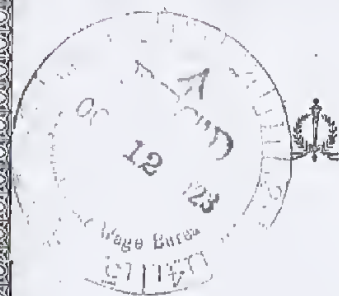


# RUSSIAN TRADE UNIONS



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## INTRODUCTION.

In presenting this little pamphlet we aim to bring to the attention of the American labor movement statistical evidence regarding the condition of the trade unions in Soviet Russia.

Unadorned facts are here marshalled against the traducers of the first Workers and Peasants Republic in the history of the world. Those who revile the Russian Soviet government with the charge that it persecutes unions are here confronted with the fact that it is only since the triumph of the Bolshevik Party in the November 7, 1917, revolution that powerful unions arose in that country. Nowhere have trade unions the tremendous power they enjoy in Russia today. Although not governmental agencies, their wishes regarding wages, hours and working conditions are always enforced by the government.

But in spite of these facts the most vindictive attacks upon the Soviet Government's trade union policy still continue. The origin of these attacks can be traced to the early days of the revolution. When the workers' and peasants' government was fighting for its existence; when the international counter-revolution was stretching forth its bloody claws to clutch the throat of the Russian workers it was the duty of the trade unionists to stand solidly behind their own government. But in that hour of peril, when the fate of this achievement of the ages hung in the balance, servile tools of Kolchak, Denikin and Yudenich, masquerading as "labor leaders" tried to betray the trade unions into White Guard traps. The Russian trade unionists repudiated these schemers and stood valiantly behind their government. The overwhelming majority of the workers organized in the trade unions assisted in frustrating this monstrous perfidy with the result that the scoundrels were exposed.

From active participation in counter-revolutionary intrigues within Russia these tools of imperialism fled to Warsaw, Paris, London and other havens of refuge, from whence they have issued volumes of malicious propaganda in a desperate effort to arouse the organized workers of other countries against Soviet Russia. It is this propaganda, emanating from these spurious "trade unionists", these hirelings and adventurers who strive to turn the Russia of the working class into a vast cemetery preliminary to restoring the dark night of Czarism, that some of our American labor leaders defend.

When Soviet Russia was fighting for its very existence against the iron ring of capitalist imperialism it was the magnificent solidarity of the whole working class that shattered the power of their mortal enemies. During that time there were no strikes, for the simple reason that the organized workers recognized the fact that it was their own government they were defending.

Now that certain concessions have been granted capitalists in Russia, the trade unions function the same as in other countries in relation to their exploiters—that is to say they use the strike and other weapons of labor's economic struggle to maintain standards of life they desire. They, of course, have the tremendous advantage over other trade union movements, in that the Soviet government is their government and always stands behind them in their struggle, instead of taking the side of the oppressor as in other countries.

Such a government is the friend of the working class everywhere. The best way for the working class of the United States to help the workers and farmers of Russia is to fight for trade relations with and recognition of Soviet Russia by the United States government.

## ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF THE RUSSIAN TRADE UNIONS.

The first Russian trade unions arose during the twenties of the last century in present-day Poland, where "societies for mutual aid" were formed mainly among artisans. It was not until the sixties that there began the workers' movement which created among the industrial working class unions fighting for its economic interests.

In the beginning the labor movement took on the form of "labor disturbances," which testified to the growth of class consciousness. The result of these disturbances was the introduction of factory legislation. Thus, the strikes of the seventies, which were directed mainly against the exploitation of child labor, brought it about that on June 1, 1882, employment of juvenile workers under 12 was legally prohibited and the work day of other juvenile workers was fixed at eight hours. The famous Morosov strike in Orekhovo-Suyev during the first half of the eighties led to the law of June 3, 1886, which took up juridically questions of engaging workers, fines, etc. This movement, however, still lacked a strong organized form. Police persecutions made any legal organization of the workers impossible. Among the first illegal organizations belongs the half economic and half political organization of the "North Russian Workers Union," which was founded by the carpenter, Stephan Khalturin. But, as these organizations changed very soon into purely political ones, the guidance of the economic struggle remained with the "strike committees," which were arrested during the strikes.

