

C W MILLS, INDUSTRIAL SOCIOLOGY & WORKER PARTICIPATION PROGRAMS

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MILLS' THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Mills' 1948 article, "The Contribution of Sociology to Studies of Industrial Relations" castigated applied sociologists and the human relations school of management for lending themselves to management as consultants. In his critique, he charged that the human relations school was trying to create a "pseudo-gemeinschaft" atmosphere in an authoritarian industrial setting by manipulating workers and their informal groups to follow cheerfully the directives of management. Manipulation occurred through consulting with workers and listening sympathetically to their complaints so as to gain their cooperation and confidence. The human relations "counselor" may even be able to compete with the shop steward or coopt the union into "promoting collaboration in the pursuit of a collective goal." Intelligent human relations management should make happy, cooperative workers without changing the social structure of the workplace.

Why does Mills see this as a problem when it would appear that human relations management works, and that management, shareholders and workers are happy? Morale, productivity, and profit should rise. Alienation, absenteeism, turnover, strikes, and industrial conflict should fall. With a simple grid shown in Figure 1, Mills shows the subjective and objective possibilities of worker morale, and explains why this school of management is a "sophisticated conservative" approach which in no way liberates the worker.

Mills is saying that the pseudo-participation of human relations management, if it is successful, places the "cheerful robot" in Cell 2 of Figure 1. It does not really allow the worker decision-making participation, as in Cell 1. Cell 1 participation implies either the social structure available to the old-fashion craftsman who was self-managing, or to workers' control under some new structure. Cell 3 contains workers who do participate, but still do not like the work — hopeless malcontents who remain unadjusted. Cell 4 contains those workers who are alienated as in Cell 3, but who have not been manipulated into false consciousness like the cheerful robots of Cell 2.

FIGURE 1: MORALE ANALYSIS MODEL

	Objective Power Structure Participates	Does not Participates
Individual's Subjective State	Cheerful, willing 1	2
Sullen, unwilling 3	4	

Adapted from C W Mills, "Contribution of Sociology to Studies of Industrial Relations," reprinted 1970 in *Berkeley J of Sociol* 15 24.

Cell 4 is what management has on its hands if it does not apply human relations methods, or if management bungles it.

Mills holds that what social scientists should be seeking is not the management goal of Cell 2 but the humanist Marxian goal of Cell 1. Sociologists and other social scientists have been willing to allow the structure of the workplace to shift from the left side of worker participation in decision-making to the right side of authoritarian power relations without batting an eye. In pursuing their own career development, social scientists have accepted management's definition of the problem of morale and productivity, allowing their political range of alternatives to narrow and atrophy. Mills castigates the social scientists of the 1940's for being so apolitical in their pursuit of the technician role that they cannot "sell out" something they do not have.

From "The Marxists," (1962) Mills' preferences on "self-managing" and "workers' control" can be distinguished. He does not want either economic influence or political direction from a small financial capitalist class, or the authoritarian dictates of a bureaucratic state-controlled economy. He wants a form of social democracy exemplified in the theories of Kautsky, Luxemburg, syndicalist G D H Cole, and grassroots economic democracy incipient in the Yugoslavian workers' council experiences. Decentralized decision-making should be based on worker control/democracy in the economic sector. Is there one pattern, good for all the world? No. The sociological imagination knows that in each culture and historical time, grassroots democracy might work itself out differently. The paths to that

devolution of decision-making for the "little man" might be different.

Mills feels fervently that worker participation in decision-making is, or should be the goal of social scientists' endeavors. He described himself as a "plain marxist," meaning that theory and praxis should be used in a dialectical manner, continually to improve workers' knowledge of their social condition. Social scientists should be on the forefront of exposing how people have been shaped by their social structures and how, they can consciously reshape their future structures through public policy decisions.

