

## ETHICS OF WORK AND DISCIPLINE IN TRANSITION: ULJANIK IN LATE AND POST-SOCIALISM\*

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The article examines the development of the work discipline and the ethics of work in the shipyard Uljanik in Pula considering the period from the 1980s up to now. Combining oral sources, archival documents, and factory's magazines, one first conclusion is that in the framework of the self-management system labour discipline was certainly not severe, but neither absent. It was rather in the first half of the 1990s that work discipline vanished, before to be reinstated, in quite new forms, from the second half of the 1990s onwards. Secondly, the article shows how the workers-managers relations worsened in the post-socialist years. This caused a profound emotional detachment by the workers from their work and the factory. In the absence of the older ethics of work, and of a mutual respect between workers and managers (both directors and foremen), what seems to have remained for managing work and the workers is only contemporary labour discipline.

**Keywords:** labour history, post-socialist transition, shipbuilding industry, Croatia, ethics of work, labour discipline

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## Introduction

The issue of modern work discipline has long been recognized as a relevant topic to be investigated for better understanding historical transitions between different systems of production and work regimes. Beginning with the pioneering reflections of E.P. Thompson,<sup>1</sup> and enriched by the studies inspired by Foucauldian theories, labour historians intensively dealt with the different historical forms of work discipline for instance in Western Europe and the United States.<sup>2</sup> This has also been applied to the socialist societies,<sup>3</sup> what led a prominent scholar like Donald Filtzer to develop a pregnant thesis: that “the issue of labor discipline lay at the very heart of the antagonistic relationship between the Soviet elite and its work force”, with the result that “workers became a central [...] cause of the long-term trend toward chronic inefficiency and economic decline.”<sup>4</sup> Following this thesis, the notorious lack of discipline in Soviet factories encouraged the system's eventual collapse.

To what extent can this conclusion be applied to the Yugoslav case, and particularly to the Uljanik case? First aim of this article is, thus, to consider

<sup>1</sup> Edward P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism”, *Past and Present*, 38 (1967), 1, pp. 56-97.

<sup>2</sup> Some classic works related to the United States: David Montgomery, *Workers' Control in America: Studies in The History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1979); Donald Roy, “Work Satisfaction and Social Reward in Quota Achievement: An Analysis Of Piecework Incentive”, *American Sociological Review*, 18 (October 1953), pp. 507-14; Michael Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979). See also, about Germany: James S. Roberts, “Drink and Industrial Work Discipline in 19th Century Germany”, *Journal of Social History*, 15 (1981), 1, pp. 25-38.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of historical scholarship about (mainly industrial) workers in socialist societies, see Peter Hübner, Christoph Klessmann, Klaus Tenefelde, eds., *Arbeiter im Staatsozialismus. Ideologischer Anspruch und soziale Wirklichkeit* (Köln etc.: Böhlau, 2005); Peter Heumos, “Workers under Communist Rule. Research in the Former Socialist Countries of Eastern-Central and South-Eastern Europe and in the Federal Republic of Germany”, *International Review of Social History* 55 (2010), 1, pp. 83-115; Sabine Rutar, “Towards a Southeast European History of Labour: Examples from Yugoslavia”, in: Ead., ed., *Beyond the Balkans. Towards an Inclusive History of Southeastern Europe* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2014), pp. 325-356. For an excellent recent investigation of two Yugoslav case studies, namely two car factories, see Ulrike Schult, *Zwischen Stechuhr und Selbstverwaltung. Eine Mikrogeschichte sozialer Konflikte in der jugoslawischen Fahrzeugindustrie 1965-1985*, (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2017), particularly pp. 147-182. For an insightful post-socialist comparison: Elizabeth C. Dunn, *Privatizing Poland. Baby Food, Big Business, and the Remaking of Labor* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004). For contextualising Uljanik in a global perspective: Raquel Varela, Hugh Murphy, Marcel Van Der Linden, eds., *Shipbuilding and Ship Repair Workers around the World. Case Studies 1950-2010* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Donald Filtzer, “Labor Discipline, the Use of Work-Time and the Decline of the Soviet System, 1928–1991”, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 50 (1996), pp. 9-28, here p. 9. For a thorough discussion of the genesis of the Soviet labour relationships and the reactions to the new labour laws at the beginning and at the end of the 1930s, see D. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928-1941* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharp, 1986), 107-15, pp. 233-53.

whether the work discipline in Uljanik was slack, or even absent, as often perceived in the common opinions – both in West and in East Europe – when socialist factories are concerned. Beyond common places and superficial impressions, the questions to be answered is how was labour discipline concretely shaped and applied, and how did it develop through time. Secondly, with a more comparative approach, one should ask what the labour discipline-related dynamics can tell us about workers-managers relationships. Going back to Filtzer's work, was labour discipline in Uljanik and in Yugoslavia, like in the USSR, the result of an antagonistic relationship, even a struggle with the elite, a form of "individualized defensive action"<sup>5</sup> by the workforce?

In general terms, the analysis of the work discipline allows to enlightening the evolutions of the work relationships inside the factory, and to better understanding modes and times of the "transition". Furthermore, the focus on the work discipline offers the occasion for considering *the everyday life* in the factory, and how the "transition" to post-socialism has been experienced *from below*, ie. by those who worked and still work there<sup>6</sup>.

My thesis is that, differently from what is often believed, it has not taken place simply a transition from a regime with a lacking labour discipline, to a much more severe one. First of all, Uljanik's labour discipline had several dimensions and underwent some changes through the time, knowing different stages. Workers' control was somehow still present in the 1960s, and although

