is provided by the hours worked in regular working time and only 20 percent by the additional labour resources.) The volume of additional labour is increasing year by year, it is at most only its internal proportions that—as a result of the changing regulations—have shifted. In 1983, for example, when the charges of part-time contracts concluded by the big enterprises on a relatively large scale with their own employees could no longer be charged to the “other” wage costs but had to be paid according to the general wage regulations, part-time jobs were transformed into VGMKs on a massive scale. The VGMKs replaced occasionally outside subcontracting, that is, a source of labour already drawn upon, but of an equally additional, external nature.

The calculations have not yet been made by means of which we hope to find the common traits: whether, for example, the scale and value of output, the export volume, etc. can explain in what enterprises, with what endowments VGMKs have, and in what enterprises they have not been established. But even without these calculations it can be ascertained that those enterprises are likely not to be interested in VGMKs which are satisfied with the extent and the earlier forms of drawing on external labour. If, for example, they have old-established and tested subcontracted outside work partnership relations which prove to be appropriate and can be expanded, then they will not risk these partnership relations for the sake of the perhaps only temporary advantages of the VGMKs.

The keeping of the existing labour force may be equivalent for the enterprises to employing new labour.

*Béla *Rabi*, state secretary of industry, expounded this view in the Parliament's Industrial Commission. Quoted by Csaba *Vértes* in his article [11].

Among those, who have not reckoned seriously either with the recession, or with the possibility of the resulting labour surplus, the old reflexes reviving at the time when small ventures were established, immediately gave rise to the view that the new forms—not unlike the auxiliary plants of agricultural cooperatives—would draw away labour from the state and the cooperative industry. Since that time it has become obvious that these ventures have not brought about any appreciable outflow of manpower from these sectors (neither have they created new job opportunities).

What has ensued is rather the reverse of what was expected; even the members of civil law partnerships that can be regarded as private enterprises and those of the (private) business work partnerships have kept, with negligible exceptions, their employment relations in the socialist (state and cooperative) sectors, in their original jobs.

In the case of the VGMKS and specialized teams, with their combined workforce of 120 000 members, the new form has proved to be explicitly labour retaining. It is exactly this fact that constitutes one of the major advantages of the VGMKS for several enterprises.

According to available data about 15–16 percent of the income of VGMKS derives from turning out manufactures (making up for the missing staff, increasing at times the volume of exports, helping when peak workloads occurred etc.). 26–27 percent of the teams perform construction activities and almost 60 percent provide industrial and other services (from the manufacturing of tools to cleaning), and mainly perform maintenance work. [13]

Moreover, in a significant part of the “host organizations” of industrial enterprises and industrial cooperatives, VGMKS have been established exclusively for maintenance purposes. (For example, where just one VGMK exists at one plant site, it is typically of a maintenance character.)

The diffusion of maintenance VGMKS is accounted for by two interrelated and mutually reinforcing factors. On the one hand, the economic units have organized these VGMKS because, owing to the scarcity of funds, there is no possibility to replace or to exchange the machines, the equipment is becoming obsolete, and repair work is increasing. On the other hand, because in this way they can pay and keep the specialists of shortage skills, for whom there is a great demand everywhere. The income of maintenance workers is usually much lower in all sectors than that of those who perform regular production tasks. The possibility of surplus work—and surplus income, too—is functioning simultaneously as a spontaneous wage correction in the different trades. But this already leads to wage regulation, which we shall discuss only from the point of view of the VGMKS.

Wage regulation

For the economic organizations there exist various “hard” and “soft” forints: (the Hungarian currency) the “hardest” is the “wage forint” kept for years within the strict limits of wage regulation and handled in separation from the other inputs of production.

For several years, the reduction of the staff has been a source of the enterprises' wage rises. They have been able to use three percent of the wages of the job leavers to increase the wages of those who have stayed. Therefore, all enterprises have been interested (until 1984) in an annual 3 percent reduction of the workforce. To counterbalance, however, the workforce decreasing spontaneously or in a planned way, the above-mentioned more expensive sources of labour (subcontracting work of outside firms, part-time work done by the enterprise's own personnel, foreign workers) have been made use of to an ever-growing extent. In addition, they have been paid not from a rigidly regulated wage fund, whose limits cannot be transgressed (or, more exactly, whose transgression is heavily penalized), but from general overhead costs. The enterprises are—as commonly known—not particularly sensitive to the latter, because they can usually afford, among other things, to shift them onto the buyers.

