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THE PRESENT SITUATION OF THE SOVIET TRADE UNIONS

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FOREWORD

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THE PRESENT SITUATION OF THE SOVIET TRADE UNIONS

[Following is the translation of an article by Borys Lewytskyi in Osteuropa (Eastern Europe), Vol 11, No 2, Stuttgart, February 1961, pages 113-119.]

Only after the 20th Congress of the CPSU (1956), did any changes occur in the trade unions. In his report to the Congress, Khrushchev criticized the situation in the trade unions as follows: "We must say that the trade unions no longer have any disputes with the economic leaders. Between them there is quiet and harmony. But in the interest of a good cause, one must not be afraid of quarreling. Sometimes it is necessary to have an all-out dispute with someone." The then Chairman of the Central Union Council (Union Council of the Trade Unions), N. M. Shvernik, also began speaking in this new vein. Besides the previous appeals for increasing labor productivity and fulfillment of plans, the social tasks of the trade unions now came into the foreground.

During the "thaw-out" interlude, when the party was quite agreeable to a revival of the activities of the trade unions, Soviet workers showed strong tendencies toward changing them into organs which would safeguard the interests of their class.

From several statements representing this view we have selected the following for an explanation of the situation at that time: In Pravda of 3 September 1957, the then provincial secretary of the CP of the Ukraine in Kharkov, V. Titov, wrote in part: "Comrades Kalinichenko and Omelyanenko strongly disagree with the principle of the one-man leadership of a plant director because of justified criticism of the actions of the director of the plant. They demand that each order and each directive issued by the director be discussed collectively before being executed." (See also B. Skierenko, "Rol' kollektiva v upravlenii predpriyatiyem" (Role of the Collective in Plant Management) in Partiynaya Zhizn' (Party Life), 15 August 1956). That this was partly an echo of the events in Poland and Hungary, and partly the influence of the Yugoslav workers' administration system is evident here. The Soviet party press condemned all these views as "anarcho-syndical-

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istic tendencies contrary to Marxism and Leninism". This fermentation, however, accelerated the process of change and consolidation within the union bureaucracy. But only the reform of economic leadership in industry and construction as decided on 10 May 1957 by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR ushered in a new phase in the history of Soviet trade unions.

Congresses and Membership of Soviet Trade Unions

	Date	Membership
I. Congress	January 1918	2,532,000
II. "	January 1919	3,638,812
III. "	April 1920	4,326,000
IV. "	May 1921	6,485,600
V. "	June 1922	5,100,000
VI. "	November 1924	6,700,000
VII. "	December 1926	9,541,220
VIII. "	April 1929	10,995,600
IX. "	April 1932	16,500,000
X. "	April 1949	28,500,000
XI. "	June 1954	40,400,000
XII. "	March 1959	52,780,000

Trade Union Congresses of the Republics of the Soviet Union in 1960.

10th Trade Union Congress of the Georgian SSR	24-25 March 1960
9th " " " White Russian "	28-29 March 1960
2nd " " " Turkmen "	29-30 March 1960
11th " " " Estonian "	30-31 March 1960
2nd " " " Moldavian "	30-31 March 1960
7th " " " Ukrainian "	6-7 April 1960
4th " " " Latvian "	7-8 April 1960
6th " " " Tadzhik "	12-13 April 1960
5th " " " Lithuanian "	14-15 April 1960
7th " " " Kirgiz "	15-16 April 1960
10th " " " Armenian "	15-16 April 1960
6th " " " Uzbek "	23-24 May 1960
9th " " " Azerbaidzhan "	12-14 May 1960
6th " " " Kazakh "	1-3 June 1960

Did the Trade Unions Acquire Increased Importance in Industry and Building Construction?

In June 1957, the 6th plenum of the Central Trade Union Council decided to adapt the entire organization of Soviet trade unions to the new economic situation. Thus the previous organization by branches was replaced by an

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organization according to territory, and in August 1957, a resolution was adopted by the directorate of the Central Trade Union Council "Concerning the Unification of Trade Unions". While there were 176 trade unions for the various branches in 1944, their number decreased to 43 by 1954 (11th Trade Union Congress) and to 23 by 1959 (12th Trade Union Congress).