<sup>5</sup> D. Filtzer, "Labor Discipline", p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> The international research about work in socialist Yugoslavia and in the post-Yugoslav space has markedly increased in recent times. To mention but a few recent studies: Sabine Rutar, "Containing Conflict and Enforcing Consent in Titoist Yugoslavia. The 1970 Dockworkers' Strike in Koper (Slovenia)", in: *European History Quarterly*, 45 (2015), 2, pp. 275-294; Goran Musić, "They Came as Workers and Left as Serbs': The Role of Rakovica's Blue-Collar Workers in Serbian Social Mobilizations of the Late 1980s" in Rory Archer, Igor Duda and Paul Stubbs, eds., *Social Inequalities and Discontent in Yugoslav Socialism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 132-154; Ulrike Schult, *Zwischen Stechuhr und Selbstverwaltung*; Ivan Rajković, "For an anthropology of the demoralized: state pay, mock-labour, and unfreedom in a Serbian firm", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 24(2017), 1, pp. 47-70; Anna Calori, Kathrin Jurkat, "I'm Both a Worker and a Shareholder: Workers' Narratives and Property Transformations in Postsocialist Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia", *Südosteuropa. Journal of Politics and Society*, vol. 65 (2017), 4, pp. 654-678; Jasna Račić, Snježana Ivčić, Sven Cvek, "Tržište, država i kraj socijalizma: slučaj 'Borova'", in: Chiara Bonfiglioli, Boris Koroman, eds., *Socijalizam: izgradnja i razgradnja* (Zagreb and Pula: Srednja Europa, Sveučilište Jurja Dobrile u Puli, 2017), pp. 129-152; Rory Archer, "It was better when it was worse': Blue-collar narratives of the recent past in Belgrade" *Social History*, 43 (2018), 1, pp. 30-55; Sara Bernard, *Deutsch Marks in the Head, Shovel in the Hands and Yugoslavia in the Heart: the Gastarbeiter return to Yugoslavia (1965-1991)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2019); for a gender perspective: Chiara Bonfiglioli, *Women and Industry in the Balkans: The Rise and Fall of the Yugoslav Textile Sector* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019); more in general: Vladimir Unkovski-Korica, *The Economic Struggle for Power in Tito's Yugoslavia: From World War II to Non-Alignment* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016); Igor Duda, ed., *Stvaranje socijalističkoga čovjeka: hrvatsko društvo i ideologija jugoslavenskoga socijalizma* (Zagreb and Pula: Srednja Europa, Sveučilište Jurja Dobrile u Puli, 2017).

it seems that the later development of the self-management system provided the undisciplined workers with effective tools for not being easily sanctioned, this was not impossible, as often maintained. At the same time, the issue is much diversified, depending on age, education, and gender factors, as well as on the specific individual occupation in the factory structure. In general terms, it seems that it can be maintained that it was rather in the first half of the 1990s that work discipline vanished, before to be reinstated, in quite new forms, from the second half of the 1990s onwards.

A second relevant conclusion is that the changes in the field of the work discipline are deeply intertwined with changes in the field of work ethics and of the relationships between workers and managers.<sup>7</sup> In other words, in order to explain the relationships between workers and their labour performance, it is not enough to only consider the control of work time and efficiency. The workers' behaviours are deeply determined by question of honour, of reciprocal respect, of social and cultural values assigned to work, ie. by the "moral economy" (quoting again E.P. Thompson) which informs many individual and collective actions, including performances at work.

Therefore, the analysis must also include the historical evolution of work ethics and of the relationships between workers and management. The second main conclusion of this article is actually linked with these issues, showing first that a growing dissatisfaction among the workers, both blue and white collars, led during the 1990s to an increasing and widespread emotive detachment from the factory. Secondly, it seems that the personal and professional relationships between managers and workers drastically worsened in the last decades, deeply affecting workers' attitudes toward their work.

This article provides some elements in order to investigate these issues with regard to Uljanik during its late socialist and post-socialist transformation. The analysis will adopt a "scenographic" approach, ie. recurring to three "scenes" which can be condensed in three meaningful objects: the entrance gate (of the factory), the table (of the disciplinary committee), and the door (of the manager's office). Before of that, I will briefly illustrate the oral sources collected for this research and used for this article, along with archive materials kept in the Uljanik's Archive.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> I will make use of the category of "managers" for what workers generically call "bosses" (*šefovi*), an all-inclusive notion in the framework of the "cadres" (*kadrovi*). In the case that further distinctions are made, for instance between the "directors" (*direktori*) and the "foremen/supervisors" of a production unit (*poslovođa*), I will take them into account.

<sup>8</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to Radivoj Jelenić, Head of the General Affairs Unit, and all his colleagues, for the valuable and kind support.

## About the conducted interviews<sup>9</sup>

In general terms, one of the main goals in selecting the interviewees was to obtain, more than quantitatively a high number of interviews, a qualitatively very variegated sample of interviews. Therefore, both men and (although less) women were included (Table 1), as well as workers who held different professional positions: both blue and white collars, including some heads of production units and one top manager (Tables 2 and 3). The interviewees also worked in different but overlapping times, beginning with 1960s and reaching the present time (Table 4). This varied sample offers a good overview of the “transformation” of Uljanik in a historical perspective and from sometimes very different points of view.

Table 1: Distribution of the interviewees by sex

male	14
female	3

Table 2: Distribution of the interviewees by their job position at the beginning of their labor relationships (italics for women)

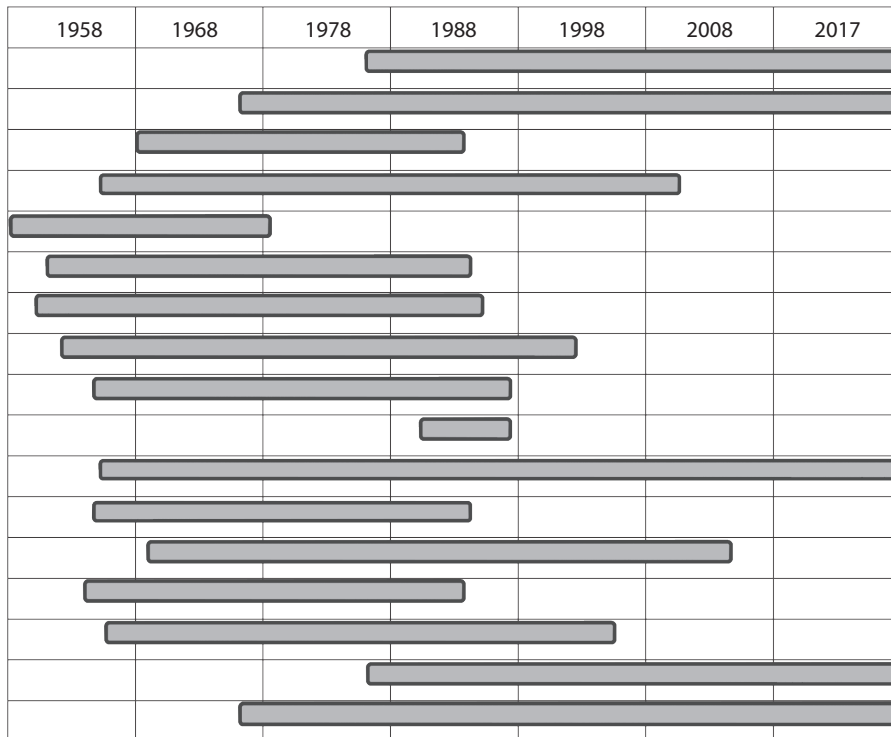
blue collars	unqualified (e.g. guardman, apprentice)	4 (Mario, Igor, Marko, Vladimir)
	qualified with lower status (e.g. phone technician, welder, blacksmith)	6 (Antonio, Josip, Milan, Davor, Filip, Luka)
	qualified with higher status (e.g. electrician, mechanic, metalworker)	2 (Damir, Ivan)
	highly qualified (e.g. electro technical engineer, supervisor of a unit ( <i>poslovođa</i> ))	1 (Damjan)
white collars	lower qualified (e.g. archivist, “in the administration”)	
	higher qualified (e.g. graphic designer, shorthand typist, chemist)	4 ( <i>Ana, Mirjana, Vesna, Goran</i> )
senior managers	e.g. head of a production unit, head of the marketing unit	
	top managers, chief director	