The management policy of the enterprises is concerned primarily with wage costs while their sections administer *moving wage rates*, including mainly overtime, task bonuses, etc. And although the equally strict internal enterprise rules prescribe year by year the sum of the fixed and moving-wage rates that can be used by the individual plant units (an average of seven to nine percent of overall wages is spent to cover the moving-wage rates), the managers of the plant units, in order to prevent a fall in the labour force—and mainly in view of the limited possibilities of the wage-payment system—try to let their employees have surplus income in a number of ways.

Such a function is performed at many enterprises by *overtime*. Rational thinking generally assumes that overtime means work done in "off" hours. This is usually, but by far not always the case. "Overtime" may be allowed in return for urgent work performed in the regular working time—in which case it is a substitute for task-bonus payment. "Overtime", just as any other form of the moving-wage system, can be used in a number of ways and, as is also well-known to experienced workplace managers, the moving-wage fund may function as a bonus allocation and also as a simple complementary payment. Therefore, overtime allowance, although it is, in principle, a sum which can be precisely computed, has in fact often a fictitious value of a "guiding price" nature. But since it is a sum that cannot be transgressed, its "allocation has to be economized with" (in such a way, of course, that, as all allocations, it has to be spent). Moving-wage allocations, from which overtime is also paid, constitute today already a vested right, a wage-complementing sum of money which no manager renounces unless he is given the equivalent value in exchange for it.

An income-augmenting possibility was provided—as has already been mentioned—by the right to conclude a part-time work contract with its own personnel (which in enterprise parlance is often called black or concealed overtime—moonlighting—), which in several enterprises ensured a ratio of the working-time fund which was equal to, or occasionally even larger than, the overtime fund.

Then, in 1982, a further possibility was added to the existing ones in the form of an agreement to be concluded with the VGMKs, increasing the incomes of workers and other employees through surplus work. This method of increasing incomes also appeared to be

very suited for the workers ready to do more work for more money. Besides, the enterprises were also willing to pay the higher wage costs of outside labour out of the "softer", less controlled cost forints.

Reference has already been made to the fact that the costs of the various working-time resources show significant differences. Although the analysis below is rather superficial, yet it is, basically, in compliance with the calculations made by the enterprises.

According to these calculations, the wage costs of those employed in regular working time are—seemingly—the lowest for the enterprises. Here it is, generally, the average hourly wage rates paid in the sphere of manual work that are taken into account, leaving out of consideration the social costs of employing labour, although they are also part of the labour costs for the enterprises.*

Overtime costs are, in general, 160 to 170 percent higher than the hourly wage rates paid in full-time employment, but in the case of most enterprises needing overtime they are usually twice as high. The price of overtime work has increased: enterprises admit that the sacrifice of leisure-time has become more expensive, therefore they pay—wherever possible—the highest overtime rates. In addition, the social costs of labour employment are also to be paid after overtime wages.

The surplus working time gained by part-time job contracts can be accounted at a cost roughly identical with overtime costs. According to established practice, the hourly wage rate of the VGMKs (taking into consideration the hourly-wage earnings that can be made in the second economy) is two-and-half to three times higher than the base wage rate. In other words: it is somewhat higher than the overtime rate. But the enterprise does not pay taxes on these costs.

The costs of labour recruited from outside sources are much higher than the costs of internal labour (the hourly wage rate of the cooperations under subcontracting amounts to at least double the wage rate paid to the VGMKs, and the employment of foreign guest workers is even more expensive.) Precisely in order to make the employment of VGMKs more expensive for enterprises, beginning with 1985 a 10 percent surtax has to be paid after the wages paid to VGMKs—similarly under the heading of general overhead costs. The workteam is even thus cheaper for the enterprise than any other "external" labour.

The existence of the already six varieties of wage costs, as they have necessarily come to be established over the years (and of the great many allowances (benefits) complementing personal earnings) testifies to the impossibility of maintaining the wage regulation illusion and makes it possible for enterprises to manoeuvre with wages and to use the various forms according to their own interests. (Paradoxically, it is sometimes exactly this manoeuvring ability that is beneficial also according to the intention of the national economy when, for example, the enterprise prefers to rely on the cheaper

*E. g. social insurance contribution, wage-tax. (*Ed. note.*)

VGMKs rather than on an outside firm in subcontracting work, at half the costs charged by the latter. In other cases they only enforce their own interests when, for example, they rely on organized VGMK work instead of overtime.)