These measures, accompanied by a considerable reduction of administrative personnel in the trade union organizations, concerned mainly organizational and structural questions. The resolution of the December plenum of the CC (Central Committee) of the CPSU of 1957, on the other hand, was the first attempt at making certain functional changes in the activities of the trade unions. The plenum decided to change the existing "Production Advisory Boards" into "Permanent Production Advisory Boards", thus "increasing the role of workers in the economic leadership in the Soviet Union" (Spravochnik partiynogo rabotnika (Handbook of the Party Worker), Moscow 1959, p. 140-154). This new trend was confirmed by the decision of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of 15 July 1958 "Concerning the Extension of the Rights of the Trade Union Committee in the Plant", and by the decree of the Council of Ministers of the USSR and of the Central Union Council of 9 July of the same year "Concerning the Statutes of the Permanent Production Advisory Boards".

According to the new directives, trade union committees in plants are allowed to take part in the development of all plans and projects, to decide to a large extent on work and compensation, to check on the directors and the entire administration as well as the execution of labor legislation and work safety measures. No workers or clerical personnel may be dismissed without their consent. They also have a voice in the distribution of living quarters. The trade union committee in the plant carries out the functions of the Permanent Production Advisory Board which is to be organized in any plant with a labor force of more than one hundred. The numerical proportion between the elected representatives from Party organizations and the Young Communist League to those from the trade union and plant administration was not fixed in the statutes. Each Production Advisory Board has an elected directorate of 5-15 persons.

In scanning the Soviet press, we see that the intended activation of the Production Advisory Boards and the increased control of the directors and plant administration by the trade unions had aroused the interest of the workers in 1957 and 1958. By the end of 1958, seven million workers and clerical personnel had been elected members of the Permanent Production Advisory Boards -- a number which was repeated as being still valid by the chairman of the Central Trade Union Council, V. V. Grishin, during the 12th Trade Union Congress in 1959. In the meantime, however, the activation of the Permanent Production Advisory Boards seems to have stagnated, having changed back into a purely formal affair of no interest to the workers. This is clearly evident from the documentation of the Trade Union Congresses in the republics of the Union in 1960.

There are various causes for this failure. When Khrushchev announced a reform of economic management in 1957, the government was very much in favor of the criticism and control of plant directors "from below". However, since the reform was not a true democratization of the Soviet economic system, it increased even more the principle of the one-man leadership by the directors

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as the only authorized guardians of the interests of the state. The fiction of a "community of interests" between plant management and workers has not been done away with by the reform. All "operative-economic orders of the administration are absolutely binding upon the workers, regardless of their position in the Party, in the trade union or any other organization" (A. V. Pyatakov, Profsovuzy i Sovietskoye Gosudarstvo (Trade Unions and the Soviet Government), 1960, p. 90).

Furthermore, the Seven-Year Plan had been announced, and its fulfillment became the main task of all political and economic organizations in the Soviet Union. The CPSU was simply no longer interested in experiments for "the increased importance of the worker in economic management"; the entire activity of the trade unions automatically centered around the ahead-of-schedule fulfillment of the Seven-Year Plan. This was evident in the 12th Trade Union Congress which was entirely dominated by the Seven-Year Plan, while the "Permanent Production Advisory Boards", which had occupied such a prominent place in 1957 and 1958, were only mentioned casually; during the second plenum of the Central Trade Union Council in July 1959, they were mentioned neither in the discussion nor in the resolutions. During the congresses of the trade unions of the republics in 1960, almost all chief functionaries made the stereotyped, supposedly critical, remark that "the activity of the Permanent Productions Advisory Boards are underestimated by the plant managements as well as by the leaders of the trade unions".

