

novan, udružen, upoređen zajedno sa drugim (klasičnim i do sada poznatim) kriterijumima.

U svetlu onoga što je do sada izneseno, može se reći da Zelićeva knjiga, koja je poslužila kao povod ovom osvrtu, predstavlja originalnu studiju koja koristi teorijska shvatanja i oruđa analize koja nisu uobičajena u našoj stručnoj literaturi. S te strane, ovakva knjiga se može samo pozdraviti, naročito u situaciji kada se dobar deo jugoslovenskih ekonomista koji se bave opštom teorijom (čast izuzeci-ma), još uvek oslanja na oruđa analize s kraja XIX veka (videti, na primer, jednoobrazne i dogmatizovane sadržaje i strukturu većine domaćih udžbenika iz političke ekonomije). Moje primedbe su, međutim, išle u tom smeru da ta nova (a u svetu već poznata) teorijska shvatanja nema ni smisla ni potreba izlagati isključivo u pozitivnom i bezkonfliktnom vidu, u situaciji kada već postoji relativno razučena i opširna kritička valorizacija tih shvatanja. Svet o toj kritičkoj valorizaciji je naučno neophodan preduslov svakog pokušaja njihove eventualne primedbe.

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USING NEW TECHNOLOGY TO ERODE ECONOMIC AND DEMOCRACY: THE CASE OF SWEDEN*

Bengt SANDKULL**

INTRODUCTION

In his book *Class, Crisis and the State* (1978), Erik Olin Wright examines the thesis that in advanced monopoly capital a left government may use the democratic capitalist state apparatus as a basis for destroying the capitalist state itself. By state interventions the left government would gradually produce a social transformation.

On the level of articulated ideology the governing social democratic party in Sweden seems, by using state interventions, to be attempting to achieve a social transformation into a democratic, non-capitalistic state, where organized labour formally and really controls the capital accumulation process. On the basis of empirical studies in a number of companies I contend that technological changes in industry act as a means of intervention that seem to outpace the interventions made and planned by the SD government. This government has neglected the new means for domination and control provided by technology which prevents workers from mobilizing. The interventions may in effect weaken the labour movement, unless the SD leadership recognized the problems involved.

At the point of production, where the workers feel the full effects of technical changes, they are deserted by their own unions. Most labour leaders still cling to the myth that technology simply brings prosperity to all, irrespective of its form and content. On the local level the picture looks different, however. In a few instances the local leaders have acted and initiated a break out of the vicious circle encountered.

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REFORMS DURING THE SEVENTIES

At the end of the sixties pressures from below the ranks stirred the labour movement and got it finally to act more vigorously with respect to work environment and workers' influence. The unauthorized strike in the state-owned iron ore mines in Kiruna (LKAB) was a direct blow at the top leadership of the labour movement who blamed the strike on communist provocateurs. The claims of the striking miners, who got wide-spread support from other people, focussed on the wage system and the physical working conditions underground. The piece-rate system in use was regarded as the main instrument of the Tayloristic management for pacing work in a way that is detrimental to the workers' health and physical well-being and in addition elicits risk-taking with respect to safety measures.

The strike which was firmly rooted among the miners was finally settled. The workers were paid off by increased wages but they got rid of the piece-rate system in favour of monthly salaries also, although this depended upon the fulfilment of company production targets. The system for collaboration between workers and management agreed on did not fit the managerial tradition and was soon abandoned (see Kronlund, 1973 for an account).

WORK ENVIRONMENT

The labour movement responded to the new signals by introducing a number of legislative measures. The regulatory bodies got more resources to allow them to intensify their work on hygienic standards, occupational risks, inspection of work places and similar measures. The new Work Environment Act of 1978 tries to define the fundamental requirements applying to work environment and to cover measures for the prevention of every variety of health and safety hazard related to the work environment. The essential aim of the new act is to afford protection against health hazards and accident risks, as does the earlier act of 1974, but in addition the law aims at such working conditions which can allow the individual to experience his work as a meaningful and rewarding part of his life.

The act gives a rough outline of the means whereby these ends are to be achieved, and it defines the liabilities, obligations, and rights involved. An accompanying work environment ordinance contains a number of provisions for the regulation of the actual content of its rules. One important section of the act gives the employees the right of participating in the design of their work environment, i.e. management has to consult the employees in question on the design of new work places. The safety delegates have the right to stop work if they regard a work place as dangerous. However a work inspector may by his own judgement lift the ban.