The rigid wage regulation system itself stimulates enterprises to search incessantly for forms and possible combinations advantageous for them. In this respect, the VGMKs have various advantages:

– without burdening the wage costs, the enterprise can acquire additional labour that is cheaper and more reliable than any outside workers;

– work assigned to the VGMKs spares moving-wage allocations, which makes it possible for workplace managers to stimulate and recognize full-time activities in a more differentiated way;

– surplus work performance attained by saving wage costs enables the enterprise to improve its wage position

Since it is the interest of the enterprise, which is rather insensitive to costs, to let its personnel earn as much income as possible (if only because thereby the higher executives can also have their share in wage increments), the provisions of the wage regulation have stimulated the employment of its own workers for doing surplus work rather than to establish a work partnership (venture) with its less reliable results.

In my view, the virtually unchanged circumstances of economic activities, the lasting demand for additional labour, the survival of wage administration separated from other input costs provide an adequate explanation for the practically unchanged enterprise interests; interests to which the idea of partnerships is rather alien, while the work-brigade concept is their natural concomitant.

It constitutes an *inside* reinforcement of enterprise interest that what workers want is nothing else but to increase their earnings even at the price of sacrificing their leisure-time. In an earlier paper I have already analyzed several interconnections of the socially conditioned causes of employee behaviour [14]. Here I only emphasize the role of the internal factor in shaping enterprise interest: the fact that it was the reconciled interests of the enterprise requiring surplus work and of the workers demanding surplus earnings that was responsible for the establishment of the VGMKs rather than the “enterprising spirit” of any of them.

The rules of wage control have changed in a part of enterprises beginning with 1985: cost reduction has obtained a greater role in the opportunities for increasing wages. Today it cannot yet be assessed how the interests of enterprises related to operating VGMKs will change in this scope of firms, whether they will reduce the employment of VGMKs or, conversely, they will replace through them the more expensive outside contracting or guest workers to a greater extent. In about half of the enterprises, where the annual increment of wages is secured from central sources, the interests related to keeping and replacing labour will hardly change.

Where to go on?

Now we have the established "work brigades". Their work is part of the daily activities of the economy. Their usefulness is beyond doubt. Their activities may contribute to the mitigation of the steadily increasing difficulties of production (with many secondary impacts) and of the delays demanding surplus working time, or rush work. At several workplaces they provide the surplus exports that are indispensable for the national economy. A more coordinated maintenance of the production equipment may spare the economy losses which would be hard to express in money terms.

Yet, the question marks are multiplying and proposals are formulated one after the other, indicating the need to face the situation, to carry out a kind of settlement and to take further steps.

One of these questions affects social perspicacity: shall the VGMKs be kept in the scope of "small ventures", possibly holding an advanced position in national statistics and promulgating the success of their dynamic development? Or, shall we accept them such as they have become: work brigades, and only those VGMKs should be included in the sphere of small enterprises which, in consonance with the original aims, provide already today not surplus working time for their parent firm, but offer surplus products and services for the consumers, communities and the population. And those working for their own enterprise should be freed from the ritual constraints of VGMK-founding and of being incorporated by the Court of Registration.*

I hold the view that it would be worthwhile, in the interest of social perspicacity, to put an end to a fiction. But it should be done in a way which ensures at the same time the possibility for us to help this form to attain its full competence, to strengthen its valuable and useful traits and also to weaken its undesirable effects.

I am fully aware of the reluctance of the Hungarian protagonists of the VGMKs to bring about any changes because even the smallest changes may trigger off the avalanche that has been threatening the VGMKs with destruction from the very beginning. Nor do they wish to recognize the work brigades for fear that if they were to get out of the safety belt of economic policy still protecting small ventures, the VGMKs would immediately be hamstrung by wage regulation or simply by a final prohibitive decision.

But realities require, sooner or later, a solution. It is worth noting that the proposals known to me are not of an economic but of a social nature: in different formulations, they equally emphasize the need for *publicity* and the demand for creating and increasing *equal chances*.

