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The Work of the Manager of an Agricultural Enterprise

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During the 19 years of the building up of socialist agriculture in Czechoslovakia hundreds of outstanding organizers of production have emerged. From small- and medium-sized farmers who formerly managed nobody but themselves, their wives and their children, and whose organization of production was confined to a few hectares, real captains of large scale agricultural production have emerged. Tens and hundreds of them have been awarded the highest honours by the state for their outstanding work. A majority of them, frequently with only basic education, after hard days' work and numberless meetings, have spent nights in trying to penetrate the mysteries of the management of agricultural mass production. So, slowly, step by step, all their experience gained in a hard life, together with the practical knowledge of organizing mass production gained in hard work, was transformed into new ways of thinking and new notions which have driven and still drive production, and the way of life in our agricultural enterprises, constantly onwards. Hundreds of these workers have been enabled to complement their technical training by studying at schools and in different forms of extension schooling. However, an increasing number of the new socialist agricultural intelligentsia have joined agricultural enterprises.

A glance back over the years, beginning from the first steps of collectivization, shows best what has been accomplished by our leading workers effectively supported by the state authorities and political bodies. The realization of the greatest revolution in our history, the establishment of socialist production in rural communities and the present standard of our agricultural mass production constitute the greatest appreciation of their zealous work.

However, development continues. The scientific-technical revolution begins to make its timid appearance in our agriculture. Society as a whole has made it its aim to bring the standard of agriculture up to that of

industry. New tasks call for new requirements. What was good yesterday is no longer good today, and will be insufficient tomorrow. We cannot be satisfied with the standard of technical education of the leaders. The large number of practitioners without any expert training indicates that only a few of them have made use of the wide possibilities of our educational system and of supplementary training to deepen their knowledge. Obviously, this unfavourable state of affairs has a number of cause, one of which is the excessive load of work to be performed by the leaders, which leaves no time for study.

The exacting tasks of socialist agriculture make it imperative to change this situation. It is necessary to correct the mistaken view that the schooling of leading workers is their private concern, their own personal interest. That this is not so can be seen in the results of the foremost agricultural enterprises headed by politically mature and technically qualified leaders. Expert, well qualified leading workers are of immense advantage to their enterprises and to the whole society. Therefore, study and the complementing of technical knowledge and the training of agricultural specialists, are becoming increasingly important. However, the basic problem is the direction which the training should take.

With regard to the problems of the differentiation and integration of production, neither the problem of the employment of leading workers according to their technical specializations, the balance of the various professions, nor the question of the qualifications for the work of management, etc. have been solved. The importance of these problems is shown by the data contained in Table 1, which show the influence of the leading workers' qualifications on the results of farming and on certain indices of the enterprises.

How unfavourable a low standard of qualification can be is shown by a large number of unified agricultural cooperatives (41%), in the management of which not a single graduate is employed. The influence of the qualifications of the management appears in all the indices. Proportionate to the qualifications there is a growth of personal incomes of the workers and of the productivity of labour (not all indices have been stated here, but the tendency in those omitted is equally favourable), and a decrease of the average age of the workers, which, apart from other reasons, is also a consequence of the good result obtained from farming, as work in these enterprises is sufficiently attractive to young people.

The decision as to what should be the work of the leader and which qualifications would be the best for the performance of this work raises many problems of how research can be conducted so that the aims of the enterprise may be achieved. On the one hand, investigation of the theory of management and its application in agriculture is directed towards the external relations between the given system and the natural and social

Table 1

| Number of workers with college education in the controlling centre | Proportion of leading workers according to their qualifications (education) | | | Percentage of unified agricultural cooperatives | Average age of workers of unified agricultural cooperation | Gross production per worker in Kes | Personal income of 1 worker (percentage of average) | | |
|--|---|-----------------|-------------|--|--|---|--|--------------------|----------------------------|
| | college, % | secondary, % | basic, % | | | | in crop production | tractor drivers | in livestock production |
| 0 | 0 | 45.0 | 55.0 | 41 | 51.50 | 34,099 | 86 | 93 | 97 |
| 11 | 0.2 | 30.0 | 63.8 | 27 | 49.60 | 37,321 | 101 | 104 | 96 |
| 2 | 11.6 | 39.2 | 49.1 | 18 | 50.50 | 42,560 | 142 | 105 | 108 |
| 3 | 20.0 | 46.7 | 33.3 | 9 | 44.15 | 50,042 | 144 | 105 | 145 |
| Over 3 | 33.3 | 50.0 | 16.7 | 5 | 39.30 | 48,216 | 151 | 124 | 132 |
| Average 1.18 | 7.5 | 40.0 | 52.5 | 100 | 49.50 | 37,200 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

environment affecting its activity and development, i.e. the factors of management exercising a positive effect (in which case we endeavour to utilize them in management) or a negative and disturbing effect, which must be eliminated. On the other hand, it is an examination of the relations between that which controls and that which is controlled, i.e. an examination of the mechanism of management. From this point of view, in the operative management there is an uninterrupted repetition of the cycle of management, which may be characterized by the notions "information-deciding-checking", linked by regressive linkage in the cycle.

