

# A Comparative Analysis towards the Workers' Participation in Management with Special Reference to The U.K., U.S.A., Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Yugoslavia, Israel, Dutch, Norway, France, Italy and India

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In the context of industries the programmes of workers' participation in management has been introduced in different countries. It is observed that much hopes have been pinned on the various forms of workers' participation. But unfortunately some methods, forms and machineries have not laid foundation for cordial industrial relations as suggested by Fisher, Waldo, (1961). Consequently, the government of various countries have introduced various forms and laid great emphasis on the workers' participation. The study has thrown light on various important and interesting aspects regarding the present system of workers' participation. The practice of workers' participation has not produced substantial results. The success of all models depends on the sincere approach of both managements and workers and trade unions. Mere formality would make only window dressing without any impact on industrial harmony. Thus a good industrial relations system should ensure a close co-operation and mutual recognition of workers and management. It is evident from this article that a comparative analysis of the international experience with reference to various countries has proved that it is a long journey to go for attaining a cordial industrial relations scene.

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## Introduction

Trade unionism in the USA and European countries as well as in India is identical. But the attitudes and approaches of trade unions substantially differ. While informal relation is largely emphasized in the U.S.A., relation is as formal as possible in India and in European countries. Workers' participation in management plays a vital role in industrial relations. American and Indian trade unions concentrate mainly on bargaining, while direct actions like strikes, lockouts, intimidation, etc. are very common in India. While workers'

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participation in management is a smooth path for collective bargaining, Denmark concentrates more on constructive programmes. Workers in Europe generally deal with almost all the socio-economic problems that face workers and industry, which is appreciable. Commenting on the functions of European workers Cordval (1978) observed that organizations which had hitherto dealt only with question of wages and condition of work affecting their members would now be involved in an expanded range of matters including employment questions and over-all social and economic policies.

A voluntary mutual relation has existed in British industries in the past, which is being replaced by an institutional based on an effective, mutual informal communication system. The American experience seems to be very effective. Employers are greatly concerned about the well being of their employees in Sweden which motivates the workers to make the best possible contribution for the achievement of corporate objectives even when a serious dispute exists between workers and management.

The decision at worker's participation may become law in Denmark. workers' participation and trade unions make a lot of other positive contributions to the State. Indian trade unions and workers can follow the practice of Danish in respect of constructive contribution to economy. Indian management may try to experiment with the "quality of work life" approach of American management and the concern for the workers of the Swedish management. The integrated approach would succeed to establish a cordial industrial relations scene in the years to come.

#### **International Experience: A Comparative Evaluation**

The analytical framework provided in this article proves that Co-determination has succeeded in gaining the confidence of worker's and an in Germany where an effective mutual communication system and a spirit of co-operation could be established. It enables the worker to foster an attitude of oneness with the enterprise. This is the very proof of the success of co-determination in Germany. Co-determination which came about with the passing of the German Co-determination Law for the coal and steel industry in 1951, has received fillip when the new Co-determination Law took effect on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1976. The previous law required that one-third of seats on supervisory board should be occupied by worker's representatives in all the companies engaging 500 or more employees. The 1976 Law has gone a step further to stipulate parity representation in the supervisory boards of all the companies employing over 2,000 workers. It means that half of the members of the supervisory boards consisting of 12, 16 or 20 members on the basis of the size of the firms, should be employee's representatives. Having one-third of the seats on the supervisory board filled by workers made no real difference