<sup>9</sup> The interviews have been conducted during two research stays in Pula in July and September 2016. I wish to sincerely thank all those who provided me a precious help in contacting the interviewees, particularly Vladimir Sinčić, and all the members of the “Klub umirovljenika Uljanika”, Tajana Ujčić, and Ratko Radošević. All the names of the interviewees have been changed to protect their privacy.

*Table 3: Distribution of the interviewees by their job position at the end of their labor relationships (italics for women)*

blue collars	unqualified (e.g. guardman, apprentice)	
	qualified with lower status (e.g. phone technician, welder)	1 (Antonio)
	qualified with higher status (e.g. electrician, mechanic, metalworker)	4 (Damir, Igor, Marko, Vladimir)
	highly qualified (e.g. electro technical engineer, supervisor of a shop floor unit ( <i>poslovođa</i> ))	4 (Milan, Damjan, Luka, Josip)
white collars	lower qualified (e.g. archivist, "employed in the administration")	2 (Mario, Davor)
	higher qualified (e.g. graphic designer, shorthand typist, chemist)	3 ( <i>Ana, Mirjana, Vesna</i> )
senior managers	e.g. chief head of a production unit, head of the marketing office	2 (Filip, Ivan)
	top managers (e.g. director of the personal management office), chief director	1 (Goran)

*Table 4: Period of employment at Uljanik of the interviewees*



## The gate

From a methodologically point of view, the integration of archival and press material with oral sources has been considered the best way for approaching *from below* the history of Uljanik “transformation”, ie. the passage from the late to the post-socialist experience. According to the most sophisticated approaches developed by the oral history, and not forgetting what can be learned from historical anthropology and the memory studies, oral sources are ideal for grasping something of the representations, emotions, and lived experiences of the examined actors.<sup>10</sup> For the purposes of an accurate historical reconstruction, the integration of interviews with other kind of documents, namely archival material and published texts, remains unavoidable. This is the methodological choice adopted in this article.<sup>11</sup>

Crossing the entrance gate (*kapija*): with this action a working day begins. This movement marks the crossing of a physical space, as well as the entering of a specific dimension, that of the workplace. It is at the gate that the labour discipline raises from the first time its voice, or better said, its siren.

“You should have seen how we stood up in the morning and how we ran, and we thought ‘will I manage to cross that gate?’, ie. without hearing the siren.” Because there were two sirens at the beginning of each shift. If you began to work at 06:00, the first siren sounded at 05:55, the second at 06:00. But the gate closed already at 05:55, because it was foreseen that you need at least a five-minutes’ walk for reaching your proper workplace. It was an experience which is considered unforgettable and deeply formative, also in moral terms. For some workers it became “unbelievable” to come late and in general to have a dishonest, undisciplined behaviour (Ana, speaking about the 1960s).

According to some interviewees, in Uljanik there was “a very strong discipline”, both in the work and in the general behaviour. “There was very little joking around” (*Nije tu bilo zafrkancije*): you were not allowed during the work time to chat with your fellows, and you couldn’t easily leave for short breaks, for example for smoking. This was at least the situation in a relatively small office, where ten technical designers were working together, and the head of the office could monitor the employees from a small window, located at the back of the workers (Ana).

<sup>10</sup> For an overview of theoretical, methodological and practical issues linked with oral history see: Robert Perks, Alistair Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016, 3rd ed.), and Maria Todorova, ed., *Remembering Communism. Genres of Representation* (Budapest, New York: CEU Press, 2010). For conceiving and conducting the interviews: Uwe Flick, *Qualitative Sozialforschung: Eine Einführung* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2011, 4th ed.), particularly pp. 194-247.

<sup>11</sup> In line with the recent suggestions by Rory Archer, Goran Musić, “Approaching the socialist factory and its workforce: considerations from fieldwork in (former) Yugoslavia”, *Labor History*, 58 (2017), 1, pp. 44-66.

Similarly later, during the 1970s, to cross late the entrance gate was not only a problem of disciplinary sanctions (which are also vividly remembered; e.g. Damjan), but first of all a matter of “shame”: better than to be ashamed of being late, one would take a vacation day (Igor). Because, in general terms, labour discipline was “severe” (*jaka disciplina*), and the head of your unit was “alpha and omega, and you had to obey him.” (Davor)

Later, something changed. Somebody observed some changes already in the first 1970s, when a new generation of managers arrived. They behaved not like the older ones, who were “severe like a father” (note that it is a woman, who is speaking). The new, younger managers were more relaxed, they spent the breaks together with the employees, chatted and laughed with them. They still had a very reciprocal respectful, but now “more human” relationship (Ana).

Discipline – it is explained – can be distinguished in “upbringing” (*odgoj*), and “regime”, ie. imposed (*režim, nametnuta*). In the recollections of the workers, in the past was discipline more internalized, and it worked “very good”. Now, it is exclusively of the second type (Davor).

Why and when did this change happen? It seems that in the very late 1980s and especially first 1990s, a kind of perceived anarchy reigned on the shop floor: “Discipline was nothing, not existing. (*disciplina je bila nula - ustvari nula*)” Ships were still built, sure, but it was normal, for example, to finish with the work on Fridays around 11 o’ clock, and to remain in the factory until the end of the working day, ie. 15:00, but doing barbecue, eating and drinking (Marko).

