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**FORM AND CONTENT IN
INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY**

**Some Experiences from Norway
and other European Countries**

**F E EMERY AND EINAR THORSRUD
IN COOPERATION WITH ERIC TRIST**

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AND OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

F. E. EMERY and EINAR THORSRUD
in cooperation with
ERIC TRIST

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Contents

PREFACE	<i>page</i>	VII
PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION		IX
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS		XI
INTRODUCTION		1
1 INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY IN THE NORWEGIAN SETTING		
<i>The views of leaders in politics, trade unions, and business</i>		4
2 EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATION AND INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY		
<i>The views of employee representatives on some Norwegian boards</i>		17
3 PURPOSES AND FORMS OF EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATION		
<i>Some hypotheses and problems</i>		26
4 INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES		
<i>Some models and experiences</i>		31
<i>Yugoslavia</i>		31
<i>West Germany</i>		42
<i>Great Britain</i>		52
5 THE BEHAVIOUR AND ROLE OF EMPLOYEE REP- RESENTATIVES ON THE BOARDS OF COMPANIES		68
6 THE FUNCTIONS OF BOARDS AND THE ROLE OF BOARD MEMBERS		77

VI		
7	CONCLUSIONS	83
	APPENDICES	
I	<i>Approach and methods of Phase A of the Participation Project</i>	88
II	<i>Plan of interview-Phase A</i>	91
III	<i>The Participation Project: frame of reference and preliminary research plan (November 1962)</i>	94
IV	<i>Regarding Phase B of the project (December 1962)</i>	99
V	<i>Some hypotheses about the ways in which tasks may be more effectively put together to make jobs</i>	103
VI	<i>Employees' attitudes towards increased participation in decision-making</i>	106
	REFERENCES	110
	INDEX	112

Preface

During a course in labour relations at the Technical University of Norway in 1959, the late Minister of Social Affairs, Mr Olav Bruvik, suggested that the problems of industrial democracy might become a central research task for the new Institute for Industrial Social Research in Trondheim. Mr Bruvik repeated this proposal several times before he died and he promoted the idea also before the Trades Union Congress of Norway. The reason for mentioning Mr Bruvik's name is not only that he helped to start the Participation Project, the first phase of which is reported in this volume, but that he represents the best type of leadership in industrial relations.

Industrial relations in Norway are characterized by mutual respect between the two major organizations, the Trades Union Congress and the Norwegian Confederation of Employers. With an increasing degree of objectivity these organizations are able to deal with the critical issues of industry even when conflicting interests are involved. Consequently, it is now possible to investigate on a social scientific basis some fundamental problems of industry. Some of these problems are still tabu for the social sciences in most countries although they are related to the release of large potentials of human resources. Involvement in the solution of such basic issues presents social scientists with considerable stimulus but also with high-level responsibilities.

During the winter of 1962-63 the Institute for Industrial Social Research was invited to undertake research on the problems of 'industrial democracy'. The board of the Institute was fully aware that this might be a unique opportunity, but the risks of getting involved in political issues were at the same time quite obvious. After consultation with the Tavistock Institute of

Human Relations in London, which agreed to cooperate, a research programme was presented. The Trades Union Congress and the Confederation of Employers agreed to sponsor the programme jointly, to share the expenses, and to appoint a joint consultative committee. We are grateful for all the help we have received from the two organizations and the joint committee.

Members of the board of the Trondheim Institute, particularly Mr Harald Throne-Holst and Mr Martin Siem, have rendered invaluable help. The same applies to representatives of management and of employees in five Norwegian companies where we conducted an interview programme and investigated written material on board proceedings.

We should also like to thank the other members of the research group — first and foremost Eric Trist, who took part in all phases of planning and in the interview programme. Knut Lange, Julius Marek, and Hans Marius Blegen have contributed to the analysis and interpretation of research data. The secretarial work done by Jill Sieveking was made more useful by her knowledge of the social sciences. We are indebted to Mr Sven Persson for his help as a language consultant. Among all the colleagues who have suggested improvements in the drafts of this report we should like to mention in particular Harriet Holter and Eric Rhenman.

We should like to stress a point of particular importance in a project of this kind, that none of the organizations or individuals involved has used any sort of pressure to influence decisions which had to be left entirely to the research workers. We are grateful to the many who have helped, but only the authors are responsible for the shortcomings of this report.

F. E. Emery & Einar Thorsrud, 1968

Preface to the English Edition

Preparation of the English edition has been delayed partly by pressure of work associated with the field experiments for Phase B of the Participation Project, and partly by the feeling that the topic was of minor interest in the United Kingdom. By late 1966, however, it was clear that industrial democracy had become a live issue. The Liberal Party and the Trades Union Congress had both made public policies favouring legislation to create greater industrial democracy. Interestingly enough, the British TUC seemed willing to reverse its traditional attitude and to consider employee representation on company boards — the prime focus of this study (Phase A of the project).

Since the publication of this report in 1964 by the University of Oslo Press, the joint research team has been constantly engaged in: (a) field experiments to discern how the conditions for more democratic participation can be realized under the actual operating conditions of economic production; and (b) an extended study of board functioning. The reports of three completed experiments (plus an observational study of 'Spontaneous autonomous industrial work groups') have been circulated as public documents of the two Institutes (the Institute for Industrial Social Research in Trondheim and the Tavistock Institute in London). These first experiments were in the metal fabrication sector and in pulp and paper. Current experiments have extended to chemicals and shipping. The Norwegian effort to create an empirical basis for modifying the country's industrial culture has already inspired parallel efforts in Eire and the United Kingdom. We hope that this interim study may do something to lessen the emphasis on the traditional solution of representative structures.

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F. E. Emery, 1968

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