in the running of the company. German workers and the trade unions are enlightened and they are more considerate about their own enterprises than anything else. They make their positive contributions. Even though the managements had anxiety in the beginning, it was soon discovered that the workers' minority could be overcome in any voting situation, allowing management to protect its interest. It became clear that the general Co-determination Law really did not give the worker's any rights at all at the board level. It was necessary to listen to the workers but their votes did not really count. However, some firms have invented new ways and means to get rid of Co-determination. Some firms, for example changed their or of incorporation so as to become exempt from the law; others were divided up into smaller companies in order to be below the limit of 500 employees. Mr. Voigt, (1962) have opinion that the American MNCs often turned their subsidiaries into trading companies incorporated in the U.S, thus avoiding German jurisdiction. In spite of the prevailing anxiety and reservation of managements Co-determination has given some good result. Renato Mazzolini (1978) observes that Management soon realized, however, that co-determination had certain advantages. Co-determination has helped many German firms to avoid strikes. The presence of workers on boards has allowed management to discover what impact its decisions will have on employees and unions, thus minimizing conflicts. Workers representatives have even helped management reduce the size of its workforce in times of recession, and have suggested means of reducing production when necessary. Open battles are rare in German supervisory boards and many votes are unanimous; the neutral eleventh man is almost never called upon to break a tie. Thus management found that it could live with board where one third of the sits belonged subjected to many limitations in co-determination; it has become ineffective due to inadequate representation of workers in many cases. It is in this context that the party representation of 1976 is to be considered. Half the members represent the shareholders, and the other half represents the employees. The employee representative must include at last one hourly-employee, one salaried employee, and one senior management employee, in addition the may include two union officials from outside the firm (get three in a board with 20 members). The chairman and the deputy chairman are to be elected by a two-thirds majority. If this majority cannot be found, the shareholders representatives elect the chairman and the employee representative elect the deputy chairman. The chairman has the deciding the vote. Therefore numerical party is more apart than real: if there is a deadlock, the shareholders will prevail. Still entrepreneur fear that parity membership would be a threat to free enterprise. Given the fact that management and stockholders representative still effectively retain control in conflicting situations, the actual decision making power will not

undergo much of a shift. This is all the more so in view of the fact that co-determination takes place at the level of supervisory Board whose role is really not so much to exercise an entrepreneurial, executive, or decision-making function as to control, approve, and monitor the activities of the Managing Board, the actual governing body of the enterprise. At the most, the system will prevent management from making decisions which are unduly damaging from labor viewpoint. It is believed that Co-determination would be a guiding force to ensure greater involvement of workers. At the supervisory board, workers' representatives can function as watchdogs while at the Works Council level day-to-day problems can be tackled. However, managements, especially multinational and foreign managements, are very anxious about their existence. Referring to a chief executive of coal and steel industries where parity Co-determination existed for over 25 years, Mr. Renato Mazzolini (1978) points out that the main advantage of such a system has been communication and conflict resolution. In the situation of Germany it would create trust and dependence between management and workers. However, it is not yet time to pass a comment on the effectiveness of parity Co-determination in Germany, for which one has to wait and see for a considerable time.

Workers' self management can specifically be associated with Yugoslavia system. It is workers who manage the business for themselves. While the workers, themselves, manage the business from bottom to top, the director who is paid employee of the company looks after the day-to-day business on behalf of the workers. Economic unit which is the smallest functional unit at the shop floor level looks after the shop floor functioning while the workers council is the top body which governs the whole show. Both management group and management board function in between the economic unit and workers' council. The workers are more concerned with the day-to-day affairs, and there is proper communication between the directors and different bodies of the workers. Mazzolini (1978), on the basis of extensive series of interviews with leading executives throughout Europe, observe that co-determination, the system pioneered by West Germany can actually have beneficial effects for management. These benefits, however, can only accrue where there is a spirit of co-operation between labour and management. Yugoslav model is a direct deviation from Stalinism. It is more ideological. Local committees of the people have also got a say in the management of the enterprise. Though self-management may be helpful to get more co-operation of the workers, it may lead to inefficient management too. It is felt that the Yugoslavian system diverts more resources towards welfare and wages at the cost of further growth and development. It can be detrimental to the overall economic development of the country. It, however, prevents the workers' exploitation, which is treated as the greatest advantage of the system. It should be noticed

that workers' self-management cannot be a remedy for the illness of all the industries or industrial relations. Virmani (1978) observed that one criticism is that the Yugoslavian self-management is not a panacea ...Even if it can work in a Communist country, its applicability in a country like India is very limited.