Alcohol, although theoretically forbidden, was very present in the factory. Extremely present. “Sometimes it was tremendous, really.” (Id.) There were people selling wine and *rakija* (local brandy), keeping a barrel in their lockers. This seems to have caused a lot of accidents at works. Furthermore, the stealing of construction material was very widespread,<sup>12</sup> and last but not least, nobody took care of the safety rules. For example, nobody wore the helmet. (Id.)<sup>13</sup>

All that radically changed “after the privatization”. In the discourses of the interviewees there is a “before” and an “after” (sometimes before/after the “privatization”), which are not easy to be temporally determined. The impression

<sup>12</sup> This has to do with the broader issue of the “informal economy”. For some East European comparisons, see: Jerzy Kochanowski, *Jenseits der Planwirtschaft. Der “Schwarzmarkt” in Polen 1944-1989*, (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013); Alena V. Ledeneva, *Russia’s Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking, and Informal Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> For some confirmations about the lack of discipline in terms of safety rules, and about the discussions and the improvements which began already in the 1980s, see: K.[atica] Š.[ipura], “I to se može”, and Ead., “Povreda očiju možda će biti manje”, both in *Uljanik*, 1980, 1, p. 42; Ead., “Radnici danas mnogo više znaju”, *Uljanik*, 1982, 13, p. 12; Slavica Maršić, “Sačmarenje bez prašine”, *Uljanik*, 1982, 13, p. 13; Marko Ljevar, “Samo će se radnik boriti za radnika”, *Uljanik*, 1990, 112-113, p. 16.



is that this does not precisely refer to the year of the independence of Croatia (1991), neither to the proper “privatization” of Uljanik, which took place through several steps from the 1990s onwards.<sup>14</sup> Workers temporal references have more to do with a “general change” between late socialism and nowadays, with a transitional stage which must be qualified with relation to each sub-topic. In the case of the safety measures, it is widely recognized that now there are much more “pressure” and “controls” (Vladimir).<sup>15</sup> A few but illustrative examples: alcohol tests with alcohol test machines before entering the ships; all the material numbered and registered, so that stealing became impossible; and zero tolerance regarding bad working behaviours. After the first penalty, you are fired (Marko).

This seems to represent a radical change. Because somebody maintains that in the socialist time, it was almost impossible to be fired. But the question I would like to raise is the following: is it true?

### **The table (of the Disciplinary Committee)**

The second scene of this analysis took place around a table, precisely the table of the Disciplinary Committee(s). On that table landed the denunciations by the heads of the units, on the two sides of the table sit the accused and those charged of taking a decision. It was not easy to do that, and not only because of the usual difficulties involved in a judicial proceeding. In the Yugoslav, self-managed Uljanik, workers enjoyed powerful workers’ rights, the sympathy of the Party and of the Trade Union (Mirjana), and following some embittered interviewees, the result was that “You couldn’t dismiss a worker, definitely not, not possible. You must have been a very big lazybones (*veliki bandit*), in order to be fired.” (Filip)

Maybe it could be interesting to listen to the opinion of Luka, who has been Chair of the Disciplinary Committee: “during the Yugoslavia it was a bit more difficult to introduce the discipline among the workers than now, because the worker was always right.” There were all sorts of rules,<sup>16</sup> but in the end

<sup>14</sup> For an overview of the “restructuring/privatizing” process of the shipbuilding industry in Croatia up to 2013: Ana Perić Hadžić, Tea Karačić, “Restrukturiranje hrvatske brodogradnje u kontekstu pristupanja Europskoj Uniji”, *Pomorski zbornik*, 47-48 (2013), pp. 121-132.

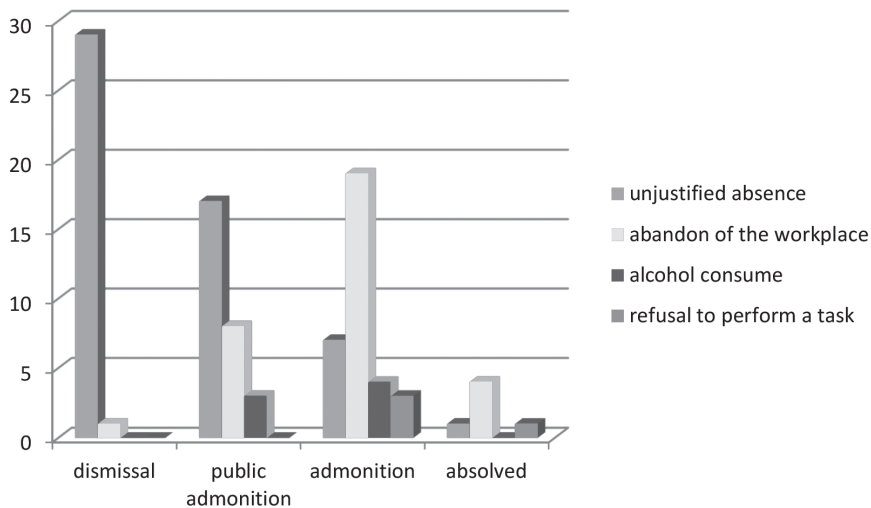
<sup>15</sup> In terms of labour discipline, first important changes were already announced through the new “Law on labour relationship” (*Zakon o radnim odnosima*, 14.10.1989), which introduced more severe disciplinary measures and assigned more decisional power to the managers and foremen. Ljiljana Kurteš, “Ovlaštenije poslovođstvo”, *Uljanik*, 1990, 110-11, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> See. e.g. *Samoupravni sporazum o zajedničkim osnovama i mjerilima za uređivanje prava, obaveza i odgovornosti radnika u radnom odnosu*, in *Dodatak Vjesniku Uljanika*, 07.12.1978, particularly §§ 52-72. For the historical context of the Yugoslav Workers’ Self-Management: John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History. Twice There Was a Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation*,

the worker had “more rights” than the head of the unit, so “it was hard, very hard.” (Luka)

It can be very useful to proceed with a kind of a short “test”, considering the final decisions taken with regard to four types of frequent accusations (unjustified absence; abandon of the workplace; alcohol consume; refusal to perform a task) between 1977 and 1986. The results are the following:

**Disciplinary measures regarding four common types of accusations, 1977-1986**



Source: Archive Uljanik, Fond: Radnički savjet i poslovni odbor (Brodogradilište), Box 277, “Disciplinska komisija, 1977-1986 – Odluke”.

“Public admonition” meant that the final decision was published in *Informatorec*, one of the factory’s periodicals.