*This idea has already found its public formulation. Speaking of the activity of the Courts of Registration, the Vice President of the Budapest Court of Law said: "...it is worth considering whether it is expedient to include the enterprise business work partnerships (VGMKs) among the enterprises in the Register of Firms. Their members can only come from an extremely narrow circle, ...and, what is more important, a contract concluded for the establishment of such VGMKs is only valid if the enterprise is ready to take financial responsibility for their activities." [15]

The demand for equal chances is formulated in various forms. For example in such a way that instead of the present-day VGMKS brought about largely by enterprise initiatives, the initiatives should be taken by the employees: as many VGMKS should be formed as the *workers* wish to establish (without the enterprise taking responsibility for employing them). On the other hand, the enterprise should declare at an open competitive bidding (tender) the surplus work deemed to be necessary and make it possible for any number of work brigades, organized as occasional or permanent teams, to tender their offers.

The groups with different interests expect different results from open competitive biddings, from changing the position of the VGMKS capable of monopolizing the surplus earning with extra work.

At the levels of management *above* the enterprise level it is the prevention of the outflow of incomes, and at the *social* level the *protection of the public morals* that make these endeavours particularly attractive.

No doubt, at some enterprises—which organized VGMKS in order to *keep* their workforce—the fictitious demand for expanding the working time fund has also appeared. That is, they assign not only such work to VGMKS as can by no means be performed in the regular working time available to them (I would call it real demand); but also such work as could also be done within the existing working time fund of the organization (i.e. the demand is fictitious).

The proportions of real and fictitious demand cannot be measured. Experiences and estimates made in a number of ways appear to indicate that a larger ratio of surplus working time created by the establishment of the VGMKS (and specialized teams) unambiguously satisfied real demand.

But the danger does exist. Although productive activities may also be based on fictitious demand (if they are performed not in the regular working time but in overtime by the VGMKS and specialized teams), the appearance of fictitious demand can be ascertained mainly in the sphere of two activities: in placing orders for intellectual and maintenance work. As the working time need of these activities cannot be measured even in the enterprise's full-time work, it is mostly here that the additional time requirement (manpower demand) of those placing the order can create fictitious demand.

The principal danger inherent in fictitious demand is that it causes the outflow of uncovered purchasing power. (Obviously, surplus purchasing power does not raise any problems if it is brought about, directly or indirectly, as the countervalue of labour *increasing* the commodity fund, or if it satisfies real—personal or public—demand).

But fictitious demand only arises where organizational or personal interests are attached to it. (It is, for example, organizational interest that requires to keep the skilled labour of various trades operating in maintenance work.)

Among personal interests it is direct material interest (often corruption) that brings about fictitious demand. I should not like to overemphasize this phenomenon, but it is sure to exist. (Here is a passage from the assessment of a sectoral trade union: "In the work communities (teams) there are senior and junior foremen, heads of sections, party

secretaries, members of the party leadership and also trade union officials. The employees disapprove and find it incompatible that the members of the VGMKs are often persons in responsible positions who direct and organize productive work in regular working time, or assess the activities of the given units, distribute rewards, task bonuses, wage rises.") We ourselves have found such a "central" VGMK, whose members, medium-level enterprise managers, "offered" all VGMKs to do their administration for 3.000 forints a month. The VGMKs, being aware of the consequences, have accepted the offer and keep on paying.*

And although the cases of incompatibility are regulated by special provisions (e. g. leaders in specified positions cannot be VGMK members), yet top managers, who are entitled to give exemption from the rules, do not always deliberate judiciously, which means that the rules, for lack of adequate economic and social control, can be eluded.

The termination of certain managers' illegal income-increasing possibilities, deriving from their being engaged in senior positions, is required, primarily, by the protection of public morals—but it is also a precondition for forcing back fictitious demand.

But a basic, old problem of uncovered wage outflow continues to exist: the enterprises are not sufficiently interested in minimizing production costs, in using additional labour and in employing manpower to the extent needed to satisfy real demand, or in pressing down labour-market wages. Their interest—especially owing to the provisions of wage regulation—stimulates them to employ labour that is not paid out of the wage-fund, and their surplus demand for it, particularly fictitious demand, itself becomes a wage-increasing factor.