Only towards the end of the nineties did the labor movement consolidate itself. The police and gendarmerie

endeavored to conquer the labor organizations by means of provocateurs. The police agent Zubatov, with the knowledge of the police, organized workers' societies in Moscow, Minsk and Odessa and sometimes even placed himself at the head of strike movements. "Zubatovism" soon had to be liquidated, however, since the organizations started by the police often functioned in the interests of the workers (as, for instance, during events in South Russia in 1903).

It was only in 1905, after the first Revolution, that the working class of Russia found it possible to start a more or less systematic building up of its unions. The right to organize was guaranteed by law, and the working class took advantage of it on a very large scale. After the promulgation of the statute of March 4, 1906, the number of workers organized in trade unions already exceeded 200,000. The epoch of reaction, however, disrupted also the trade unions. The trade unions, which had promised to become the center of the working class movement in Russia, now scarcely had more than a few dozen members; the leaders were continually imprisoned, and every strike led to the dissolution of the unions.

The March revolution of 1917 was the opportunity awaited by the labor movement for its further development. In March all prohibitive laws were abolished, but the trade unions, barely fledged, quickly met with the resistance of the powerful capitalist organizations backed by the "democratic" government. The trade unions conducted a primarily political struggle. In the July revolt of 1917\*) the trade unions took a most active part; the Petrograd council of trade unions issued a proclamation summoning the workers of Petrograd to a struggle for a government of Soviets. The trade unions furnished

\*) Unsuccessful revolt of the Bolsheviks against Kerensky.

the main mass of fighters who decided the fate of the revolution.

Before the November, 1917 Revolution, which brought to power the Bolshevik party the trade union movement of Russia had not shown any organic growth. It was only at the moment when power was transferred to the hands of the proletariat that a continuous and steady growth of trade unions set in.

| End of    | 1905 | about | 100,000   | Members |
|-----------|------|-------|-----------|---------|
| Beginning | "    | "     | 200,000   | "       |
| "         | 1907 | "     | 245,000   | "       |
| "         | 1908 | "     | 103,000   | "       |
| Middle    | "    | "     | 693,278   | "       |
| "         | 1917 | "     | 1,946,235 | "       |
| "         | 1918 | "     | 3,706,779 | "       |
| "         | 1919 | "     | 5,222,000 | "       |
| "         | 1920 | "     | 7,524,438 | "       |
| "         | 1921 | "     |           | "       |

(according to other estimates about 8 million).

The rapid growth of the trade union movement in Soviet Russia is easily understood if one takes into consideration the fact that the proletarian government regards every worker who is not organized industrially as an undesirable element.

At the same time important tasks in the organization of national economy were imposed upon the trade unions by the events of the civil war and the needs of economic life. Of course, the problems and character of the trade unions changed in accordance with the political situation. This is especially apparent from the basic problems with which the trade union congresses had to deal.

The First Congress was mainly concerned with the relation of the unions to the Soviet government. The resolution passed on the subject reads: "The revolutionary Socialists always consider the trade unions as organizations which are destined to struggle hand in hand with

the other fighting organs of the working class for the dictatorship of the proletariat and for the realization of socialism." The Second Congress took up the question of the participation of the trade unions in economic reconstruction. The Third proclaimed as the fundamental task of the trade unions the "reconstruction of the country's productive forces by increasing the efficiency of labor and the manufacturing plants". The Fourth Congress was the first to point out the necessity of defending the purely economic interests of the workers.