It must be said that this small number of cases which could be taken into consideration doesn’t allow a strict quantitative analysis, because it is not known if all the treated cases of those years have been preserved in the Uljanik’s archive. Furthermore, each “factory” in the framework of the shipyard had its own disciplinary committee. Nonetheless, on the basis already of these

1918-2005 (Washington and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, with the Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006), pp. 207-283; Marie-Janine Calic, *Geschichte Jugoslawiens im 20. Jahrhundert* (München: C.H. Beck, 2010); Wolfgang Höpken, *Sozialismus und Pluralismus in Jugoslawien: Entwicklung und Demokratiepotehtial des Selbstverwaltungssystems* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1984). More recently: Goran Musić, “Yugoslavia: Workers’ Self-Management as State Paradigm”, in Immanuel Ness, Dario Azzellini, eds., *Ours to Master and to Own: Workers’ Control from the Commune to the Present* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), 172-190; U. Schult, *Zwischen Stechuhr und Selbstverwaltung*; precisely about Uljanik: Igor Stanić, “Što pokazuje praksa? Presjek samoupravljanja u brodogradilištu Uljanik 1961-1968. godine”, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, 46 (2014), 3, pp. 453-474.

data it is possible to formulate some observations especially about the perceived “seriousness” of the different offences, and about the most common consequences in disciplinary terms.

For example, it seems that having consumed alcohol at the workplace and during the work time was not considered a grave offence and it never caused a dismissal. Similarly, to leave the workplace without permission provoked some admonishments, but generally not the dismissal. Nonetheless, the latter was not exactly “impossible”, as the interviewees said, although it was mainly linked with absenteeism. Therefore, it seems that only one offence was considered highly serious: not to come to work. In that case, the worker could be fired.

If one consults other boxes which preserved materials of the same kind, one can certainly get some confirmations of these provisory conclusions, but not only. It is fitting to begin with some confirmations, which will make our argument more concrete.<sup>17</sup> Rudolf G., for example, WC cleaner, is accused to sometimes come at work drunk. At the hearing before the Disciplinary Committee he admits it, but he also adds that, apart from this, he does his job very well; this is confirmed by his head of unit, who is also convened by the Committee. As mitigating circumstance, it is considered the unattractive character of the job, and that the man supports himself alone. The final decision thus is a public admonition.<sup>18</sup> As it is evident, there was a big degree of understanding. Nonetheless, one should not exaggerate and exasperate the Committee: after a few years, Rudolf was dismissed.<sup>19</sup> Another case of relative tolerance occurred in occasion of a theft: Janko D., tried, with the complicity of the gate watcher man, to steal 20 litres of gasoline. Nonetheless, the sentence was only a public admonition.<sup>20</sup>

Yet, comparing different archival documents, we get not only confirmation of forms of tolerance, but also regarding the severe consequences of absenteeism. As already noticed, if one didn't come to work, he/she was fired. This was exactly what happened to Veneranda V., cleaner,<sup>21</sup> to Edo B., welder, absent more than five days,<sup>22</sup> and to many others.

Furthermore, browsing the archival material one gets the impression that it's not completely true that the Disciplinary Committee had its hands almost

<sup>17</sup> For this same last purpose, ie. in order to “concretize” the reflection, also a few cases taken from the same box which served as basis for the above-reported graphic will be mentioned here.

<sup>18</sup> ABU (Uljanik's Archive), Fond: Radnički savjet (Brodogradilište) (henceforth: RS Br.), Box 277 Disciplinska komisija – Odluke, Zapisnik, 19.09.1983, Odluka 05.12.1983. The same applied to the case of M.B., in Ibid., Box 278 Disciplinska odgovornost 1981-82, and many others.

<sup>19</sup> ABU-RS Br., Box 295, Odluka 26.03.1986.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, Zapisnici 17.01.1983, and 24.01.1983.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, Box 277, Zapisnik, 07.04.1982, Odluka 21.02.1983.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, Box 278, Odluka 02.07.1981.

tied, and that the dismissal could take place only in cases of extreme absenteeism. Zdravko L., for instance, was fired because he stole something, after having got some minor admonitions.<sup>23</sup> Đenja D. was fired even only for an attempted theft,<sup>24</sup> and the same happened to Marijan C.<sup>25</sup>, and to Tomo M., with the aggravating factor that he was “completely rejected” by his unit’s fellows.<sup>26</sup> Stealing was probably widespread, but it seems that it’s not possible to maintain that it was so easily tolerated. Similarly, the alcohol consume was certainly large and not severely repressed, but it should not be associated with bad behaviour: in that case, it could provoke the dismissal, how experienced by Mario Ž.<sup>27</sup>

Apart from these dramatic cases, there were minor ones, which tell us of a partly relaxed work atmosphere, although only in a very cautious and limited way. We should not forget that we are in Pula, by the sea, and that during the summer it can be very hot. We don’t know if the reconstruction of the facts made by Ivan P. and Dragutin J. is right, if this board of wood really broke and they fell unintentionally into the water, but we are sure that it was refreshing. And that they got only an admonition.<sup>28</sup>

### **A bit too much *uravnilovka***

Before to move to the next object (the door of the boss’ office), it can be very insightful to shed a light on some doubts about and reactions to the work discipline at Uljanik expressed by the workers themselves. It is of particular interest one widespread consideration which complained that there was “a bit too much *uravnilovka* (levelling)” (Igor), referring to the wage system which radically reduced the wage differences inside the factory.<sup>29</sup> Officially not embraced by the Yugoslav socialist elites, with this term the interviewees refer to the egalitarian attitudes which were practiced in the Yugoslav society and which aimed, for example in this case, at containing the wage inequalities among workers of the same factory.<sup>30</sup> Some Uljanik’s workers nostalgically recall that the general director could earned at the most four time more than the worst paid factory worker (Dino-Aldo).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, Box 295 Disciplinska komisija RZZP 1986-87, Odluka 07.04.1987.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, Odluka 17.03.1987.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, Odluka 01.04.1986.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, Box 278, Odluka 24.07.1981.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, Odluka 13.02.1987.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, Zapisnik, 20.04.1981; Odluka 14.05.1981, and 14.05.1981.

<sup>29</sup> In self-managed Yugoslavia the official notion for “wage” was “personal income” and was, at least partly, performance-oriented: U. Schult, *Zwischen Stechuhr und Selbstverwaltung*, pp. 66-71.

<sup>30</sup> Dejan Jović, *Yugoslavia: A State that Withered Away* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2009), p. 301, footnote 123.