"In their work, plain marxists have stressed the humanism of marxism, especially of the younger Marx, and the role of the superstructure in history; they have pointed out that to underemphasize the *interplay* of bases and superstructure in the making of history is to transform man into that abstraction for which Marx himself criticized Feurbach. ... They have emphasized the volition of men in the making of history — their freedom, in contrast to any Determinist Laws of History and, accordingly, the lack of individual responsibility." (Mills 1962 99);

The central theme of all Mills' work was that a critical social science must promote freedom and democracy. Men in "publics" must have the ability to formulate the "available choices," to argue over them — then the opportunity to choose." (Mills 1959 174) A critical social science must provide information to these publics (Ford 1978; Scimecca 1977). The overall macrostructure of society must be understood first, because it is the institutional structure which gives the framework for social roles. Social roles are the basic point of contact between the individual and society -- particularly the occupational role. Most communicative action takes place within roles. Basic motivations, skills, values, and social codes are learned as parts of social roles that an individual plays or prepares to play in the future. All cultural phenomena -- language, ideology, symbols, communications -- all types of individual character structure, all social roles occur within an overall historically specific social structure. Without a framework of institutions, norms, and roles, there could not be shared meanings and shared expectations.

In trying to include both structural and cultural factors in his model, Mills insists on a model in which the social scientist can tack between macro and micro, between broad theory and empirical studies, in a society's historical development and in individuals' collective biographies (Ford 1978 26).

Mills wants all persons, not just managers, to participate in decision-making which will affect their lives. The most important roles which people play are their occupational roles. These roles have helped to shape peoples' lives and thinking, and are the locus for what Mills feels should be a primary place for decision-making and growth. People cannot understand these roles without understanding how the roles are a part of the macro institutional structure. If theoretical and applied sociologists do not work to promote this end, they have failed. Worse yet, they have become a political tool by allowing themselves to be used by elites.

THE WORKER PARTICIPATION MOVEMENT

The 1970's have seen a groundswell of interest in worker participation. The overall economy among the industrial nations of the world has seen a slump after a relatively long period of economic gains since World War II. In the United States, in addition to the inflation seen elsewhere in the world, there has been a slowdown in the growth of productivity as measured by the ratio of real output to labor hour input. In the manufacturing sector, both in the United States and Great Britain, between 1967 and 1977, labor productivity increased 27 percent. During the same period, labor productivity in the manufacturing sector increased 107 percent in Japan, 72 percent in France, 70 percent in West Germany, 62 percent in Italy, and 43 percent in Canada (McConnell 1979 38). In the 1973-1977 period the United States has slowed to an annual growth rate in labor productivity of only 1.2 percent per annum (Economic Impact Report 1977 45).

The economic problems of United States workers have been compounded by the increase in plant shutdowns as corporations close subsidiaries or move the plants to other countries and to less unionized areas. Corporations which are labor intensive seek the

more docile, more tractable, and less costly labor force of the South, or Third World countries. Equally important, and sometimes overlooked in the rush to blame United States labor unions, is the tax break for foreign investment given by the United States, foreign governments, and some southern states, and the tax write-off for dumping less profitable plants.

United States firms have an advantage of operating from inside the European Economic Community to avoid trade barriers which they would have encountered in attempting to export from the United States. Of the United States multinational investments in 1982, 75 percent were in other industrial countries in Europe, where tax break and trade barrier relief were the chief concern, or where financial and service functions which must be performed on the spot were offered (Dollars & Sense 1982; DeVos 1981; Moberg 1979; Bluestone, Harrison 1980). Over 60 of these plants have been salvaged from shutdown by employee and community buyout (Rosen 1981).

Other factors have caught the interest of some management, worker, and union personnel, and some social scientists regarding worker participation. Labor is not satisfied. The labor force is more educated, with 12.7 median years of education (Bureau of Labor Statistics 1981). This and the long period of relative prosperity have increased expectations for more interesting work and more responsibility (Frieden 1980 41). The civil rights and women's liberation movements must also be credited for their impact on cultural values concerning participation, individual rights, and the impetus to change traditional social roles.