The intentions behind the new act were to provide a framework that would allow regulations to keep up with social and technical changes. To fulfil them the authorities concerned needed to be more active. In addition the act put great responsibilities on company ma-

agement and union locals, in particular on the safety delegates. The cooperation between managers and workers varies considerably from company to company. The enforcement of the law has been quite ineffective, in particular to conspicuous hazards like asbestos and vinyl-chloride (cf. Lundberg, 1982).

THE RIGHT TO WORK

Before 1974 the employers in Sweden had an unrestricted right to dismiss people without any reason. The new act on the right to work demands that the employer must have an objective basis for dismissal, and that disputes have to be settled before the Labour Court. After six months' work a newly hired person is covered by the law and is entitled to one month's notice in case of dismissal. After six years the grace period is six months. After dismissals caused by lack of work the former workers have a preferential right for one year to any new jobs in the company, of course taking qualifications into consideration. Before any lay-off the employer must give advance notice to the unions and the labour market board.

WORKERS' INFLUENCE

Already in 1973 workers got the right to send two representatives to the board of a company with 100 employees or more. Better opportunities to exert influence were demanded though. In particular the unions wanted to refute the employers' exclusive right to govern and distribute work tasks. In 1977 the Act of Joint Regulation of Working Life (Right to Negotiations), or MBL as it is called in Sweden, came into force. This act, that is mistakenly labeled an act of codetermination, states that any question concerning the relations between employers and employees can be negotiated. On important issues, such as changes in ownership or changes in production methods, the employer is obliged to negotiate with the union local before any decisions. On other issues the union can demand negotiations. The act makes provisions for collective agreements that will regulate in what way workers may have a more far-reaching influence on issues belonging to a particular area. The act requires the employer to inform the unions about the state of the company so that their right to negotiation can be utilized in an effective way.

This law did not have the far-reaching consequences that were expected, because the legislators chose to give the word *negotiation* the meaning to exchange opinions only. The employers' exclusive right to decide was not challenged, something the unions gradually found out. It took a long time to get any additional agreements. Only in a very few instances did the employers accept technology agreements which grant the unions the word of consent before any technical changes can be executed.

At the university of Linköping we finished last year a five year project in which we studied a number of instances of major techni-

cal changes in large, multiplant corporations belonging to different industries (an initial account of the study is given in Sandkull, 1980). The study revealed that firms owned by the state, by the consumer cooperative movement or by the farmers' cooperative organizations in actual practice did not differ from the ordinary firms (the so-called private industry). In these cases we found only scattered attempts by unions and their members to contest the suggestions made by management in spite of the adverse consequences for the workers. The unions discovered that the law was of little help.

It has therefore turned out that the law is, to a large degree, a paper dragon in terms of influence. Many unions have come to realize that in times of bad business management's skillful use of the law can implicate the union in the responsibility of selecting those to be dismissed.

WAGE-EARNER FUNDS

The Meidner report in 1975 on wage-earner funds spurred a lively debate, and great numbers of proposals and models (for an account see Öhman, 1980). The ambitions attached to such a system were (1) support of a wage policy of solidarity, (2) counterbalance to the concentration of wealth and power in industry, and (3) wage-earner influence on capital investments. The system should also promote important national objectives: full employment, a high level of capital formation and a stable level of prices.

Because of the political controversy the issue was referred to a public commission, which could not agree on any proposal and dissolved after a number of reports. The issue thus became bogged down into a stalemate, in which the liberal and conservative parties together with industry refused to accept any collective fund whatsoever. The labour movement on the other hand has committed itself firmly to some kind of collective funds.

After six years' leave from the ruling power the new SD government finally sent, this fall, a proposal to the parliament, which contains a watered-down version that has abandoned almost all of the teeth of the original suggestion. The opposition labels the proposal of five regional funds as a big stride into a communist state. The leadership of the labour movement pictures the proposal as an important move to get »economic democracy« and a cure-a for the bad economy. The proposal states, however, that the funds should not take any ownership responsibility, and it gives little provision for workers' influence. To call it »economic democracy« is a blatant misuse of the concept.

ARE THE REFORMS LEADING TO STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION?

The measures taken by the SD government during the seventies could in principle qualify as reforms of the kind that Erik Olin Wright

envisages which could change the structure of the state. The structural transformation would be possible, if the limits of what is structurally possible extend the limits of what is functionally compatible with the requirements of reproducing capitalism (p. 231, 232). The reforms should have the effect of eroding the class selectivity of the state which would mitigate nonreproductive state interventions.