It stands to reason that as long as no essential change takes place in the factors of enterprise interest (among them in wage regulation), the sensitive equilibrium between purchasing power and available commodity stocks must also be protected by the containment of fictitious demand. On the other hand, however, it appears to be expedient to reckon both with surplus wage demand and with the emergence of additional commodities also in planning income outflow (accepting realities, first of all a decrease in the number of active earners), or else the plan targets cannot constitute an appropriate yardstick to bring about equilibrium.**

At the enterprise level it is hoped that partly the tensions between those who are left out of the VGMKs and those who monopolize surplus work (and mainly surplus income) with the VGMKs, will decrease, partly the reserves of higher performance will come to the surface (while the most optimistic-minded also expect advantages that can be realized in regular working time conditions).

*It is worth noting that one of the important motives of this obviously unfair step was the intention to *control* the VGMKs; management thus wanted to look into the time inputs, that is, to reveal loose norms.

**The problems relating to income regulation are more intricate than that as they are aggravated by a great many other problems. But from the point of view of income regulation its main problem is that it is only concerned with income increments. This in itself requires a steeply progressive taxation which necessarily exerts a restrictive effect on the incentive system.

The endeavour of the enterprises experimenting with finding an appropriate solution is clear: if there are many VGMKs and the work to be performed is made public at an open competitive bidding (tender), then it is possible to let those willing to undertake it compete, which may also press down the prices of offers to a still real, yet to the lowest possible level. (The natural response to this step is—as also shown by the examples—that the VGMKs form cartels. The experimenting enterprises, however, are hopeful that in the case of a large number of competitors the cartels will not prove to be viable.) And, if for undertaking the fulfilment of a given task there exists only one single group in a “natural monopoly position” (a kind of work requiring special skill and competence), open and detailed information about the task and the price for its fulfilment may also help to avoid abuses and tensions. This provides the possibility for the community to check the correctness of the agreement and also help thereby the reconciliation of the performance reserves and the contract sums.

The performance reserves are undoubtedly substantial. Hundreds of examples demonstrate that experienced performance-oriented VGMK members, who are more competent than anybody else to organize concrete work tasks, are more capable than the average of fulfilling the norms set by the big enterprises. Moreover, experiences testify that the higher VGMK earnings are due not primarily to the hourly rates, which are only slightly higher than the overtime rates, but have to be attributed to the performance reserves inherent in the work tasks and brought to the surface by the VGMKs.

It is this recognition that has led to the often voiced requirement and to the enterprises' hope that the experiences gained by the VGMKs in work organization ought to be utilized in the regular working time. But such a demand appears to be an illusion. Primarily, because the special performances could be attained partly because the work to be done was separated from the traditional work organizations. The whole mechanism of a system of the division of labour based on the given hierarchic dependence relations excludes exactly the possibility of an independent work organization. And work performed with extraordinary intensity cannot be remunerated by the wage system. There is a close interconnection between high labour intensity and high earnings (also doing justice to sacrificing leisure). But it appears to be an illusion mainly because both the VGMK members and those employed in the traditional work organizations are equally *counter-interested* in disclosing the performance reserves of the regular work cycle.

The performance reserves may come to the surface, if not in the regular working time, then in the “off” hours, especially if many compete for them.

And *the employees*, who have been left out of the possibility of doing surplus work but would be willing to perform it, have been requiring, for a long time, equal chances. The VGMKs, as indicated by the data of the table shown earlier, are concentrated today in three sectors of the national economy and include just a fraction of the labour force. (People employed in the VGMKs of industry constitute 9 percent of the labour force working in the socialist state and cooperative industry, 8 percent in construction and about 2 percent in the personal and economic services sector). Thus, it would not only be

possible but also necessary to make the chances more equal. Their voluntary organization would at the same time preserve one of the greatest assets of the VGMKs: cooperation of people who have trust in one another, are well-tested, competent and expect hard performance of one another, and are also capable of organizing work.

The activity and income of the VGMKs are generally under the strict control of the immediate environment. Income earned by hard work is held by the environment to be justified. (In any case, according to the income figures for the year 1983, 21 percent of the members of the VGMKs in industry earned at most 2,600 forints on a monthly average, 71 percent between 3,000 and 4,000 forints, 3,335 forints on average. High incomes—over 4 000 forints—were earned by only 445 VGMKs, or 8 percent of their overall number.* Human physiological endowments make possible a maximum of 100 to 120 hours of continuous surplus work a month, the earnings of which may range from 6.000 to 12.000 forints assuming 60 to 100 forints of hourly wages. Considering the extraordinary efforts made, they cannot be regarded as extremely high.) The more equal chances for earning higher income promise an unambiguously positive effect.