In the postwar period came the *demonstration effect* of successes in worker participation from Europe and Japan (Frieden 1980 20; Jenkins 1974 92, 176, 246). Workers' councils have been used in all Western European countries, usually by legislative mandate, and six countries require workers' representatives on company boards of directors (Schwartz 1981 4). Shopfloor participation has been spreading in Great Britain and Italy (Hill 1981 147). Yugoslavia remains the prime example of worker control of industry (Vanek 1971 39; Zwerdling 1980 159). Japan has about

10 million workers participating in shopfloor level quality circles to raise problematic issues, discuss them, and suggest solutions to management (DeWar 1979 9). The Mondragon system in the Basque region of Spain has stimulated interest abroad in industrial and producer cooperatives. Since the introduction of the first industrial co-op in 1956, the network has grown to over 80 industrial co-ops and more than 20 service and consumer co-ops, including a co-op bank, medical, day care, and educational services and retail establishments (Thomas, Logan 1982; Mollner 1982).

U.S. WORKER PARTICIPATION PLANS

There have been several attempts at worker participation plans in the United States. The Northwest plywood cooperatives are the best known producer co-ops, 16 of which still exist (Zwerdling 1980 95; Berman 1967; Bernstein 1974). Scanlon plans have been well known since the 1940's, and a 1967 estimate placed the number at 500 (Frieden 1980 27; Jenkins 1974 222). Other companies have been using profit-sharing plans, quality circles, and *Employee Stock Ownership Plans* (ESOP) which were facilitated by the Employee's Investment and Retirement Act of 1974.

Mills would be interested in the degree and level of worker participation and whether the program could possibly lead to an increased awareness and involvement by the worker in decision-making in the future. The social scientist might look too, at the following: 1) Does the plan offer shopfloor decision-making, middle-level decision-making at the departmental level, or top management decision-making at the company level, with representation of the non-managerial workers on the board of directors? 2) Does the plan return a share of profits from sales or increased production value to the workers for their increased efforts? 3) Does the plan offer ownership of stock to the workers, how much of the stock is in the hands of non-managerial workers, and can they vote their stock on important company issues? 4) Is there potential for workers to increase ability for leadership and decision-making by training in problem solving and experience in decision-making with adequate encouragement and information sharing by the company?

At the level of individual job enrichment, the picture is not very encouraging. Many times, jobs have been enlarged simply by rewriting the job descriptions by managements and social scientist consultants (Jenkins 1974 168). Often, the worker is not consulted, and if no structures for group decision-making are included, a chief mechanism for democratic discussion, leadership training, and decision-making is lost.

Profit sharing plans have been in the United States since Proctor and Gamble initiated one in 1887. A 1973 estimate places the number of firms with deferred and combination plans at 150,000 and cash plans at 100,000. These plans covered 10 million employees and held between \$25 and \$30 billion in trust assets (Metzger 1974 40). These plans pay a percent of the profits on sales to all employees, either directly in cash or stock, or indirectly to employee accounts held by a trust to be paid at severance or retirement. Some companies use a combination of cash and deferred payments. The amount of stock distributed in this way is usually quite small, and is not voted by employees. These firms generally ignore participation by employees in shopfloor and managerial decision-making, with no employee committees formed. While productivity has been higher in firms with profit sharing plans, compared to earlier productivity, these companies have not been effectively compared to similar firms in their industry which have more employee participation (Frieden 1980 79).

The Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOP) may offer only individual profit sharing through stock ownership, or may offer a great deal of worker participation. ESOPs and related worker/community ownership plans have increased rapidly in the 1970's and 1980's due to plant shutdowns, tax advantages to the corporation setting up an ESOP trust, and ability of owners of small firms to have a built in-market for their stock when the owner wishes to divest without selling to a conglomerate. The corporation sets up such a trust which borrows if the company wants extra capital. The trust gives the money to the company in exchange for company stock. The company pays the trust back out of its profits each year. The trust then pays back the lender and credits shares of stock to employee

accounts, and the employees are vested with ownership of the stock at some annual percent -- usually 10 percent. The tax advantage comes from the fact that both principal and interest paid from profits to the trust are tax-free dollars. The loan has been acquired cheaply, and the employees are the recipients of stock in the company in a sweat-equity agreement. In more than half of the ESOP, employees are not allowed to vote their stock.

In more than 60 cases of employee buyouts to avoid shutdown, the entire company stock is owned by employees, sometimes in partnership with the community. Ownership does not automatically transfer control, unless control mechanisms are specifically built into the original plans. While almost all ESOPs have increased worker morale and productivity and profits in the short run, if employees' expectations of increased participation in decision-making are unfulfilled, there follows a period of strong dissatisfaction, as the well-known cases of South Bend Lathe, and Rath Packing have demonstrated (Zwerdling 1980 65). The potential for meaningful worker participation is there, but will remain dormant until structural changes are made in the organization through committees at the shopfloor level up through representation on the board and through the right of employees to vote their stock.

At the shopfloor level there are two major modes of employee participation being tried in the United States. Quality circles are becoming rather popular, according to the Quality Circle Institute (DeWar 1979). By February 1980, at least 65 companies had active quality circles and the number was increasing rapidly (DeVos 1981 95). These companies include such giants as General Motors, J C Penney, Uniroyal, General Electric, Firestone Tire and Rubber, International Harvester, Northrup and Lockheed Aviation, Rockwell International, Phillips Petroleum, Ford Motor, and the United States Navy and Federal Aviation Administration. The reason quality circles have spread so rapidly to hundreds of companies in the industrial nations may be to avoid restructuring into shopfloor teams, requiring employee stock ownership, or posing a threat to the management hierarchy.

A recent Oregon State University report

found that 75 percent of the quality circle programs die within a few years because the manner in which they are planned and operated leaves the workers feeling manipulated (Watts 1982 3). Many of these quality circles have a certain amount of autonomy, are cost effective, average acceptance of about 80 percent of their suggestions by management, tend to boost morale initially, promote a certain amount of leadership and decision-making training, and may sometimes include bonuses or profit sharing. However, they do not deal with company-level problems (DeWar 1975 15,27).

Quality circles must be structured from the beginning by both top management and by workers' representatives so that management goals of increased productivity and profits do not overshadow worker goals of participation in creating a more satisfying workplace. In the initial contact between workers and management, there must be some guarantee of worker rights, such as job security and voluntary participation, equality between union or worker representatives and management, and the goal of a better worklife.

Another form of shopfloor participation which calls for more restructuring of the workplace than does the quality circle is the shopfloor work team. The best-known example of this in the United States is the General Foods Gravy Train Plant in Topeka Kansas. The 8-person processing team and 16-person packaging-warehousing team -- one each on the three shifts -- had genuine autonomy. The work teams decided who would do what job each day. There were no job categories, and each worker was paid according to the number of jobs learned. Besides job scheduling, the teams did their own hiring and firing, maintenance and cleanup work, and quality control (Jenkins 1974 225; Zwerdling 1980 19). Productivity and profits and quality were higher than at similar conventional plants, but the project was eventually scuttled because it "worked too well," making management and staff nervous (Frieden 1980 43).

The Rushton Mining experiment with work teams of miners was also successful in terms of extra training, morale building, productivity, and safety, but was not applied company-wide. Jealousies from miners not in the experiment and from supervisors who did not have

special training and feared their loss of power, ended the experiment by a company-wide vote. Harman International Industries in Bolivar Tennessee adopted a Harman-United Auto Worker work improvement program which included virtually every worker in the factory. Shopfloor committees were developed to make their own workplace decisions. All committees contain union, management, and worker representatives. Their new employee-run newspaper presents real debates and communication about company and larger issues. While it has taken several years and many heated arguments to develop this system, the workers have continued to develop problem solving skills and have maintained their workplace participation even after the company was sold and new management assumed control (Zwerdling 1980 31).