### THE NEW ECONOMIC POLICY AND THE RUSSIAN TRADE UNIONS.

The special position in which the Russian trade unions found themselves during the period extending up to the spring of 1921 impressed a peculiar stamp upon them. Without being governmental organs, the trade unions were the deciding factor in many problems. In fact they fulfilled functions of the government in the regulation of wages, rationing, etc. The western European trade unions cannot even dream of such power to determine working conditions. Every step in this direction was made at the cost of the greatest effort. It is only natural that this particular situation of the Russian trade unions should have exhibited, besides its positive aspects, a number of negative features, which have come to the fore during the past year. Some trade unions acquired an altogether too rigid conception of the matter of membership; they thought that the mere fact that this or that worker or clerk was employed in some factory or office sufficed to make him a member. Since the trade unions fixed the working conditions for all labor without exception, they required the payment of trade union dues from all. In most cases these dues were deducted by the management, so that the connection between the union members and their economic organizations was lost.

There was no legal compulsion to become members of the trade unions. No law was enacted forcing the worker to become a union member. Of course the trade unions could have had such a law passed, but they did not do so, because their actual influence was so great that such a law was quite superfluous. But this mechanical registration of all workers into the trade unions undoubtedly had its drawbacks, and with the new tasks and working methods, that question also grew pressing. It was termed "free membership," not quite accurately, since no trade union in any country relinquishes the right to exert pressure on the unorganized workers. If the worker refuses to join, the union gives employment preference to its members.

The development of small industry and trade lent a new color to the recruiting of new members. The trade unions now had to revise their membership lists. They had to scrutinize every single member and fight against formal membership, since the newly created situation demanded more activity and initiative from each union member.

In the first year of the revolution, with the continually changing structure of the economic organs, the trade union bodies also occupied themselves with the immediate organization of production. This was the business of two different organs. On the one hand, it was the function of the economic organs which were made up of trade unions and representatives of the Soviets of Workers' Delegates; on the other hand, the same trade unions took part directly in all problems of production. Thus there arose a dualism and a parallelism whose consequence was a lack of stability in the management of industry. This dualism had to be done away with. It was necessary to define where the jurisdiction of the trade unions ends and where the power of the economic organs begins. It was imperative to achieve a single will in the management of production. When the economic organs had finally taken shape, this division of labor was altogether natural. The

economic organs concentrated their attention on the management of industry and its technical improvement, while the trade unions organized the work and concerned themselves mainly with raising the material and cultural level of the working class, that is, with questions connected with the co-ordination, development and improvement of working-power. In this division of labor, of course, conflicts are possible, but as soon as these conflicts arise they are arbitrated by special organs and offices. If they cannot be solved in a peaceful way, then violent pressure by the trade unions on one or another state organ is possible. The trade unions will be as averse to seek such conflicts as the economic organs themselves. The ones as well as the others are interested in systematic work, in the improvement of production and in promoting the welfare of the working class.

Amidst the continually growing development of productive forces this division of labor between the trade unions and the economic organizations in no way diminishes the influence of the trade unions upon the Soviet state and its apparatus. There is no important state decree which has originated without the participation of the trade unions. The entire economic policy of the Soviet government interests the unions as much as the economic organs. The trade unions, which have cast aside military provisioning and other such problems, have freed their hands to devote themselves more energetically and freely to questions of immediate organization of the masses and to raising the material and cultural level of the working class. This, however, by no means signifies that the trade unions are never going to be concerned with other problems. If the position of the Soviet state should demand a military effort or assistance in provisioning, the trade unions would do their utmost to master these problems. This they would do not out of theoretical considerations, but because the mastery of these problems is necessary in the interest of the trade union members

themselves, because the interests of the Soviet state are also the interests of the working class and therefore of the Russian trade unions. There is no antagonism between the interests of the Soviet state and those of the trade unions. Where the state, under the assault of the petty bourgeois elements, or under the pressure of foreign capitalists, is forced to make concessions, there is no conflict involved between the state and the trade unions. The Soviet state has entered upon a retreat because the Russian working class is not strong enough to avoid making concessions to the international capitalists, and the trade unions would have made the same concessions if they themselves had been the government. These are not concessions by an abstract Soviet state or by bureaucratic officials far removed from the workers, but they are concessions by the workers themselves, who are one with the trade unions.