As explained by a well-informed interviewee, ie. a former director of the human resources, the basic salary at Uljanik was in the last decade around 400 marks, e.g. this was the income of a cleaner. To this basic salary, one should add a “variable part”, which could even reach 20-30%. The general director could then score around 1300 marks. But looking at the wage rankings of the entire firm, it could easily happen that he was at the 50<sup>th</sup> place. That means that, according to our source, forty-nine people, ie. not only the fifteen Uljanik’s top-managers, earned more than the general director (Goran).<sup>31</sup>

The “variable part” has to do with the system of incentives (*sistem nagradivanja*), which were assigned in accordance with individual performance and the results of the working unity to whom one belonged. It was not only linked with the mere work performance, as it was in other socialist countries, but it was also – thanks to the self-management system and the liberal and “alternative” Yugoslav socialism – partly market oriented, because it considered the factory’s commercial achievements. In general, it was conceived for motivating the workers and improving the productivity. It represented a constant topic of public discussion and underwent several reform efforts during the 70s and 80s. Considering Uljanik more closely, it was the same general director who admitted in 1980 that the previous system of incentives was unfair,<sup>32</sup> but also the reformed system was subject of vivid polemics during the 1980s.<sup>33</sup> It was even at the core of public irony, as it is exemplified by some vignettes published in the factory’s magazine.<sup>34</sup>

While many of the interviewees now consider positively the system of the incentives, appreciating its meritocratic character, one can read on the pages of the factory’s magazines at the turn of the 1990s discordant opinions. Some workers, like the locksmith Marko Ljevar, considered it “the only good thing” of that time,<sup>35</sup> while other blue-collar workers regarded it as “another great failure, like the others before it”, due to the fact that it didn’t properly remunerate their work.<sup>36</sup> In one case we can read an acute consideration: the new system of incentives allegedly did not change so much the concrete work, whereas the main effect was to have “aggravated the relationships among the people”.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>31</sup> This should not leave the impression that Yugoslavia in general was a radical egalitarian society. See e.g. Rory Archer, Igor Duda, Paul Stubbs, eds., *Social Inequalities and Discontent in Yugoslav Socialism*; U. Schult, *Zwischen Stechuhr und Selbstverwaltung*, pp. 237-309.

<sup>32</sup> Karlo Radolović, “Radimo više, kako bi nam bilo bolje”, *Uljanik*, 1980, 1, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> See e.g. the confrontation between Blaž Rocek e M.B.B., in *Uljanik*, 1982, br. 13, p. 18-19.

<sup>34</sup> E.g. “Neizvjednost do posljednjeg trenutka”, with the caption: “We delivered the ship 343, now we have to divide the cake! But how, ask the OOUR [the basic labour organizations]!, in *Uljanik*, 1982, br. 13, without page number.

<sup>35</sup> Marko Ljevar, “Samo će se radnik boriti za radnika”, *Uljanik*, 1990, 112-113, p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> Josip Starčić, “Imam osjelaj da nazadujemo”, and similarly Aldo Pačić, “Puno lijepih rječi, ali...”, both in *Ibid*, p. 17.

<sup>37</sup> Radovan Cvek, “Ljudi nam odlaze, a to nije dobro”, *Uljanik*, 1990, 110-11, p. 19.

Incentives means actually concurrence among the workers and between the factory's units. This could have bad consequences in large company like a shipyard, necessarily made up of very different units which should harmonically work together. It is from this point of view that one has to read the heartfelt plea by the main director Karlo Radolović, who in December 1980 call all Uljanik's workers and factory's units to perceive themselves as a real "collective" (*kolektiv*), ie. as elements of the same and unique organization. In this envisioned sense of a common identity should be grounded the entire production process. This appealed "we" could be able to overcome the technical difficulties and reaching the production goals, considering the ship as "a common product", "the most important final product of our collective".<sup>38</sup>

The reason of this plea is the ongoing process of internal concurrence between the production units, a development which is in accordance with general Yugoslav trends of these years. As undesired outputs of the self-management and the market-oriented remuneration systems, the sense of solidarity among the workers began to be eroded, slowly leading to an atomization of the Yugoslav working class.<sup>39</sup> This is also to be noticed in the framework of Uljanik, as it is clearly visualized in a vignette of the factory's magazine, which shows the selfish attitudes of each factory units.<sup>40</sup> The individual worker and more markedly the single factory unit was induced by the new system to caring for its own production performances. Uljanik was less and less "one" factory, and increasingly the connector of highly competing, if not even reciprocally hostile production units.

Furthermore, for those who were in favour of a consistent performance-oriented wage system, the existing system of the incentives was not enough and the effects of the *uravnilovka* at the level of the production unit and department were disturbing: "It means that we had all the same wage", without the desired regard to the work performance and sometimes even with weak consideration of the different skills: "personally it didn't disturb me", initially stated one interviewee, but adding only a few seconds later that "[I think that] I should get a bit higher wage" in comparison with colleagues with lower qualifications (Mirjana). Following the opinion of some interviewees, it was almost more convenient to be a bad worker, than to work hard, because at the end you got more or less the same (Igor).

Such critical stances are not expressed with regard to the workers' self-management system, which is in general considered positively. Rather, in the framework of that system what is negatively regarded is the "remuneration of work" and precisely in the following terms: "if you worked, or not: you got your

<sup>38</sup> Karlo Radolović, "Radimo više, kako bi nam bilo bolje", *Uljanik*, 1980, 1, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> U. Schult, *Zwischen Stechuhr und Selbstverwaltung*, pp. 144-147.

<sup>40</sup> "Uljanik", 1980, 1, without page number (but last page of the issue).

wage.” This caused big discontent, and it was considered “really a big problem. It definitely didn’t stimulate people.” (Filip)

Egalitarian values seem not to apply to Uljanik’s workers of the late socialist and post-socialist period. Although the system of incentives could originate some frictions in the company and the working class, many workers preferred a differentiated system of remuneration, than the *uravnilovka*. Some of Uljanik’s workers were actually unsatisfied with their wages and held them for unfair, when their professional skills and work performance were considered. The system of incentives was thus, in general, appreciated, also because, as we will see in the next section, it contributed in a very concrete, financial way, to recognize the work done by disciplined workers.

Apart from measures, there were also many informal rules which were considered positively and which contributed to shaping the work discipline, without the huge bureaucracy and the numerous formalized prohibitions of nowadays. Cigarette breaks, for example, were not formally forbidden, but they were perceived with hostility by the heads of the units as well as by some co-workers, because they reduced the efficiency of the team (Igor). According to the interviewees, there was much more flexibility in the organization, and much more orality: the tasks were communicated directly and orally, without the *papirologija* of today (Igor). The issue of the communication of tasks, and more in general of the communication between workers and managers, is a relevant one. It is then opportune to deal more deeply with it and to move to the next section.