While the systems in Germany and Yugoslavia have been the result of statutory compulsion, it has been a spontaneous movement in France. Hence in the beginning works committee was a success formality, and consequently it has become more or less effective. Trade unions in France play a very vital role in the participation. However, work committee mechanism does not help reduce industrial disputes or tension, and thus it has failed to achieve its economic objective, mainly because the trade unions do not take much interest in the economic aspects of business. They remain silent spectators or sleeping partners which ultimately leads the committee to be a mere formality.

On the contrary in Israel, workers' participation has been initiated by trade union. But even in the business enterprises run by the same trade union, worker's participation has not succeeded in achieving the objective; though it is has not been a cent per cent failure. France, the U.K., Poland and Israel try to treat joint consultation as model of participation. In the U.K. much publicity has been given to joint consultation. As per ICO report all the publicity and propaganda of the last few years have resulted in the wide acceptance by industry and indeed by the general public of the need for joint consultation between management and workers. Same is the case with Canada where joint production committees play a very notable role in the improvement of relation and communication between employers and workers. This has created a team spirit and is largely reflected in the efficiency of the production process. The philosophy of joint consultation in Belgium is not universally approved, even though a few enterprises have experimented with it and have gained results. However, joint consultation in the U.K. has not been taken seriously both by workers and the managements and the initial enthusiasm has vanished with passage of time. Unless an effective communication channel is established between the workers and the managements which would facilitate frequent mutual consultation, consideration and discussion of everything concerned with the unit, and unless the workers are taken into confidence by the management, it is difficult for a formal programme of workers' participation to become successful. In France the government commissioned a committee chaired by Pierre Sudreau, a former Minister, to study company reform. The committee's report was submitted in February 1975, and the government has since then evinced considerable interest but no signs of legislation as yet. Co-management is one of the issues addressed in the report. It also deals with a broad range of issues, including transformation of daily activity, working

conditions, employee relationship and company structure. The report first recommends that employee be provided with better information on the conduct of the firm. In particular, each foreign multinational is under obligation to appoint a representative to its French subsidiary to account for the policies and conduct for the total enterprise. Further the report calls for co-supervision though in rather elusive terms. It is hoped that full discussion will be held before the end of the decade on the possibility of a compulsory system whereby employee representatives with full voting rights would occupy one-third of the seats on the board or supervisory boards for enterprises of certain size for the purpose of monitoring management's decision and actions. Widespread opposition has already been evoked against this recommendation.

The Dutch system of Co-determination has existed since 1971, and is required in all companies with a minimum capital of ten million guilders and employing at least 100 workers in the country. The system was proposed in 1969 by the Socio-Economic Council which considered it desirable that both employees and shareholders should have confidence in the members of the supervisory council. Employees should therefore have same influence as that of shareholders over the composition of the council. But direct representation was rejected because it was felt that there was too great a risk of polarisation. Therefore, a system of "co-option" was recommended in order to preserve a greater degree of homogeneity while giving owners and workers an equal opportunity to determine the number of members on the board. Under the co-option system new members of the supervisory council are appointed by the existing members. The shareholders' meeting, the enterprise council, the management board and the supervisory board itself may advance nominations. No person, however, can be nominated, if he is in the service of the company or of a trade union involved in determining working conditions for the company concerned.

The Danish Companies Act of June 1973 gives to the employees of companies employing at least fifty workers the right but not the duty, to elect to the Board of Directors two members in addition to those elected by shareholders. The articles of association may provide for a large number of employee representatives or for one or more representatives appointed by others, such as public authorities. The majority of the members of the Board, however, are always to be elected by shareholders. In Sweden, voluntarism had been the critical word for many years. The extent to which labour participated in management was decided in the national collective bargaining agreements. This approach unsatisfactory during the early 1970s, when a wave of strikes plagued Swedish industry. Labour began pressing for legislation guaranteeing workers' rights, and ultimately gained the right to place two worker elected directors on the Boards of companies employing more than 500 workers.