A. Losovsky.

#### ORGANIZATION OF TRADE UNIONS.

All persons belonging to any industrial union are counted as trade union members. There are 21 industrial unions. The activity of the local sections of the industrial unions is centralized, however, in every region and conducted by mixed local committees. In every district there are not only district sections for every branch of industry, but also a district trade union bureau. In every province, besides the provincial sections of the industrial unions, there is also a provincial trade union council.

The presidiums and the secretariats of the various national unions, elected at their respective conferences and congresses, are the highest administrative organs.

The conferences and congresses are the legislative organs of the trade union movement. They are called once a year for all Russia and at least twice a year in every province. During the intervals between congresses

the Plenum of the Central Committee of the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions has legislative power and, to a more limited degree, also the Central Committee and the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions.

The whole movement is strictly centralized: The territory in which each union unit has the right to make independent decisions is sharply defined. Decisions that are to apply to all Russia are made by the Supreme Central Council of the National Unions, the All-Russian Trade Union Congress, the Central Committee of the Trade Unions and their All-Russian Congresses. (The latter are confirmed by the Supreme Central Council of Trade Unions). Within the provinces decisions are made by the provincial conferences of all unions and by conferences of the various industrial unions. In case of conflict, provincial decisions can be nullified by the corresponding Central Committees or by the Supreme Central Council of Trade Unions. The latter also has the power to dissolve unions.

### THE FACTORY COMMITTEES

The factory committees played a particularly important role during the period following the March Revolution, when the trade unions, which were still under the influence of the Mensheviks, were not energetic enough in defending the workers' interests.

Sabotage on the part of the manufacturers went so far, for instance, that at the suggestion of the well-known manufacturer Ryabushinsky they refused to adjust wages according to the cost of living. It then became necessary to create organs which would be in a position to conduct negotiations with the manufacturers on the spot. These were the factory committees, which were formed exclusively from workers in the plant itself and were officially considered as organs of workers' control.

In line with the development of the trade union movement the function of the factory committees has now become essentially different. The factory committees, numbering from 3 to 10 persons and elected at plenary meetings in the various plants, at present form the lowest organization unit with the following functions:

**Scale:** The committee must see to it that the workers are registered in their proper wage scale group according to their qualifications.

**Settlement of conflicts:** The committees must intervene in all litigations and misunderstandings which arise between the management and the individual worker, the committee nominating mixed settlement commissions with equal representation from both sides. Moreover the committee enters directly into negotiations with the management and has the right to start suits.

**Protection of labor:** The factory committees are charged with the duty of supervising measures taken for protection of the workers.

**Educational work:** This includes fighting illiteracy and organizing amusements in line with cultural needs.

**Membership Dues:** These are collected for the trade unions by the factory committees and delivered to the trade union treasury.

Intercourse with the national unions, acceptance of new members, organization of meetings, representation of workers' interests at conferences etc., are taken care of by the factory committees. As the lowest trade union unit in the plant, the factory committee is also charged with putting into effect all the decisions of the national union.

At the present time there are over 20,000 such committees in Soviet Russia with at least 100,000 members.

## THE TRADE UNIONS' SPHERE OF ACTIVITY

The most important function of all trade union organizations is the **fixing of wages**. The amount of wages and the manner of paying wages is determined in Soviet Russia by a single body, namely, the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions. Gradation of wages is fixed according to a so-called 17-degree scale. The relation between the individual scale degrees is a fixed one, but the scales themselves represent a minimum and not a fixed wage norm. The scale policy of the trade unions admits the most varied forms of payment for work: besides payment for time, provision is also made for lump payments; moreover, there is often employed the so called budget lump payment, which consists in setting aside from the budget of the enterprise in question a certain sum calculated on the basis of average production.

The **protection of the economic interests** of the workers in the plants has become a pressing question due to the latest changes (1921-1922) in the economic life of Soviet Russia; formerly, during the period of civil war, these interests were subordinated to the general interests of the proletarian dictatorship. The new economic policy necessitated a transition to collective agreements with the trade unions and, moreover, brought a need for a wide network of arbitration chambers. The possibility of strikes and the necessity of participation by the trade unions in these strikes has finally made the establishment of strike funds imperative.