### **The door (of the boss)**

“Once you could go to the director at every time, and speak with him, and you knew that he/they would help you”, while now, when you ask for the reason of something, the answer is “‘That it’s!’ and goodbye” (Marko). All the interviewees lamented that the relationships with the heads of units and especially with the managers had changed and worsened sensibly. If in the past one could go to the boss office and knock to its door, confident that the door will be opened, now nobody neither thinks to do that. Marko clarifies that hierarchy has always existed, but now its nature has changed and it has become much more “rigid”.

Again, in the past it was not only a matter of hierarchy and of formalized rules. It was first of all a question of *respect*. “We had a great respect for the boss. Because the boss really was somebody who deserved to be at that place.” (Ana, referring mainly to the 60s and beginning of the 70s) This is a shared assumption and maybe it can be explained by the fact that the general director, as well as all the other directors, were not selected through an open, but only through an internal competition. In other words, “we trained our directors, we

shaped them during the production process. This is what the actual transition does not recognize, neither know.” (Goran) It never happened that somebody was imposed from outside.

The respectability and the recognized competencies of the directors are perceived as crucial for the functionality of the factory (Igor).<sup>41</sup> Karlo Radolović is the local hero, celebrated for having skilfully saved the factory, or at least to have avoided that it would be “sell off” (Id.; the same for Josip and many others). This kind of positive opinion often regards also other directors, defined “very clever” (Filip), although criticism was not absent already at the turn of the 1990s.<sup>42</sup>

Anyway, one of the peculiarities of the post-socialist Uljanik is that it didn't get *immediately* post-socialist managers, rather keeping at the first stages at least some of the older ones. It is firmly believed by all the interviewees that exactly this continuity of people and competencies – the best example was of course the general director Karlo Radolović – saved the factory during the transformation. Consequently, the abrupt interruption of this continuity, linked with the dismissal of the previous policy, ie. when Uljanik was still in charge of training their own skilled workforce and management, is regarded as a crucial problem of nowadays (e.g. Ivan).<sup>43</sup>

One concrete consequence of this change both of managers and foremen is that the communication between the several heads of the unit and workers has ceased to be “normal”, it is not possible to rationally “discuss” the work issues, and the only dynamics which steers the relationships is “the law of the strongest” (Igor). There is no space for discussing working conditions with the new managers, because the lapidary remark you obtain is that “If you don't like to work under these conditions, you go.” And if you see a boss from the distance, you “very careful avoid him, not getting in contact with him.” (Vladimir) Having in mind the scene which opened this section, it seems that something has definitely changed.

Uljanik's workers seem not to be self-confident like in the past. Maybe even more than that. Because once to the ethics of work was also attached a strong pride in your own work. People were “very pride” (Davor), and that's why the rewards for well-done jobs – although they were sometimes only symbolic –

<sup>41</sup> In general about the role of directors in Yugoslav socialism: Jurij Fikfak, Jože Prinčič, Jeffrey D. Turk, eds., *Biti direktor v času socializma. Med idejami in praksami* (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> See e.g. respectively one shop-floor worker and one unqualified worker, Albino Padien, “Dosta nepravilnosti”, and Zora Buić, “Treba samo više raditi”, both in *Uljanik*, 1990, 110-11, pp. 17-18, and even more radical the new vice-director of the factory's unit “Brodogradilište” Jakov Tomičić, “Slabe osnove za optimizam”, *Uljanik*, 1990, 112-113, pp. 20-21.

<sup>43</sup> This issue had begun to be discussed already in the 1980s, see e.g. Franko Kopal, “Organizacija i kadrovi u brodogradnji”, *Uljanik*, 1982, br. 13, pp. 14-15.



were nonetheless highly appreciated (Id.; Damir). More in general terms, the work itself is said to have been socially highly considered, while now what is important is only the money (Id.).

A sentiment of pride and personal realization was shared both by men and women, especially among skilled workers and white collars. Women add a further element of pride, that of having been able to be at the same time a good worker, and a good mother (Mirjana). Although it was sometimes very difficult to find a work-life balance, ie. to harmonize labour obligations like the overtimes, with family responsibilities, women maintain to be happy to have made that experience. (Ead.)

Uljanik's workers declared that they were in the past "happy", proud that their products were of high quality, and that this was recognized throughout the entire world. And along with emotive and symbolic issues, they were well and regularly paid (Filip and many others). Furthermore, thanks to the system of incentives and in partial contrast to the *uravnilovka*, good work could in some cases be recognized not only symbolically, but also in monetary terms, and this could, at least sometimes and for some workers, represent a not irrelevant part of the income. But what must be stressed here is the *emotive* side of that: if "all of us fight for that [incentive]", it was not only because of economic reasons. The incentive was "so sweet (*toliko draga*)", and to obtain it was "a great satisfaction" (Ana).

The emotive attachment to the work could be declined also in terms of caring for the *place* of work, like in the case of the flowers, plants and small trees bought at their own expenses by two female workers, who voluntarily took care of them in the free time.<sup>44</sup> It is an act which reveals some "love" invested in the place where to work, as well as in the work itself, as it is programmatically announced in the title ("One must love the work") of a long interview with Ivan Zenzerović, a long-time welder.<sup>45</sup> He explained that every duty must be performed "rightly", with precision and responsibility, caring for it. And that in general terms, "work makes people happy".

Actually, a sense of "responsibility" toward the work – even though it was variegated and differently distributed among the workforce – was present. Many were inclined to say "who cares?", but many others cared a lot about how to perform a task (Josip). It was a matter of respectability gained at the workplace, which was reflected in the general consideration of Uljanik and its workers. This kind of honorability was also much promoted from above: when the general director took the floor in the first 1980s, it was repeatedly a matter of "honour" (*čast*) and of "reputation" (*ugled*) to be defended,<sup>46</sup> apparently with

<sup>44</sup> "Za pohvalu", *Uljanik*, 1990, 112-113, p. 30.

<sup>45</sup> K.[atica] Š.[ipura], "Treba voljeti posao", *Ibid*, p. 27.