The cognition of the response of the VGMK members—depending on their enterprise position and circumstances—(which will necessarily also include the protection of monopoly positions, manoeuvring and cartel formation, etc.) is the subject matter of a separate study. As much can be foreseen that both competitive biddings and the equalization of chances are opposed to the interests of many VGMK members. The consequences of this opposition, however, are hard to predict (the question, for example, whether the new situation will be accepted, or their response will perhaps, be increased fluctuation).

It is a common trait of the ideas approximating reality that efforts are being made to resolve the tensions and to preserve the result attained within the limits of the *existing* enterprise interest. These are necessarily superficial and partial changes. The solution would be a change in enterprise interest itself.

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*For information: the average monthly earnings were about Ft 5 000 in Hungary in 1983. —Ed. note.

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ХОЗЯЙСТВЕННЫЕ ТРУДОВЫЕ ТОВАРИЩЕСТВА НА ПРЕДПРИЯТИЯХ И ИНТЕРЕСЫ ПРЕДПРИЯТИЙ В ВЕНГРИИ

Т. ЛАКИ

С 1982 г. в Венгрии могут учреждаться несколько видов мелких хозяйственных организаций, так называемых мелких предпринимательств. Из возникших к концу 1984 г. около 27 000 новых хозяйственных единиц более 60% составляют хозяйственные трудовые товарищества на предприятиях, в которых заняты собственные работники предприятий. В производственных кооперативах, работающих в промышленности и сфере услуг, также образовались подобные коллективы, т. н. специальные группы. Две эти формы вместе составляют 72% новых мелких организаций.

В момент их создания предполагалось, что новые мелкие единицы будут функционировать как мелкие предпринимательства, приспособляющиеся к спросу и предложению. Опыт двух лет показывает, что ни товарищества на предприятиях, ни специальные группы не стали совместными с предприятиями предпринимательствами; и то и другое превратилось в специфические трудовые бригады, выполняющие сверхурочные работы на собственных предприятиях и включенные предприятиями в иерархическую систему разделения труда.

В статье анализируются приведение к тому, что первоначально задуманные как форма предпринимательства товарищества превратились в трудовые бригады. Анализ исходит из интересов предприятий. Предприятия при данных условиях своей хозяйственной деятельности, в

узкой сфере действия, определяемой отношениями субординации, незаинтересованы в хозяйственных результатах, которых они могут добиться благодаря предпринимательству. А, следовательно, и в том, чтобы товарищество стало автономной организацией, находящейся в отношениях партнерства с предприятием, и совместно с ним налаживало производство дефицитной продукции и удовлетворяло различные потребности народного хозяйства.

Элементарные же интересы предприятий были связаны с восполнением недостающей рабочей силы, а также в сохранении кадров квалифицированных, опытных рабочих, в основном работающих по ремонту оборудования, которые имеют широкие возможности для выбора места работы. Благодаря товариществам появилась возможность использовать вне рабочее время собственных рабочих для восполнения недостатка рабочих рук. В условиях жестких ограничений регулирования заработной платы это было выгодно и предприятиям, т. к. затраты по выполненной товариществами дополнительной работе обременяли не жестко ограниченный фонд заработной платы, а гораздо более «мягкие» общие издержки, которые можно переложить на покупателей. Таким образом, товарищества стали одной из применявшихся и раньше — различной по затратам — форм восполнения недостающей рабочей силы.

Выполняемая за счет вне рабочего времени и оплачиваемая выше сверхурочной работа удовлетворяла и требованиям работников. Однако существование отлично работающих трудовых бригад — наряду с очевидными результатами — привело к разнообразным конфликтам. Однако предложения, направленные на разрешение столкновения интересов государственных органов управления, предприятий, членов товарищества и не участвующих в них работников (составляющих в промышленности 90%), обещают лишь частичные и поверхностные результаты, поскольку они ищут возможность решения в рамках существующих отношений. Решение может дать лишь изменение отношений заинтересованности, в частности, интересов предприятий.