The keystones of the modern economy are the commodity status of labour power and resource allocation by market rationality. The reforms of the seventies aim at these two aspects with varying strength. To assess the case I will take a closer look at the reforms mentioned.

The act concerning the right to work is the most clearcut. It liberates the workers from the whip or the whim of the employer. It cushions to some extent the market forces which are kept at bay through a whole set of labour market support measures. It adds to the general welfare provisions: medicare, health insurance, and guaranteed pensions, an important measure in decommoifying labour power. Class selectivity is reduced. (The reader is reminded that the right to unionize was recognized by the Swedish industry long ago.)

The new act concerning work environment is a reform with great potential of reshaping the labour process. In addition it introduces use-values in resource allocation besides the dominating market values. The reform represented for the unions an organizational change. They had for a long time been shaping themselves into a strong but centralized organization for central negotiations with the employers federation. The general agreement accompanying the act introduced a system of safety committees and safety delegates in each factory of some size. In addition to the traditional centralized organization for negotiations the unions got a decentralized safety organization that should be able to respond to problems encountered locally.

The reform potentials of the act have not been fully realized in Sweden. In Norway as a contrast the work environment act has a broader scope and has been followed by a massive educational programme (see Gustavsen, 1980 and 1982). The safety inspectorate (i. e. the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health), in particular its top level management, has not abandoned its traditional pro-industry stance. There is a strong tendency among the inspectors to rule against the complaining unions, at least when problems appear in large industries, or when only women are affected. Unfortunately this attitude has been contagious, with the result that local union leaders have refrained from giving the safety delegates enough support.

The act of 1978 was broadened to include psychical and social aspects of work, i. e. work organization was regarded as part of the work environment. With few exceptions industry has refused to regard these issues as subject to intervention according to the law. The potential of the law to reduce class selectivity has only been partially realized.

Far stronger expectations were attached to the act of Right to Negotiations (MBL) than to the new Work Environment Act. A number of deficiencies disqualify it as a major reform. We have already

mentioned the novel meaning to negotiation in the act which prevents the use of the law to infringe upon the owners' exclusive rights to make decisions.

The act was premised on the concept of a traditional unitary firm on shares, without the legislators' realizing that the modern corporation usually is a vast conglomerate of operations and units, in which the formal partition into judicial units in no way defines the borders of actual control. The law's adherence to the traditional unitary firm provided impetus to industry to make formal arrangements in order to avoid its effects. For example, in a big firm all important decisions are discussed and prepared by an advisory committee to the board, thereby circumventing the obligation to disseminate information to the unions.

The act presupposed agreement between the labour market parties on certain issues. The act did not stipulate a finite time to reach such supplementary agreements. This missing point made it possible for »private« industry to refuse to give any concessions in an agreement. When an agreement finally was reached after several years the result was not very encouraging to the unions. In the cooperative sector the agreement came much earlier and gave some provisions for local initiatives.

Despite its flaws the law was still not without importance. Although several companies had already, before the new law was introduced, adopted procedures for exchanging information and discussing important matters with union representatives, the law made it a standard procedure. The majority of firms that were behind had to keep up to this standard, even if this sometimes introduced a formal, legalistic attitude. The possibilities for unions to influence important matters is probably as low as earlier but there is, in most firms, a decidedly more open climate than before. Managerial loftiness has become an unaccepted trait to the unions. The MBL laws have reduced class selectivity with respect to information but hardly in other aspects.

The wage-earner funds have not yet come into existence, but a proposal has recently been tabled before the parliament. The opinions in the labour movement are divided and polls show that about half of the SD voters are not in favour of the proposed collective funds »owned« by the unions. Leading SD members have warned against the confusion of roles that will follow as a consequence of union ownership. (The reader may remember the discouraging case of Israel's Histadrut, see Palgi & Rosner, 1983).

In the present form the proposal would only be a minor reform as the funds would not take ownership responsibility, nor have any influence on the labour process. According to the proposal funds should be invested using market values, i.e. a standard return on investment. On the economic level the funds are fully compatible with the existing capitalist structure in Sweden, although the opponents in industry fear that the funds will come under pressure to employ use-values and neglect the market rationality.