The problems of the flow of information and of making decisions are solved principally by the second phase of management, i.e. by organizing information linkages and a flow of information, and by leaving the various elements of management a certain degree of freedom and (together with the tasks) authority to make decisions. Thus practical management consists predominantly of working within the framework of formal organization and rules, and only in exceptional situations is it necessary to leave the making of decisions to the management. The most serious problems remaining are those of checking, in which we measure and evaluate the results of the activity. This evaluation may be final if it is possible to gauge the quality of the result, i.e. especially in cases in which the material and positive changes predominate over the information or subjective changes, according to the result obtained in the controlled system or according to an indirect evaluation by the social environment concerned.

The first type of evaluation concerns, for example, workers employed in production and has been worked out fairly thoroughly though it is not without problems (concerning the effectiveness of different forms of evaluation) as regards the accuracy with which we can measure the result, its quantity and quality.

The second method is typical of the methods so far applied for evaluating the work of control, be it a subjective estimation according to the indices of the enterprise or various methods of point evaluation, competitions, etc.

The third form of evaluation is, above all, the market. This shows how the enterprise is able to orientate itself towards the influences of the environment and to react to them, and thus to be evaluated as better or worse. The working of the law of values is more effective than verbal or written orders.

At present we have a similar unknown in the many problems regarding the forming of informal organizations and their functioning, the attitude of people, the ascertaining of needs, interests, and tools of motivation.

Certain steps have been taken regarding further problems of practical management, i.e. in organizing the control of work, particularly with regard to analysing the control and organizing it better. This means

analysing the time spent on management, the effectiveness of management, its rationalization, the utilization of reserves, and planning.

This wide range of problems, contradictions obscurities, and problems as yet uninvestigated, shows that as regards the problems of management in agriculture we find ourselves in a situation in which formulate tasks and aims and collect forces for the work, but it is only in some of the problems that we are capable of drawing conclusions. However, there is no cause for pessimism. New solutions of certain problems of central management of agriculture as a branch of the national economy will give rise to demands for a solution of the detailed problems of management in this sector, demands that will have to be readily met.

Our Institute of Rural Sociology which is attached to the Research Institute of Agricultural Economics in Prague, and which I have the honour of representing, has been dealing for a number of years with the sociological and socio-psychological problems of the control exercised by leading workers in our socialist agricultural enterprises. One of the principal complications of the problems we have examined is the social role played by the leading worker in the hierarchy of the enterprise, who, among others, is concerned with a larger or smaller share of the duties of management as they are understood.

To initiate work requires above all detailed knowledge and analysis of facts and, on the basis of the long-term trends in a given range of activity,

Table 2

| Stage of contr. | 1 day | 1 week (decade) | 1 month | 5-6 months | 1 year | 2-4 years | 5 years |
|-----------------|-------|-----------------|---------|------------|--------|-----------|---------|
| VI | — | 2 | 8 | 10 | 18 | 27 | 35 |
| V | 1 | 4 | 5 | 15 | 25 | 30 | 20 |
| IV | 4 | 6 | 10 | 20 | 30 | 20 | 10 |
| III | 8 | 10 | 20 | 30 | 20 | 10 | 2 |
| II | 13 | 20 | 30 | 25 | 10 | 2 | — |
| I | 30 | 40 | 15 | 10 | 5 | — | — |

an audacious setting of aims and an indication of the methods by which they may be reached.

The economic worker employed in planning, in technical development, and in long-term conceptual activity is a creative worker.

Table 2 gives an estimate of the proportion of time devoted by leading workers at different levels of management to short-term and prospective work. It also shows the general hierarchy among the individual levels of management which, applied to the concrete conditions of agriculture, would indicate:

(I) Work group-leader of a work team.

(II) Worker in charge of a livestock building, leading worker of a field group or mechanized group of tractor drivers.

(III) Leading worker of a farming centre of a unified agricultural co-operative or state farm.

(IV) Worker directing an agricultural enterprise.

(V) Leader of district administration controlling agricultural production at more than enterprise level.

(VI) Minister and his agents.

This theoretical model draws attention to the centre of gravity of the work of control at the different levels of management of production.

As a rule it is known that the working hours of leading workers in industry are excessively long, i.e. 10-12 hr. In agriculture the conditions are very similar. In the course of 4 months (September, October, November, December) in 1965 the following working hours were found on state farms:

| | |
|-------------------------|----------|
| Directors of farms | 11.14 hr |
| Chief animal husbandmen | 10.42 hr |
| Chief agronomists | 10.31 hr |
| Chief mechanics | 10.06 hr |
| Chief economists | 9.17 hr |

Excessive working hours have been found above all for those doing physical work.

Another inquiry carried out in the same year, also in the autumn, revealed that 53 chairmen of unified agricultural cooperatives worked 11.20 hr.