This option has been exercised by 65 per cent of the companies. Unions have the right to hire, at company's expense, an outside consultant to examine company records and future plans. The Democracy at Work Act which became effective on January 1, 1977, throws open all management decisions to union examination and calls for total disclosure of manpower and investment plans. It gives a practical veto to workers on issues of massive transfers, sale of the firm, and major organizational changes. It forces employers to negotiate agreements on many management matters and, in the case of failure to reach accord, places the decision in the hands of a national panel, and, ultimately, the national Labour Court. The Swedish unions have opted for the collective bargaining path rather than strive for greater influence in the board room because of the efficiency of the collective bargaining system in the country. Also, Swedish unions feel that worker-elected directors end up with split loyalties, thus limiting the effectiveness with which they defend employers' interests.

In Norway there has also been a movement towards legislating for workers, rights. The legislation of 1973 established here company assemblies with one third workers representation. These bodies were given final justification over major investment reorganizations and other substantial decisions. Mr. Garson G. D. (1977) commented that new legislation passed in 1976 provided that technology, work organization, working hours and pay system should not subject workers to unhealthy physical or psychological conditions. Self-management and professional responsibility are encouraged.

Certain interesting fact have been brought out by a recent study conducted in Denmark by Mr. R. D. Pricop (1977) : (1) it may take three to four years before a worker director has a full grasp of what happens at board meetings. (2) Senior non-manual workers with seat on the board face a potential conflict of interest resulting from the fact that while they represent all of the company's employees, they tend to view issues through managements eyes. (3) For similar reasons the manual workers on a board are likely to be confronted with a serious conflict of interest when issues arise affecting their own work groups. Commenting on the Danish situation, one executive said: "From the employers' situation the system appears to work smoothly. Not much has really changed in the way companies actually behave from a strategic point of view. Workers' representative seems to have neither the competence nor the will to get involved in policy level decision making. Up to now, they really have gone along with what employer representatives have proposed. Not only in Denmark, but also in Sweden, managements are critical about the recent trends of participation. As described by Mr. R.D. Pricop that the Swedish employers' confederation and the executives have pointed out certain genuine difficulties, they are: (1) The clause which gives

workers the right to veto managements choice of subcontractors is a special threat. Many of us see this as breakthrough in the workers' growing desire to exert control over decision making. The veto right is a very strong weapon in the hands of the unions. It will be a problem because the whole building and construction industry depends upon a system of subcontractors. (2) The new law increases the danger of control from the powerful central unions and of infiltration by left wing people. (3) It is feared that long winding union consultation will handicap national industry in meeting foreign competitions. they are concerned that the legislation is leading towards a heavy bureaucratic system whereby there are workers' committees for consultation on practically every aspect of a company's operations. Thus though there seems to be a widespread awakening in favour of workers' participation, there is equal or more scathing criticism of opposition to it throughout the world. Even in countries like U.K., France and Italy real workers' participation is still not claimed. The worker-management relation is revealed in the traditional way of overt confrontation. Non-co-operation and militant confrontation with managements which resulted in a virtual absence of any sincere attempt by workers to "co-manage" business is a common scene in these countries. Especially in the leftist-dominated union movements of Italy and France, labour's traditional position has been one of the class struggle. Mazzolini (1978) have focused that Led by the Communist Party, unionists in these countries have sought to dissociate themselves generally from the Co-determination model. The general impression of managements in these countries cannot be ignored. Unions don't want to be co-responsible for the conduct of the enterprise or the management of the capitalist system in general. They want to be on the other side of the table and just try to maximize their parochial interests-their members' well-being and their political aims. Trade unions are interested in immediate gains of higher pay, improved social benefits, better working conditions, job security, etc., even at the cost of the survival of the enterprise, but their long-term interests are political. In a situation where the workers are controlled and guided by trade unions with vested interests of political motivations, deputing such trade union leaders to the Director Board of the Companies would be detrimental to the long-term interests of the enterprise. Placing them in a controlling position is all the more suicidal. In the words of a French executive, "Labour really only puts certain pressures on us. But it really doesn't co-manage."