The functions of **labor protection** are closely connected with the defense of the workers' interests in the plants. However, whereas formerly the entire activity of labor protection devolved upon the trade unions, at present they limit themselves to supplying information for the bureau of labor inspection and to participation in the elaboration of labor protection laws through the Peoples' Commissariat of Labor.

The trade unions, which were formerly more concerned with the organization of production itself, are more and more changing into regulatory economic organs and are participating in the management of industry only in the legislative and not in the administrative respect. This legislative role of the trade unions is, however, very important. At present there is not a single field of industrial legislation in which the trade union movement has not made itself felt. The participation of the trade unions in the Supreme Council of National Economy is not unimportant. Repeatedly there are joint sessions of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of National Economy and of the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions. Likewise there are in almost all the People's Commissariats representatives of the corresponding trade unions.

Last but not least, we may mention the **educational, publishing** and general political activity of the trade unions. The trade unions are conducting an active struggle not only against illiteracy in general, but also against ignorance in regard to trade unions. To the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions there is attached a University for the Trade Union Movement, in which 250 to 300 union officials are trained annually. In this school thorough courses are given in the history, theory and practice of the trade union movement in Soviet Russia and abroad, as well as in the principles of political economy, the history of Western Europe and Russia, the history of socialism, the basic principles of Marxism, etc. Similar schools on a smaller scale are attached to the Provincial Trade Union Councils.

All Russian National Unions have their monthly or weekly papers, some of them both (for instance, the textile and metal workers). The railroad workers have a daily organ called "Gudok" (The Signal). The All-Russian Central Council has a daily paper "Trud" (Labor) and a monthly paper "Vestnik Truda" (Labor Messenger),



and publishes a "Bulletin" twice a month. In addition to the periodical publications the Central Committee of the All-Russian Central Council publishes a quantity of books and pamphlets; thus there has been published by the All-Russian Central Trade Union Council Webb's "History of Trade Unionism" as well as other books.

The political functions of the trade unions are characterized by the fact that they take part in all events in the political life of Soviet Russia. Thus, for instance, there were two representatives of the trade unions (Ruisutak and Saproinov) attached to the Genoa delegation. Trade unions are patrons of individual detachments of the Red Army and Navy, they participate actively in the election campaigns for the Soviets, etc.

### LABOR LEGISLATION

On December 10, 1918, the decrees and separate ordinances relating to labor protection were collected and published as a Code of Labor Laws. In line with the motto of the Soviet Republic, "Whoever does not work shall not eat," paragraph 1 of the Code establishes the right and the duty to work for all citizens of the Republic from the age of 16 to 50, with the exception of persons who have become temporarily or permanently incapacitated either on account of old age or sickness, pregnant women (during a period of eight weeks preceding and eight weeks following confinement), and students in all grades, since going to school is regarded as work. Night work and employment in particularly unhealthy enterprises are prohibited for juvenile workers under 18 and for women. Engagement of workers is effected through the labor registration and distribution sections, and manufacturers or workers evading these bureaus are liable to prosecution.

Every working person is granted the right to get work in his or her trade under the conditions established by

the proper trade union. An unemployed person has no right to refuse work if it corresponds to his or her trade and qualifications. In order to establish the fitness of the individual worker for the work assigned to him, he must be tried out for a maximum period of six days in the case of factory workers, 14 days for clerical workers and one month for highly skilled employees. If a worker is not dismissed at his own request but on account of closing down or curtailment of the enterprise or for similar reasons, he must be given 14 days' notice, or, if he is discharged immediately, wages for 14 days must be paid to him.

Wages are regulated by the scales established by the People's Commissariat for Labor. The working day is 8 hours for day and 7 hours for night work. For juvenile workers under 18, in particularly unhealthy branches of industry and for Sundays and holidays the working time is reduced to 6 hours. The worker gets 14 days' paid vacation.

In case of loss of working capacity every worker gets medical attendance free of charge and sustenance up to the full amount of his wages. Provision is made also for the unemployed.