<sup>46</sup> Karlo Radolović, "Radimo više, kako bi nam bilo bolje", *Uljanik*, 1980, 1, p. 2.

success, if some years later he wrote that “The actual Uljanik is our honour.” More precisely: “it is necessary to stress that the biggest worth of Uljanik are the good and honest workers”.<sup>47</sup> A clear confirmation of the social prestige of the Uljanik’s worker could be also heard listening to the words of Vinko Jurcan, good representative of the municipality,<sup>48</sup> who clearly stated that “really a person (čovjek) can be glad (*ponosan*) that he/she works at Uljanik”, adding a statement about the traditional and harmonious synergy and identification between the city and the shpyard: “I’ll repeat what has been said many times, ie. that Uljanik is Pula, and Pula is Uljanik.”<sup>49</sup>

But also this self- and hetero-perception and the high esteem linked to it have now changed. Once not only the worker at Uljanik was socially regarded as a “gentleman” (*signore*), but Uljanik itself attracted much public attention through the media, what could be clearly noticed at each launch of a new ship, which represented a relevant public event for the entire city. On the contrary, now, as it is sorrowfully admitted, such events go almost unnoticed (Marko).

## Conclusions

This article, with its focus on the ethics of work and the work discipline, allowed to highlight how in this regard the “transformation” took place. It shows that, differently than in other socialist countries, it was not the lack of discipline that encouraged the system’s eventual collapse. Furthermore, in Yugoslavia the existence of forms of weak work (self)discipline was not, like in the USSR, a *defensive act* against the attack of the elite; on the contrary, it was the result of a position of *power* hold by the workers towards the factory’s management. But notwithstanding the fact that the Yugoslav self-management provided some peculiar tools for escaping a strong work discipline, it seems that work discipline and an efficient ethics of work were nonetheless present and widespread for many decades.

It seems, therefore, that present-day common opinion and some contemporary individual memories about the complete absence of labour discipline are deeply affected by developments which actually took place in recent time, precisely during the first half of the 1990s, ie. the war years and the years of economic crisis, as well as the years of the lowest level of labour discipline. With a more historical approach, considering the recollections of older workers and combining them with the analysis of archival sources, the conclusion is that one cannot extend the “anarchy” of the first half of the 1990s to the pre-

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in “Dobro poslovanje uljepšava obljetnicu”, *Uljanik*, 1986, 1, p. 28.

<sup>48</sup> Vinko Jurcan was “president of the municipal assembly in Pula”.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

vious decades. In the 1960s-80s the issue of labour discipline was diversified and multilayered, often not invasive and severe, but neither absent. Uljanik was certainly not managed with a draconian disciplinary attitude, but labour discipline was somehow present, in some cases even sensibly perceived and with very concrete effects. In any case, it didn't lie at the heart of the economic difficulties of the enterprise. Uljanik's productivity and competitiveness depended much more on other factors, which were considered during the 1990s to require to be urgently changed.

When did, thus, the "transformation" begin if observed from this perspective? Looking at it from below and with particular attention to the issue of the labour discipline, it was not in the late 1990s and the 2000s, but earlier. Already in the 1980s the system of the workers' self-management began to split apart also in the sense – highlighted by some interviewees – that "workers didn't really obey the management." Contestations began to be more frequent and invasive, and this affected the production process. "With this self-management we went a bit into anarchy." (Antun E.) The contestation became palpable at every level, even in the framework of the lowest workers' assemblies (*zborovi radnika*) (Id.).

Summarizing and connecting all the elements illustrated in this article, we gain some new factors which explained how the "transformation" at Uljanik took place, if observed "from below". Apart from evident economic developments, which made an employment at Uljanik much less safe and attractive in the 1990s, there was also a growing dissatisfaction towards some aspects of the old system. The attitudes toward the *uravnilovka* are exemplary: from this point of view, Uljanik's workers were not simply subjected to and victims of the transformation, because they didn't defend the old system *in toto*. Rather, many workers evoked the change, they welcomed it, and some of them even anticipated it, for instance leaving Uljanik already before the "privatization" and starting a private business. This decision is presented not only as economically more profitable, but also as more meritocratic (Filip).

On the other hand, other changes in the system were much less welcomed. One of these seems to be the different system of recruitment of the managers, who began to be outsiders and to be perceived as imposed as well as incompetent. This was perceived as a relevant break in terms of Uljanik's culture and traditional practice, and it deeply affected the workers-managers relationships. Furthermore, the new and different managerial culture and contemptuous behavior of the managers toward the workers caused big disappointment and disaffection towards the factory and their work. Even more in general, the progressive disappearance of an entire discourse and of public practices which celebrated and rewarded the work seems to have reduced the labor performance to a mere income activity. All this has caused a profound emotional detachment by the workers from their work and the factory.

The last conclusion of this article is that it is impossible to speak about labour discipline without engaging in an analysis of the overall value assigned to work in Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav society. The ethics of work, of course, must be put into consideration, but also the esteem enjoyed, or not, by the managers in the eyes of their workers. It seems that what moved to work Uljanik's workers of the past was something more, something different from the labour discipline. And what has been "transformed" during the war and before all the post-war period is precisely this social and cultural framework, outside and inside the factory. Once appreciation of one's own work and of the managers weakened, what remained was almost only discipline.

Without good workers-managers relationships and without a consistent ethics of work, efficiency in the production can be affirmed solely through a rigid and repressive work discipline. The older formal and informal rules, with all their strenghtens and weaknesses, wispered away, together with a mutual respect between workers and managers.

## **Die Arbeitsethik und -disziplin in der Übergangsperiode: Die Schiffswerft Uljanik im späten Sozialismus und Postsozialismus**

### **Zusammenfassung**

Dieser Artikel befasst sich mit der Entwicklung der Arbeitsdisziplin und -ethik in der Schiffswerft Uljanik in Pula ab den 1980er Jahren bis heute. Die erste Schlussfolgerung ist, dass die Arbeitsdisziplin, obwohl sie im Rahmen des Selbstverwaltungssystems sicherlich nicht streng war, nicht komplett abwesend war. Die Arbeitsdisziplin verschwand eher in der ersten Hälfte der 1990er Jahre und erschien in der zweiten Hälfte der 1990er Jahre wieder, jetzt aber in ganz neuer Form. Zweitens, der Artikel legt dar, wie sich das Verhältnis zwischen Arbeitnehmern und Geschäftsführung in den post-sozialistischen Jahren verschlechtert hat. Dies trug dazu bei, dass sich die Arbeiter von ihrer Arbeit und ihrer Werft immer weiter emotional entfernt haben. Da es an einer älteren Arbeitsethik und am gegenseitigen Respekt zwischen Arbeitern und Geschäftsführung mangelte, scheint es, dass für die Verwaltung der Arbeit und Arbeitnehmer nur die moderne Arbeitsdisziplin in Frage kam.

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