Another plan reminiscent of quality circles but often aimed at the departmental level is the Scanlon Plan, pioneered by Joseph Scanlon in the 1930's to save a company during the depression. The basic concern was to increase productivity, but wider issues sometimes arising in quality circles are not treated. Scanlon plans send up production innovations from the shopfloor or departmental committee to management or to a plant level worker/manager committee for consideration (Zwerdling 1980 179). A base line of worker productivity is decided at the start, and subsequent profits are based on the increased value of produced goods, rather than profits from sales. Such profits are divided among employees (Frieden 1980 27). Usually, 75 percent of increased profits are reserved for the workers, and 25 percent for the company. There appears less of group interaction and training in problem-solving under Scanlon plans than in quality circles. Eight studies of Scanlon Plan applications indicate production gains in most instances and tremendous gains in a few cases (Frieden 1980 27). In both the Scanlon Plan and quality circles, the problems considered for solution are at the shopfloor or departmental level, rather than at the company level.

There are presently only a few labor-management committees. Labor-management committees began in the United States during World War II under the aegis of the War Production Board, with the blessing of the

American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations. Only the conservative National Association of Manufacturers was reluctant, seeing it as an attempt to dilute management's prerogatives (DeVos 1981 87). By 1944 there were some 5,000 plant committees which represented over 7 million workers. Many limited themselves to blood banks, car pools, and the war bond drives, but the memory lingered, and in some areas such as the steel industry, these committees continue to function. The 1970's have seen a resurgence of these committees in various forms. Some include only labor and management. Some include the community in a tripartite form. Related to these early labor-management committees is the more recent idea of the Quality of Worklife Program, but these have not dealt with worker participation in management-level decision-making.

The most thoroughgoing form of employee decision-making in the United States is the cooperative. The plywood cooperatives of the Pacific Northwest have been outproducing their conventionally owned and operated competitors since the 1920's (Berman 1967). The cooperative setup allows one vote per owner-employee. Some co-ops have retained complete worker control over decision-making; some have abdicated in favor of allowing management to make all decisions. The basic problems faced by co-ops are in assuring mechanisms for continued employee involvement and in providing a means by which all employees are owners, and by which ownership does not go outside the company through employee turnover or retirement, if departing employees sell their stock outside the company. In addition to the annual vote for the board of directors, owner-employees could participate in overlapping committees from shopfloor to plant level for active involvement. To assure that ownership does not go outside the plant, a trust could be set up to purchase the stock of departing employees on a "right of first refusal" basis, allowing new employees to purchase this stock through sweat equity over a period of time, as in an ESOP.

APPLIED SOCIAL SCIENCE IN INDUSTRY

Mills might see some improvement in the conditions under which social scientists can now operate in the applied realm of industry.

It was once widely argued that worker participation at any decision-making level was a wildly radical and impractical idea, and that workers had only muscles, and not minds, to contribute. There are those that still see the situation this way, and the majority of industries are still engaged in some combination of scientific management and human relations pseudo-participation styles. But this is becoming increasingly challenged by data from experiments and studies. In a national poll in 1975, 65 percent of the respondents were in favor of working for an employee-owned and managed firm, as opposed to a private company or government-operated organization (Whyte 1977). Yankelovich notes that his surveys of the aspirations of workers reveal a trend toward seeking freedom and choice. Having experienced the "Me decade" in which self-satisfaction came first, but was unfulfilling, and having rejected the self-denial ethic of the parental generation, young men and women workers are seeking commitment. According to Yankelovich, "Commitment is in terms of both a hunger for deeper personal relations and a yearning to belong to a community where people share many bonds in common. The meaning of life lies in finding a commitment outside one's self." (Yankelovich 1981)

In response to the growing awareness of alternative ways of structuring the workplace and the increasing readiness of workers to "do our own thing" and the advancing necessity for worker buyouts, there have been a number of state and federal laws to facilitate employee ownership and control. At the same time, organizations which offer technical and legal advice, dissemination of information on current experiments, and lobbying for favorable legislation have sprung up around the United States. The climate for worker participation has improved since Mills first wrote about industrial sociology.