During the most crucial period of civil war and intervention, militarization of labor, together with restriction of liberty of movement, became necessary. All these exceptional measures have since been abolished.

## STATISTICS OF THE RUSSIAN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

Towards the end of 1921 there were 9451 trade unions in Russia with a total membership of 7,963,000. The 21 All-Russian national unions now in existence may be grouped as follows:

|   |                  |          |
|---|------------------|----------|
| 1. Metal workers .....  | 522,000          | members  |
| 2. Textile workers .....  | 369,000          | "        |
| 3. Mine workers .....   | 284,000          | "        |
| 4. Farm & Forest workers.....                                   | 658,000          | "        |
| 5. Woodworkers .....  | 236,000          | "        |
| 6. Leather workers .....  | 182,000          | "        |
| 7. Building workers.....  | 347,000          | "        |
| 8. Needle workers .....   | 186,000          | "        |
| 9. Food workers .....   | 268,000          | "        |
| 10. Sugar workers.....  | 51,000           | "        |
| 11. Printing industry.....                                      | 86,000           | "        |
| 12. Paper industry.....   | 27,000           | "        |
| 13. Tobacco workers.....  | 30,000           | "        |
| 14. Chemical industry.....                                      | 159,000          | "        |
| 15. Railroad workers.....                                       | 1,070,000        | "        |
| 16. Water transport workers.....                                | 299,000          | "        |
| 17. Local transport workers.....                                | 201,000          | "        |
| 18. Art workers.....  | 122,000          | "        |
| 19. Health & Sanitation.....                                    | 562,000          | "        |
| 20. Education .....   | 756,000          | "        |
| 21. Posts & Telegraphs.....                                     | 198,000          | "        |
| <b>Add:</b>   |                  |          |
| Soviet employees.....   | 1,028,000        | "        |
| Persons occupied in public feeding<br>and on Soviet farms ..... | 322,000          | "        |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>7,963,000</b> | <b>"</b> |

Territorially the trade unions are grouped as follows:

|                                  |                  |          |
|----------------------------------|------------------|----------|
| 1. Central industrial area.....  | 1,378,000        | members  |
| 2. Central Black-Earth area..... | 961,000          | "        |
| 3. Northern area.....            | 855,000          | "        |
| 4. Western area.....             | 365,000          | "        |
| 5. Volga area.....               | 938,000          | "        |
| 6. Urals .....                   | 783,000          | "        |
| 7. Kirghiz Republic.....         | 145,000          | "        |
| 8. Siberia .....                 | 387,000          | "        |
| 9. Turkestan .....               | 206,000          | "        |
| 10. Caucasus .....               | 208,000          | "        |
| 11. Southeast .....              | 405,000          | "        |
| 12. Crimea .....                 | 38,000           | "        |
| 13. Ukraine .....                | 1,294,000        | "        |
| <b>Total</b>                     | <b>7,963,000</b> | <b>"</b> |

The proportion of women, who predominate in some unions, is shown in the following table:

|                               |              |          |
|-------------------------------|--------------|----------|
| 1. Farm & Forest workers..... | 25.6%        | women    |
| 2. Wood workers.....          | 19.9%        | "        |
| 3. Leather workers.....       | 10.7%        | "        |
| 4. Building workers.....      | 11.0%        | "        |
| 5. Tobacco workers.....       | 55.1%        | "        |
| 6. Needle workers.....        | 64.8%        | "        |
| 7. Transport workers.....     | 16.8%        | "        |
| 8. Soviet farms .....         | 21.9%        | "        |
| 9. Public feeding.....        | 64.9%        | "        |
| 10. Art workers.....          | 36.9%        | "        |
| 11. Sanitation & Medical..... | 57.8%        | "        |
| 12. Public education.....     | 62.3%        | "        |
| 13. Posts & Telegraph.....    | 31.6%        | "        |
| 14. Soviet employees.....     | 25.1%        | "        |
| <b>Average</b>                | <b>33.4%</b> | <b>"</b> |