British employers seem relatively less worried than others in Europe about the principle of Co-determination. Their prime concerns focus on certain particular aspects of the bullock report. Thus, the Confederation of British Industry has made public a proposal which, though falling short of the Bullock report, does make some provisions for participation : (a) Companies with



over 2,000 workers should negotiate participation agreements ; (b) if after four years no agreement has been reached ,then participation could be legally enforced by a new tripartite agency ; (c) both voluntary and enforced agreement would have to conform to the legislation setting out guidelines for them ; (d) all agreements must be endorsed by as secret ballot of the entire that work-force. Most managers who were interviewed agree that some worker representation at the board level is desirable, but are opposed to 50-50 representation. Furthermore, management tends to be worried that Co-determination will not in fact solve Britain's social and labour problems. Co-management will be little benefit unless it is accompanied by reform of Britain's chaotic and strike-prone system of collective bargaining. It can be summarized that the proposals of the Bullock Committee report do not threaten, in themselves, to revolutionise the behavior of British industries. But thinkers feel that participation would not yield the expected results in terms of improving labour relations and productivity if it is missed for other ends. On the basis of the past histories, managements fear that the trade union leaders would make use of the first opportunity for misusing the participation philosophy; then it would be self-defeating. It is feared that trade unions would take advantage of participation simply for political and vested ends while employers may react strongly; this would further increase social tension. Yet European Economic Community, especially, Sweden, Holland and Denmark, are now thinking of making legislation to improve their workers' participation practice. In Sweden at present there is a move for the formation of an employee fund out of profit-sharing. Local trade union may control the share votes and when the employee fund owns 20 per cent of the company's share, local trade union may elect its member to the board of companies. In Denmark proposal is already formulated to create wage earners fund. In Holland, a central fund is proposed which identical to the wage earners' fund. A portion of the excess profit of the company should be transferred to this fund, which can be used for improving old age pension. Fifteen per cent of the excess profits would be transferred to this fund up to 1980 and 18 per cent thereafter. While the Swedish Employers' Confederation fears that the unions would grab the control of the whole business activities within 5 years if the new Co-determination Law progresses at the present speed, the wage earners' fund suggested in Denmark is equally controversial.

There is no controversy that collective bargaining cannot be an alternative to workers' participation. Both are different and their scope and functions are also different. However, collective bargaining can be used as a means of industrial democracy, which is mainly practiced in U.S.A. While workers' participation is a means of industrial democracy, collective bargaining with wider scope, is also a technique to attain worker-management compromise,

co-operation and industrial peace. In the U.S.A. collective bargaining is much widely used, as the chief means for industrial democracy. Sturmtal Adolf F. (1978) observes: "The belief that collective bargaining is the main road towards industrial democracy, and that the collective agreement in its widest sense is its principal expression, is almost unchallenged by contemporary thought in the United States."<sup>19</sup> As early as in 1920<sub>s</sub> the U.S. enterprises had formed elected bodies of workers according to the "employee representation plans." These bodies sat together with the managements to discuss problems of mutual interest, especially, personnel and welfare matters and the demands of working class. Of course, it could not survive the great depression of 1930<sub>s</sub>. However, the communication and consultation system which existed in 1920<sub>s</sub> is still in vogue in the American industry. American trade unions are actively involved in grievance procedures and the settlement of disputes through arbitration. Trade unions are enlightened and they concentrate more attention on the development of the industry than their own personal problems. Thus the area of workers' involvement is expanding continually. The continuous bargaining and the formation of union management bodies to study and report on the complex issues are the recent developments. Rather than a formal worker participation scheme, an effective communication system is much more emphasized in the American industry. Trade unions are highly involved in settling disputes rather than creating them. The managements have, therefore, no hesitation to encourage the profit sharing scheme; and the workers do not evade their responsibility contributing their mite to solve production problems and in reducing cost, according to Scanlon plan. Thus a mutual trust and dependence exist in the American industry. Trade unions never see the capitalist managements as their enemies while managements treat trade unions as part and parcel of the industry. No prestige issue exists between the managements and the workers, say trade unions, to sit around a table, discuss their problems and evolve solutions. Most of the workers are not interested in formal participation in management.