Such a situation cannot be considered normal or right. It will probably never be possible to limit the work of leading workers to the legal working hours, but a systematic prolongation of work to 10, 12 and more does not contribute towards a good mental and physical state of health. It is necessary, therefore, that by means of time-sheets, we should estimate the reserve in the utilization of working hours. We must gradually introduce a system of simple personal plans of work and make leading workers try to adhere to the daily or weekly plans, and introduce some kind of method into their work. As a rule it is said that approximately 20% of the work of leading workers is last time, i.e. that they are doing work they should not do themselves but should leave for someone else.

The Institute of Rural Sociology and Agricultural History has carried out an investigation of the work performed by the leading workers of 10 unified agricultural cooperatives in the beet production regions in 4 week period. The total length of the inquiry was 910 days. We used the following divisions of the kinds of activity:

(1) Working out the plan of the whole work of the enterprise or shop:

collecting information — data on production and economy, elaboration of the plan; propagation of the plan at consultations, acquainting members with it.

(2) Operative activity: working out the production process, assigning and explaining tasks; checking the system of organization, evaluation of work; settling of disputes (personal, production); selection, schooling and training of workers; primary evidence, evidence of work.

(3) Preparation for consultations and meetings within the enterprise.

(4) Study.

(5) Manual work.

(6) Tasks outside the enterprise.

Classification of the data obtained was carried out according to the different functions of the leading workers. We distinguished seven kinds of function (chairman, economist, agronomist, animal husbandman, worker in charge of crop production, worker in charge of livestock production, worker in charge of mechanization).

Furthermore, the leading workers were divided into three groups according to the standard of management. Below are several results obtained in an investigation of the scale of the working time of leading workers found in enterprises with an average standard of management (in the conditions of a beet growing region).

In the case of the chairmen of unified agricultural cooperatives, who are on the highest level of organization in the enterprise, the time they spent on organizing activity amounted to 21%. Part of this time had to be devoted to obtaining data and information and, further, to the introduction of their plans. The actual working out and selecting the best way of solving a problem took only 6.5% of the working time. A chairman devotes a considerable part of his time in practical work, i.e. in supervising the production process and to checking. As chairmen spend an excessive amount of time on minor matters, they are short of time for settling the principal prospective problems. Almost all leading workers pay little attention to the training and selection of workers. It is a surprising fact that at the present time a majority of workers in leading positions still do manual work (10-20% of their working time). We have found that leading workers at present spend little time on their own studies. Chairmen of unified agricultural cooperatives devote more time to study than other leaders do (5.4% of their working time). Other workers study less, and least of all the leaders of working groups. The Research Institute of Agricultural Economics in Bratislava suggests that the time to be devoted to study by leading workers of unified agricultural cooperatives should be 6.3% of their working time. In engineering, the leading workers of the same status devote more than 7% of their working time to study at present.

In the case of workers at other levels of organization there are different time schedules based on their different functions. Obviously the economists devote most time to planning activities. By contrast, least time is devoted to these affairs by workers employed in the mechanization sector. This may be explained by the fact that these workers are not always at the same level of organization as are economists and animal husbandmen. Frequently a mechanic is in charge only of a workshop and his work approaches that of a group leader. In the case of these functionaries there is a minimum of such activities as the training of subordinates, or their own study, and preparation for consultations. A considerable part of their working time is taken up by contact with bodies at higher levels, particularly is this the case with economists (15%).

The work of group leaders consists in the main of practical affairs concerned above all with carrying out the production tasks, with checking, and with evidence. They do considerably less planning. Also, they devote a minimum of time to study but, on the contrary, up to one-sixth of their time to manual work.

None of the leading workers consulted completed their tasks in the course of an eight-hours' working day. Their working hours ranged between 8.3 and 10.9 hr. The leading workers themselves stated that they could not complete the tasks set them within an eight-hours' stint because: — there are many peaks of work; — there is a shortage of labour, and workers are badly trained; and — agricultural production is seasonal.

All leading workers employed in unified agricultural cooperatives devoted most of their working time (80%) to short-term, operative problems. Leading workers have expressed the view that the proportion of working time that can be spent on planning is limited by: — lack of manpower, low standard of technical training; — deficiencies of organization, insufficient equipment of their sectors; — excessive paper work, and having to handle less important matters.

Every job of organizing, and every other activity, of a leading worker of an agricultural enterprise demands a different allocation of time. Of a chairman of a unified agricultural cooperative it is expected that he will deal predominantly with problems of at least one season and with the forward planning of the enterprise. The job of group leaders, on the other hand, mainly concerns the organization of work over a short period, e.g. a week or a month.

Of course, the work of planning will not concern all leading workers to the same extent. In the work of planning at *higher levels* the ever important factor is the ability to foresee development, to determine aims and tasks with the required foresight, i.e. to create conceptions.

The character of work at lower levels of control on the other hand, e.g. of foremen at shops, of group leaders, and of workers in charge of

farms, even the growing mechanization of the production process in agriculture, is becoming a routine part of established organization and relatively stable programmes. Differences are growing deeper between the style and methods of work of the upper and lower levels of management. Whereas we measure the effectiveness of the work of creative technicians and economists by the excellence of their work, their plans of development, and the scientific character of their long-term projections, we evaluate their performance and supervisory activities by the extent to which they maintain established standards and by the ratio between the methods used and the results obtained.