Mills might agree that at the far end of the spectrum of worker participation there is a possibility of expansion to a form of social democracy capitalism. Cooperatives and ESOPs in which workers own and set policies for management are in line with his criteria for grassroots democracy. This fits his approval of G D H Cole and the early Yugoslavian efforts. He might have been even more

enthusiastic about the Mondragon system, since it demonstrates what can be done within an ongoing capitalist economic system. It is possible that he would see an increase in democracy in the workplace as a mechanism for eventually moderating the influence of the major corporations on the government.

Third, Mills would realize that this is only a possibility in the future. Today's political and economic institutions are only minimally affected by the growing idea of worker participation. Then what is the current role of the social scientist to be? Must the applied industrial social scientist concentrate only on co-ops or ESOPs which are 100 percent worker owned and directed, or is it acceptable to take assignments in industries further to the conservative side in worker participation?

Mills was always an active researcher and knowledge disseminator. He would probably advise us to take those jobs which can expand our knowledge and give us a chance to share findings with management, colleagues, and the ordinary worker. How can this be done when management defines the problem for the researcher or the consultant? What if the report is company property and strictly confidential? In answer to the first question, which is an ethical dilemma discussed for many years by social scientists, the researcher might decide to enlarge the assigned task. Instead of taking a social engineering approach and dealing only with the problem as given, the social scientist might give clients more than they asked. Enlargement of the task means that the social scientist can bring a broader framework to the research project both in theory and in a knowledge of other research and other alternative hypotheses, sharing this information with management to expand their knowledge of the situation.

The second question deals more with sharing knowledge in the other direction, with colleagues and workers. Before an assignment is accepted, it is advisable to agree explicitly with the client on what findings can be shared, and in what form. None of the firms I have approached in doing studies for the National Center for Employee Ownership have balked at sharing all kinds of information with the Center, although many have requested that the company name not be included in reports to the public. They seem anxious to contribute

to public knowledge and scientific research on organizational structure, management, worker morale, and productivity.

Today, Mills might well be an active member of the International Cooperative Association, the National Center for Employee Ownership, the Association for Workplace Democracy, the Center for Economic Alternatives, or work at the Institute for Social Research at Michigan University on the effect of worker participation on productivity, or the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University. He might even found his own applied industrial research institute. He would be irritated that things were not progressing faster, but would probably throw his energies into the struggle.

Of all sociologists, Mills best understood the value of organization, research, and getting the information to the public.

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colony would be operated by private enterprise under contract for services by the correctional authority. Advantages are as follows:

- Offenders would be socially "banished"
- Offenders build facilities for confinement.
- Construction costs would be controlled and minimized by use of less expensive materials, group living, and inmate labor.
- Public works projects would become feasible.
- Prisoner idleness would be eliminated.
- Prisoners would be paid for working, and could be required to meet personal and moral obligations from honest earnings.
- Convicts would be tax payers, and less a tax burden.
- Convicts would learn trades and skills.
- Offenders' dependents could visit at the facility.
- Under certain conditions, civilian workers could have employment in colony industries at the usual wage.
- The colony could become self-supporting.
- A substantial part of confinement costs would be transferred from the public to the offender.
- The prisoner would learn to accept responsibility for the offense, any dependents, and self-support.
- There would be fewer incidents of institutional violence, escapes, and assaults.
- The transition to self-sufficiency on release would be made easier.

NOTE: No discussion has been provided on strategies of implementation. This is *not* an oversight. For the penal colony to be designed constructed, and organized into a positive entity, I can be hired to establish it.

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