The failure of "increasing the importance of the trade unions in economic management" is even more apparent when reconsidering a question which seemed so burning to the CC of the CPSU even in 1957; control of directors and plant management by the trade unions. In 1957, Soviet leaders realized that the Ministry for State Control of the USSR could not fulfill its task under the changed circumstances. By decision of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the Ministry was dissolved, and in its place "Commissions of Soviet Control" were set up in the Council of Ministers in each republic. This was an interesting attempt at coupling control by the State with a broader "social" control. The commissions consist of a chairman, his deputy, who should usually be the secretary of the local Trade Union Council, further a secretary of the CC of the Young Communist League of the republic of the Union, and a number of higher officials. In the People's Economic Councils, small "Groups of Soviet Control" were founded, consisting of six to ten persons, (according to G. Aleksandrenko, Radnakhospv ekonomichnykh administrativnykh rayoniv Ukrainskovi RSR, (Worker's Public Control of the Economic Administrative Rayons in the Ukrainian RSR), Kiev, 1959, p. 101-102.) With a very small number of state officials they wanted to set up an extensive organization of workers and clerical personnel for control purposes, while an important part was to be played by the trade union organizations. Furthermore, the previously mentioned extended control functions of the trade union organizations in the plant were maintained in the new statutes.

The Soviet press shows, however, that no remarkable changes in favor of the Trade Unions were made in this area. We must remember that beside the Commissions of Soviet Control there exist several other forms of state control

(Attorney General, Courts of Arbitration), and several administrative control agencies (trusts, combines (Kombinaty), administrative branches of People's Economic Councils). In addition, there is the control by financial offices, banks, etc. The planned "social control", including the proposed authorization of trade union organizations, simply got lost in the labyrinth of bureaucratic competences. The failure of this experiment is best expressed in the resolution of the CC of the CPSU of 26 June 1959 concerning the establishment of commissions for realizing the control of party organizations over the activity of plant administration in the party cells in the plants and commercial establishments (Spravochnik partiynogo rabotnika, Moscow, 1959, p. 575-580). Theoretically the newly created party control organizations are supposed to cooperate with the existing control institutions. It is certain that they will have a detrimental effect on the control of trade unions and workers over the directors.

New Fields of Activity for Trade Unions in Public Welfare Work

Since 1957 the influence of trade unions in the area of social welfare has increased steadily. Although it is necessary to consider here as always the discrepancies between official announcements and practical execution, it seems that developments in the trade unions of the Soviet Union are still favorable for the workers. In the following we shall disregard the previous social activities of the trade unions and discuss only the changes after 1957.

The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR has passed a resolution on the statute of the Commissions for the Settlement of Labor Disputes in Plants and Establishments, KTS, on 31 January 1957. These are composed of equal numbers of representatives from the administration and the local trade union organization. In larger plants there may be KTS for individual departments besides the main KTS (more details about this in Socialisticheskiy trud (Socialist Work), No 1, 1960, [published by] Forschungsdienst Osteuropa (Research Service Eastern Europe), Dusseldorf, p. 69-72). This legal basis for settling labor disputes considerably strengthens the position of the trade union committee in the plant and without a doubt represents a relief for the worker and a check on the actions of directors and administration.

Another field in which the importance of the trade unions is increasing is work safety. Since the 20th Party Congress the trade unions have worked more intensively for improvement of work safety because of the numerous accidents and the protests of the workers on this account. On 17 January 1958 a resolution was passed by the presidium of the Central Trade Union Council concerning a decree covering the "technical inspection" by the trade unions. The technical trade union inspectors have received extensive powers to execute work protection measures in the plants (Spravochnik partiynogo rabotnika, Moscow, 1960, p. 683-687). In practice, however, the Soviet trade unions have to overcome tremendous difficulties in this area also. This is not only caused by the lack of serious interest of the directors in questions of work protection, but mainly by the fact that the Government Planning Office (GOSSPLAN) does not provide for any work safety measures when building machines or machine building plants and building construction plants. The press shows that at the end of 1960 there were still grave deficiencies

in this area (see article in Sovetskiye profsoyuzy (Soviet Trade Unions), No 19, 1960: "Technicheskiy progress i bezopasnost' truda" (Technical Progress and Work Safety). On 4 August 1960 the presidium of the Central Trade Union Council adopted a resolution about maintaining safety rules before starting the serial production of any machine. Thus the role of the technical inspection of the trade unions extends to the planning and research institutes of the machine building industry, which is, of course, especially important in the present phase where modern semi-automatic machines and equipment are being built.

