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PART-TIME WORK GAINS IN THE USSR

Summary: Recently the first reports on the introduction of part-time work in the Soviet Union appeared. While up to now the party bureaucracy and plant directors have opposed acceptance of part-time work, suddenly this form of labor is seen as a means of employing new labor reserves and raising work productivity.

While part-time work has long been customary in Western industrial countries, it has only for the past few years been officially permitted in the Soviet Union and recently has even been forced. Objections to the introduction of this kind of work-schedule were various. Ideological considerations also played an important role. According to the principle of production output, the capacity for work of Soviet workers and employees should be maximally exploited, and this attitude could not be brought into agreement with part-time work. Management was of the opinion that part-time work would prove to be an interruptive element in the maintenance of a work rhythm and that new problems would emerge with a negative effect on production. The most important factor, however, was the lack of judicial and social moorings for part-time work. In practice, circumstances have been otherwise for the past few years. Already five or six years ago tourists could see notices on numerous factory bulletin boards in industrial centers, in which directors advertised for openings for half-day work, and promised the same social rights as those assured to full-time workers.

One Hundred Thousand Part-time Workers in the RSFSR

Soviet authorities passed a series of resolutions in 1969 and 1970 to establish a judicial basis for part-time work and to encourage plants and factories to employ half-day workers. At present, 100,000 persons -- mostly women -- work half-days in the Russian Federation; of these, approximately one-third were employed during 1970. (1) Beyond thus, a considerable number of students work by the hour, and there are groups that work seasonally, but are otherwise without steady jobs.

Part-time work is most widely spread in the light and food industries, in local industry (mestnaia promyslennost) and in service operations. Part-time work exists in the occupations of locksmiths, fitters, mechanics, for those from tailors and telephone operators to lavatory cleaning women.

The first reports on the results of the introduction of part-time work are positive. It has been generally determined that labor fluctuation is relatively low among part-time workers. Besides, work productivity is rising. According to the calculations of one institute, for example, one enterprise showed that the productivity of half-day workers was on the average 28.5% higher than that of employees who worked 8-hour days. (2)

From reports on Moscow's post offices one can infer that particularly in the postal system part-time work has proven successful. The majority of the part-time workers are women, but several analyses show that a considerable number of men want to work half-days as well.

Results of Research in Moldavian SSR

In the Moldavian SSR a sociological survey of groups that neither work nor study, but that are of an age capable of earning a living, was carried out. (3) In answer to the question of what circumstances they would be ready to work under, 22% declared themselves willing to work part-time; of these, 90% were women. They gave family responsibilities as the reason for not being willing to work 8 hours a day. Among women over 40 the state of their health was also given as a reason. (3) In the towns of the Moldavian SSR another sociological study of workers and employees was made which revealed that in the light and tobacco industries, the electrotechnical tool industry, in trades and in the health department, an average of 12% of the women and 5% of the men wished to change to part-time work. Of the reasons

given, 65% of those questioned named the care of children, 55.8% the state of their health, 36.7% their household burdens, and 34.8% their studies. Several of those questioned gave more than one reason for their part-time work preference. In the age group up to 25, studies were given as the dominant factor. To the question of how many hours they would like to work daily, 3.7% answered with three hours, 20.9% four, 25.1% five, 50.3% six. That means the majority, i.e., 75.4%, would be willing to work five to six hours a day. (4)

Part-time Work as a New Labor Reserve

The reports on the current results of part-time work introduction also give the reasons why this form of work has succeeded so slowly. Thus, poor information about its possibilities is named; neither is the population sufficiently aware that part-time work is possible, nor do the administrations of plants know how far they are authorized to employ part-time workers. A further reason is the fear on the part of administrators that urging part-time work will cause many workers and employees, who have worked 8 hours up to now, to opt for part-time work. In this regard, several concrete cases are referred to in which such wishes really emerged. The experts try to calm the directors by pointing out, justifiably, that labor fluctuation brings much higher losses in operations with a strict eight-hour day than would the feared transition of some workers to part-time schedules. Some operations face great difficulties in introducing part-time work, which cannot even be solved by organizational measures. In other branches of industry, however, the introduction of part-time work causes no difficulties at all. There are particularly good possibilities in the service industries. There workers of different age groups and various occupations can easily become part-time employees, e.g., postmen, salesmen, cashiers, waiters, dish washers, nurses and kindergarten teachers.

It took a long time for this kind of work to make its way in the ponderous and bureaucratic Soviet system -- the breakthrough dates just from 1970. That which was earlier handled with distrust and rejection is now conspicuously proclaimed, and the party bureaucracy and plant directors are joyful over their new "discovery." Thus, they stress

that the possibility exists of gaining new workers with the help of part-time work opportunities, diminishing labor fluctuations, and raising work productivity.

- (1) A. Novitsky and M. Babkina, "Trudyashchiesya s nepolnym rabochim vremenem - rezerv trudovykh resursov," (Handling Part-time Work - A Reserve in Labor), Sotsialistichesky trud, No. 9, 1971, p. 104 ff.
- (2) Ibid., p. 105.
- (3) N. Shishkan, "Nepolny rabochy den' dlya zhenshchin v usloviyakh sotsializma," (Part-time Work for Women under the Conditions of Socialism), Ekonomicheskii nauki, No. 8, 1971, p. 42.
- (4) Ibid., pp. 43 and 45.