On the level of ideology the regional funds represent a minor extension of the present system of government controlled funds. Ac-

ording to the spokesmen of the movement the funds will not tinker with the market economy but yet represent a step towards economic democracy. However, industry and political opponents fear the funds as the first step in a transition to socialism, i.e. control over the process of capital accumulation.

The dilemma is that the funds are intended both as a remedy for the present economic situation and as a means for worker control of the economy. The present proposal could not meet any of these goals, and will very likely create disappointment and cynicism among those rank-and-file workers who were enticed to believe in the promises.

THE CHANGING FACE OF SWEDISH CAPITALISM

In the SD party the stereotype of the Swedish industrialist has for long been Marcus Wallenberg who dominated Swedish industry for almost five decades and who always tried to advance the economy of Sweden. During the seventies the scenery started to change and the patriotic views of Marcus Wallenberg were challenged and are now part of history.

Many Swedish producing industries met increasing competition and got into difficulties during the seventies. It is important, though, to note that many internationally wellknown industries more or less have saturated their market potentials with present products and technology. It is common among them that more than 90 per cent of the production is for export. Difficulties were met by rationalization and mergers with the effect that industry became very concentrated and much more integrated into the global economy. The effect has been severe on subcontractors and the import content on products not based on domestic raw materials has increased steadily (60 per cent of a Volvo car, for example).

Before the end of the sixties wealth and power were achieved mainly through productive activities. In the seventies this picture changed completely and Sweden became what is called a transaction economy. Large wealths were created through unscrupulous methods in the real estate market. In addition we got the professional financial sharks that know how to empty a prosperous enterprise and leave a rundown company behind with no chance of recovery. The SD government has reacted quite passively to these phenomena, and has rather preferred to take them as a pretext for increasing government bureaucracy and creating new regulations. The liberal-conservative governments (1976—82) had of course little interest in actively curbing the economics of speculation.

The reforms of the seventies were a great achievement to the workers and still more to union leaders whose importance increased. But... the changes in the Swedish economy have hollowed out the gist of the reforms: the right to work and work environment. The mergers and takeovers leading to larger industrial groups have made the right to work illusory, even if the right was extended to the whole corporation.

The industry minister of the first liberal-conservative government tried to extend corporate responsibility in a case that arouse much attention. The top management of a fast growing enterprise, originally a trading company, acquired a great part of the Swedish foundry industry for cast iron, involving about 4 000 workers. The move was not successful and losses started to accumulate. When the management disclosed their decision to close down one of the foundries affecting about 1 000 workers the public outcry was very strong. The industry minister declared that the acquiring company had to take on responsibility for the workers of the acquired firms. This led to a prolonged struggle to save jobs. In the end the government had to bail out the owners to save at least 430 jobs. There was very little support in the cabinet for the industry minister's ideas on corporate responsibility, and his doctrine was soon abolished (the case is reported in Mattsson & Wigblad, 1980, 81).

The seventies have witnessed a major step towards automation of industry. Office work has also been subject to mechanization with the advent of computer systems, the full effects of which will come later. In the study of ours to which I referred earlier we had a close look on the consequences of major technical changes. We have found as a rule that the changes implied less need of qualified workers but for more engineers, as machines substituted much of the earlier knowhow. After a couple of years most of the earlier competence residing in people had vanished (for an example, see Sandkull, 1980). In the wake of high technology in products manufacture becomes manned by low-paid workers (in Sweden as elsewhere women and guest-workers). These workers can also be more efficiently controlled by the production system.

The changes were as a rule imposed on people whose experience has not been considered. As a consequence the actual effectiveness became much lower than estimated. Because the production management and engineers did not pay attention to the workers' abilities, a careless attitude emerged. The cases demonstrated that it is quite easy to lose an established sense of responsibility of the workers and much more difficult to create it anew with personnel manipulating methods.

The technical changes brought about not only a reduction in the collective competence of a company but also a deterioration in the functioning of the unions. Very few unions had the organizational capacity to deal with the technical changes that appeared. The irresolution on the part of union leaders deteriorated further the members' involvement in the union. The general picture that emerges from our studies is quite dark but there also exist more encouraging observations.

In summary I conclude that the technical changes that have appeared tend to increase the commodity status of labour power. In addition they make it more difficult for workers to grasp the labour process and provide the necessary knowledge to direct them according to their own ends. Market values have also become more dominating in the labour process itself.

Industry's own reproduction of the economic structures has in effect increased their structural versatility and reduced the scope for state interventions leading to social transformations.

OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES TO WORKER CONTROL

The main problem as I see it is not capital's advancement during the sixties. Industry is not homogeneous and there exist several companies with managers who have understood that personnel is the most important resource in the competitive struggle. The great problem on behalf of the labour movement is the lack of understanding of the nature of the changes. The class character of the new technology is not recognized.

The dominant perspective of the labour movement in Sweden is predicated on Keynesian economics which implies economic growth and individual advancements. The promise to the right to work and the yearly increase of income which motivated industrial workers after the second world war cannot any longer be fulfilled. Furthermore, a growing number of workers are reluctant to pay the price. The internal debate on these issues in the labour movement is at present severely restrained.

The fiscal crisis of the state and the economic realities are obvious. Still the SD party clings to the Keynesian solution in an almost desperate way. The government will invest heavily in military and space technology which will give little return and create few jobs, except for highly paid technicians, and in micro-electronics which may increase the competitiveness of Swedish industry but in addition strengthens the commodity status of labour power by reducing the demand for ordinary workers. The SD government has jumped on the automation spiral and trails the big industries of the US, Japan and France, which, if successful, will tie Sweden even closer to these economies and the capital hegemony.

Erik Olin Wright warns against a politicization of the capital accumulation process that reproduces the belief that it is in the interest of everyone to strengthen the capitalist institutions (p. 237). The present SD government has fallen into this trap. Erik Olin Wright also discusses the kind of employment policy that is applied (p. 238). He warns against a policy that mainly tries to stimulate economic growth in order to provide greater employment through the market mechanisms which may reinforce the commodity status of labour power. He suggests instead a reduction of the average hours worked supplemented with a compensatory income scheme, which would be consistent with further decommodification of labour power. The SD government has chosen the market avenue and does not believe in reducing working hours. The union leadership has already started complaints on government inactivity with respect to unemployment.

What are the opportunities? The contradictions that are not used for state interventions have instead spurred a number of local initiatives. These are still scattered attempts and many are just barely tolerated by the government and the bureaucracy:

1. The number of protest activities are on the increase and workers will not accept silently being thrown on the scrap-heap.

2. There is an increasing tendency among workers to make an attempt at saving one's job by forming worker-owned companies, despite the lack of official support.

3. In a few cases the local unions have been able to enter into agreements that allow the workers to have a decisive influence on the management of the firm, i.e. real participation (c f Pateman, 1970).

4. In a number of cities and towns local programmes for mobilizing unemployed youth have come into existence. These programmes usually stress the need for cooperation and self-reliance and have resulted in a number of small cooperatives and small private enterprises. The unions are seldom involved in these efforts.

5. Some municipalities have started programmes of self-reliance in order to mobilize the inhabitants and the local resources with the purpose of breaking loose from a one-sided dependency on the metropolis.

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Michael Young, Marianne Rigge

REVOLUTION FROM WITHIN

Co-operatives & co-operation in
British industry

London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983

The main title — rather misleading — reflects the political scope of the book: it is part of a series on political and social subjects written from the standpoint of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the recently formed political organization in Britain. The stage is clearly set in the introduction: the need is voiced for a "third sector", based on common ownership, in contrast with the two sectors based on private enterprise and state ownership, having their respective political proponents in the Conservative and Labour Party.

The way to introduce the change, as suggested in the book, is hardly revolutionary, however. At first sight it could be best described as a manual for prospective founders of producer co-operatives in Britain. The appendix, for example, contains checkpoints for would-be co-operators, with useful addresses of co-operative agencies, training centres and banks.

The term "revolution" probably has a meaning in Britain that differs from that in countries with harsher historical experience. The argument about the title should therefore not divert the reviewer from his main task — to describe the content and evaluate the book for the readers who will not use it as a manual.

In the first chapter five strikingly diverse cases of the set-up and functioning of co-operatives in Britain are described. They deal with the production of shoes, orchestral concerts, wholefood supplies and diversified community activities. All are rather small and obviously characterized by a strong streak of non-economic motives.

The second chapter deals with the development of the co-operative movement in Britain and its current state. The origins are set by Robert Owen and the Rochdale Pioneers. The boom of co-operative retail societies at the beginning of this century is referred to, and recent statistics of worker co-operatives in Britain are presented (nearly 500 co-operatives were listed in mid-1982). Some of the motives that influenced the growth of their number are discussed — the attempt to improve the industrial climate by removing the "us and them" division, the disappointment with the nationalized industries and generally the appeal of alternative move-