Another field in which the trade unions have extended their activities to a remarkable extent is social security. Since July 1956, when the 5th session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR decided on a state pension law, the representatives of the trade unions became active in the commissions for determining the pension rates and in the physician's certifying commissions (A. V. Pyatakov, Profsoyuzy i sovetskoye gossudarstvo (Trade Unions and the Soviet State), Moscow, 1960, p. 109 and 110). The decree of 1957 concerning state social insurance gives the following new tasks to the trade unions: Entire management of state social security within the borders of a republic or oblast; control of medical care for workers; establishing plans for admittance to sanitariums, rest homes and vacation resorts; directing the activities of certifying physicians; control of the work of social security organizations in determining and paying pensions (ibid., p. 111).

Within the framework of measures for improving the situation in sanitariums and rest homes, a change was effected when the CC of the CPSU and the Council of Ministers of the USSR transferred the entire administration of sanitariums and rest homes, and the admittance into these, to the trade unions, effective 1 May 1960. Only medical care is still in the hands of the Ministry of Health (Trud (Work), 27 March 1960).

A new field of activity for the trade unions which is important to the worker is participation in the allocation of living quarters. Since the new statutes of the trade union committees in the plants have been confirmed, no living quarters may be allocated without consent by the trade unions. Special trade union teams are now checking the quality of building construction work and examining the possibility of increasing the building of living quarters with the aid of local resources. In practice, however, much of this is only on paper, since the trade unions meet with resistance of directors and plant administrators, who in many cases distribute living quarters as they see fit. (See also report by Grishin before the 12th Trade Union Congress, Trud, 24 March 1959.) For settling various labor and social problems the new labor legislation will have great importance; it was worked out by a legislative commission with extensive participation of the trade unions; the draft was published in October, 1959 and presented for public discussion. Compared to the labor law passed in 1918 which was valid up to then, the new law is certainly in many respects a decisive step forward for the Soviet worker. (About this draft see H. Niedermeyer in the next issue of Osteuropa).

The draft of the basis for the new labor law was published in several periodicals in October 1959, among them Sovetskiye profsoyuzy, Socialisticheskii trud, Sovetskaya vustitsiya, and in the bulletin of the Supreme Court

of the USSR. An interesting discussion of the defects of the law reached its climax at the end of 1959. (A survey of the burning social problems in the Soviet Union in the light of this discussion is given in Archiv der Soviet-union, October 1959, P. 51-55 and November 1959, p. 66-71, Forschungsdienst Osteuropa, Dusseldorf, and Borys Lewytzkyj, "Der sovietische Arbeitsgesetzentwurf" (The Draft of the Soviet Labor Law) in Arbeit und Wirtschaft, (Labor and Economy), No 3, 1960, Vienna).

Since 1957 the trade unions have been trying, upon the recommendation of the CPSU, to increase their control of various phases of care for the worker, such as public food distribution, commercial organizations, cultural institutions, etc.

New Tasks of the Trade Unions in the "Communist Education" of the Workers

The announcement of the Seven-Year Plan and the fight of the CPSU for a higher level of economic development brought important changes in the activity of the Soviet trade unions in the field of "Education of the Workers". The main idea is to adapt the technical and cultural education of the worker to the new tasks in the period of technical progress and of automation.

