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Socialist Bargaining

The Power Resource Approach in
Socialist Economies

Workers of the World, June 30th 2017

Labour History

„The time has not yet come to overcome the glaring discrepancy between the political role assignments of the ‘working classes’ in the socialist planned economies (and more broadly in the real-existing state socialist countries) and the knowledge about their social-historical dimensions” (Tenfelde, 2005)

Point of departure

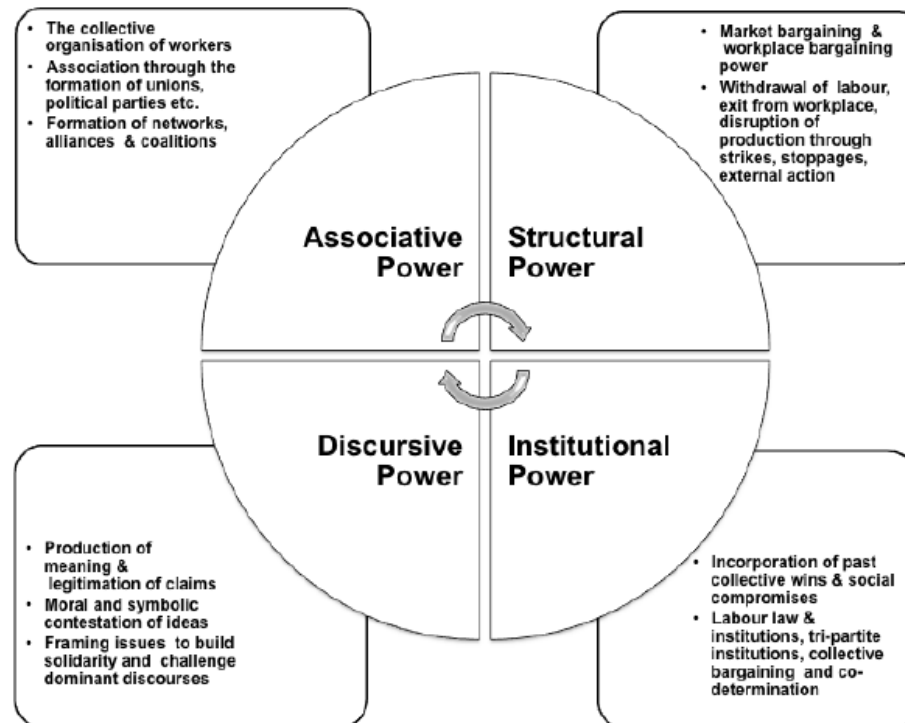
- ❌ Irrelevance of trade unions in bargaining
- ❌ Individual bargaining promoted by management (and state)
- ❌ BUT: different direction: lack of commodification

Bargaining as a key to socialist labour relations

- „the political economy of state-socialist societies can be interpreted not as a „command economy“, but as a system of bargaining.“ (Sabel/Stark 1987)
- „By now the use of the word ‘bargaining’ has become completely general, indicating that every instruction, desire, and distribution of resources coming from the control sphere may be an object of bargaining” (Laky 1979)

Power Resource Approach

Diagram 1. Forms and manifestations of union power



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Drawn from Silver (2003), Chun (2005 and 2009), Webster et al. (2008) Dörre et al. (2009), Frege et al. (2004), Tattersall (2010), and Hajer (1995)

Structural power

*„results from the workers position in within the economic system“
(Wright, 2000)*

Permanently tight labour markets (labour market power)

High labour turnover (labour market power)

Secondary economy (labour market power)

Hold production back (production power)

Weak position of masters (production power)

Associational power

„the various forms of power that result from the formation of collective organizations of workers“ (Wright, 2000)

Density

Double-function of trade unions

Individualisation

Institutional power

a derivative, a secondary power source reflecting and preserving past conflicts (Brinkmann, 2013)

Constitution

Labour code

Collective agreements

Societal power

„Viable cooperation relationships with other social groups and organizations, as well as the societies support for trade union demands“ (Schmalz/Dörre, 2014)

Management (coalitional power)

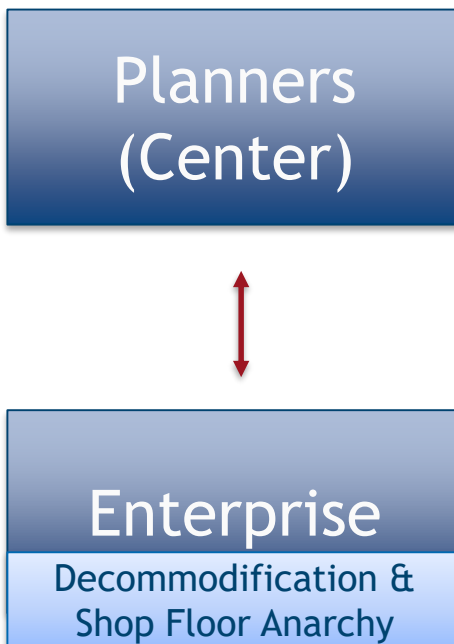
Local government (coalition power)

Political demands (coalition power)

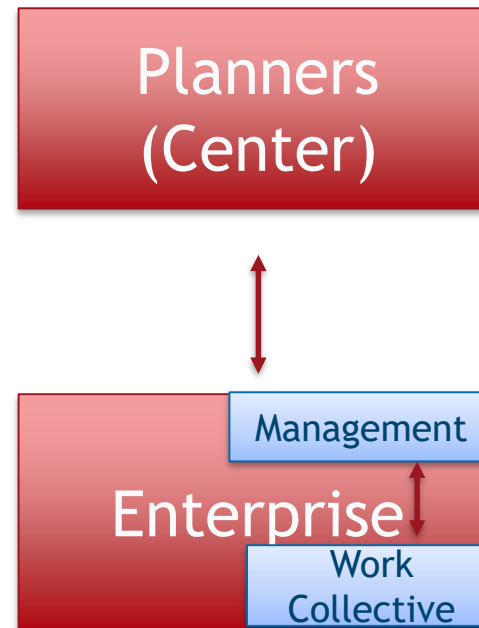
Workers' ideology (discursive power)

Change in socialist labour relations

administrative-command system



reform system



Conclusion

- ❏ Reform system as a precondition for economic transition
- ❏ Reform system a starting point for transformation studies
- ❏ Emergence of collective labour relations leads to commodification
- ❏ Commodification as a precondition to talk about labour relations?