The practice is just the reverse in communist countries. No formal participation is treated necessary in such countries. The dictatorship of the proletariat exists and it is assumed that the industries are managed by the workers. Industrial relations are totally controlled by the centralized system of government. Even in other countries Communist trade unions are not interested in the present type of participation. They aim at overthrowing the capitalist society.

The present conceptualization of worker' participation should also undergo a major change. Mere delegation of power from the managements to a person from among the workers cannot be an effective type of workers' participation in the real sense in the Indian conditions. Effective participation of workers

should mean workers' actual involvement in the affairs of the enterprise from bottom to top. Commenting on this aspect Agarwal (1977) observes : It will be more practical and realistic to regard workers' participation in management as workers' involvement in the decision-making process rather than as building block in the structure of industrial democracy. It is obvious that the management of privately owned organization will accept any scheme of worker' participation in management only if they find it functional to the achievement to organizational goals.

Workers' participation in management should be a means for the actual workers to get himself trained to share responsibility as well as information. It should positively contribute to the progress of the enterprise. It should create a channel of effective communication between each worker and the management on the other hand and reduce tension on the other. But the present worker-director concept enables a trade union leader (possibly a political leader) to be inducted to the Board Room, which compels the entrepreneurs (managements) to surrender a portion of their authority and powers to an outsider, which no management would like. This, instead of stimulating progress of the enterprise, would lead to inter-union and intra-union rivalries and management-workers rivalry. It is, therefore, a hindrance to effective functioning and a threat to industrial growth, as a whole. Hence the management would not be willing to delegate their powers in such a situation. This should be the reason why writers like Rao (1977) assert that the experiences, elsewhere on the subject, however, do not seem to show the enterprise level participating to be an effective one.

Agreeing with P.L .Tandon and Shervani, Rao has preferred to have equity participation of workers which he called workers' participation in capital. But as a matter of fact this would be possible only when the workers are more enlightened and educated, and earn sufficient surplus saving. On the contrary, the ordinary workers in India seldom gain little surplus or savings. Most of them are at subsistence or less than subsistence level. Even if some of them can afford to have their participation in capital, they are not willing to do so for want of adequate education in these lines. If at all a few of them do make capital participation, what about the remaining majority of workers? Hence there should be a technique to ensure the effective involvement of all the workers in the enterprise.

### **Conclusion**

In this article it can be asserted that effective participation does not mean that everybody, or a particular leader of a particular union, should have a say in everything. Actual competence should be the real basis of authority. A person in authority without know how of thing and interest and who does

aim at the progress of the enterprise will be detrimental to progress of the organization. At the same time other unions and workers except those who are close to the sad representative will be discounted affecting the progress of the enterprise. In fact most of the ordinary workers do not wish to share the authority, but they wish to get involved in the affairs in an effective manner.

The analytical framework provided in this article has unveiled the attitudes and approaches of worker and management towards the practice of workers' participation in various countries. It is evident that the workers' participation proposition, irrespective of the operational distinction, has succeeded in achieving its objective only to a very limited extent in many countries. In fact the effectiveness has been insignificant in most of the cases. The underlying objective of workers' participation is to establish a good communication system and mutual understanding between the managements and the workers. It should create a sense of belonging in the workers and an attitude of trust in the managements, which would ultimately lead to cordial and harmonious employer-employee relations. It should prevent exploitation of working class and stimulate productivity. In many countries, it can be noticed, its objectives have not been satisfactorily achieved. Unless workers' participation scheme helps to establish a proper and effective communication system between the workers and their employers, the scheme would never become successful. This is what we see from the experience throughout the world. Indian experience is also not much different from the experience elsewhere.

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