"Socialist competition" remains even today for the Soviet trade unions the most important task. This competition has acquired new characteristics as compared to its earlier forms (for example the Stakhanov-movement). Since the 21st Party Congress of the CPSU, the trade unions have been pushing the movement of the "Brigades" or "Activists of Communist Labor", where, besides the fulfillment of production plans and increase of work productivity, a "Communist way of life" in the plant as well as in private life stands in the foreground. From 27 to 29 May 1960 a trade union conference of the winners of the competition for the title of "Brigade" or "Activist of Communist Labor" was held in Moscow. This was the first result of the new movement, which encountered great difficulties, as Grishin admitted in his main report (Trud, 31 May 1960). All this confirms, however, that the CPSU and the trade unions are going to further these new forms of "socialist competition" by all possible means.

A new movement found its concrete expression in the "Trade Union Society of Inventors and Innovators". 1.1 million workers, engineers and technicians belong to this society, as Grishin reported during the July 1959 plenum of the CC of the CPSU; there were 2 million in 1960. Suggestions for increased efficiency in plants are supposed to have netted a savings of more than 9.7 billion rubles. Still, through the indifference of the administration, more than 600,000 suggestions were not examined at all, and more than half a million were not put into effect in 1959 (Sovetskiye profsovuzy, No 20, October 1960, p. 7).

The scientific-technical societies sponsored by the trade unions play an important role in the efforts of the trade unions to spread technical know-how among the workers. In the beginning of 1960, membership was 1 million workers and technicians (ibid.)

To these most important areas of new activities of the trade unions are added the attempts to include trade union organizations in several operations by which the Soviet regime wants to increase the importance of the role of

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society -- such as "social courts", people's militia and other measures for increasing public law and order.

Some Conclusions Concerning Latest Developments

The brief period of "Storm and Stress" after the death of Stalin did not bring any basic changes in the position of the trade unions in Soviet society in the sense of a democratization and de-bureaucratization. The excessive centralization in the trade unions was eliminated to a great extent, as Grishin reported to the 12th congress. The focal point of the activity of the trade unions was moved to the local trade union organizations and the trade union committees in the plants. As early as 20,000 functionaries were dismissed from the trade union organization, and the staff of the trade union councils of the union republics and of the Central Trade Union Council was cut by 70.5%. From the reports about the most recent elections of the new bodies of the trade union organizations in the individual plants, we can see that the specific part of the worker in the newly elected bodies amounts to only 32.2% (Sovetskiye profsoyuzy, No 14, 1960, p. 12).

The process of changes in the trade unions, which dates from 1957, has only achieved one important "sociological change", that is the emancipation of the Soviet trade union bureaucracy, which has received more independence and probably more power of decision in many new sections of Soviet life.

The experiment of the "Permanent Production Advisory Boards" and of the increased authority of trade unions in the economic management of the plants, which was so loudly proclaimed in 1957, had stagnated earlier than even the worst pessimists had expected. At the same time, however, an increasing influence of the trade unions in social care and improvement of living conditions for the workers became more and more evident.

It seems that only in the field of social work did the Soviet trade union leaders follow Khrushchev's admonition to "quarrel with the industrial functionaries". Success has been achieved on a local basis on numerous occasions, and this was due to the aforementioned emancipation of the bureaucracy of the trade unions. The previous bureaucratic heavyhandedness has been reduced considerably, and the bureaucracy of the trade unions has become more flexible and efficient.

Although no true democratization has been achieved, the basis of contacts between the bureaucracy of the trade unions and the workers has been expanded as compared to the days of Stalin. Even before, the trade unions afforded certain advantages to the workers, especially in social insurance, by short-term loans from the mutual aid funds of the trade union, free legal advice, etc. These advantages are constantly increasing. Also, the assistance of the trade unions in case of job change or additional training, is becoming more important, especially in the present transitional stage of forced technological advances which generates important problems, such as wage adjustments.

The Soviet trade unions recognize today, as they did in Stalin's days, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and its general policy as the decisive "source of its creative work". The difference lies probably in the fact that

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the objective development in the Soviet Union forces the Communists to consider the needs of the workers in their plans to a greater extent than they have done in the most recent past, where terror could still function as a "history-building" factor.

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