

The Recent Evolution of Trade Unionism in the U.S.S.R.

By a recent decision of the Soviet Government the Commissariat of Labour has been abolished and its functions transferred to the Central Trade Union Council. In the light of earlier events this decision is not so much a change in Soviet trade union policy as the culmination of the changes that this policy has undergone in consequence of the thoroughgoing economic nationalisation embarked upon simultaneously with the first Five-Year Plan. The aim of the present article is to describe this evolution in its relation to the Communist theory of trade unionism and to the general economic policy of the Soviets.

THE COMMUNIST THEORY OF TRADE UNIONISM

THE Communist theory of trade unionism rests upon the following basic principles :

- (a) only Communist trade unions are allowed ;
- (b) the trade unions are under the direction of the Communist Party and the supervision of the State ;
- (c) the trade unions are organised "vertically" (one union for one undertaking).

The Communist Party has always contended that these principles were essential to its policy, and the Ninth Congress of the Party (1920) confirmed them. In a statement approved by the Congress, Boukharin declared that "whereas under the capitalist system trade unions are a means of fighting the capitalists, under the dictatorship of the proletariat they must inevitably become an instrument of the class in power." ¹ At the same Congress Lenin laid particular emphasis on the necessity for placing the unions under the Communist Party and for

¹ Cf. "The History of the Russian Communist Party traced from its Congresses. The Ninth Congress." Kharkov, 1929. (In Russian.)

making them "schools of Communism". The Congress accordingly resolved¹ that the trade unions are "among the most important cogs in the machinery of the Soviet State as controlled by the Communist Party". Their task is to instil the Communist spirit into the workers and to take an active part in the economic life of the country within the bounds marked out for them by the State. The Communist theory of trade unionism admits of no opposition from the unions either to the Soviets (the administrative and legislative organs of the State) or to the Communist Party (the supreme political organ of the State). This theory, in fact, postulates the principle that "the Soviet State is the most extensive and complete working-class organisation that exists" and that "its powers endow it with all the means of coercion". This being so, the trade unions, which are only a cog in the machinery of the State, even if one of the most important, must bow to its will. "Since the Soviet regime is the most extensive organisation, concentrating in itself all the social power of the proletariat, it is clear that the trade unions must be converted . . . into auxiliary organs of the proletarian State; the contrary would be an error."

Further, the Communist Party is "the advance guard of the working class" and the driving force of the Soviet State. "The dictatorship of the proletariat and the achievement of Socialism are only possible if the trade unions, while nominally outside the Party, do, in fact, turn Communist and carry out the policy of the Party."

The creation of Soviet trade unions on the "vertical" system, in which all workers in any undertaking, irrespective of their occupation, are organised in a single union, was urged from the beginning of the revolution, so as to centralise and co-ordinate the management of the unions by the Party.

In a word, the Communist theory of trade unionism is that the unions, without being official organs of the Party, are controlled by the Party as its policy directs. Although not definitely part of the State machinery, the unions are semi-official organisations under direct State supervision and responsible for carrying out the State policy.

¹ Verbatim report of the Ninth Congress of the Russian Communist Party, Moscow, 1920. (In Russian.)

THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADE UNION POLICY UP TO 1928

During the first years of the revolution (1917-1921), the so-called "War Communism" period, the economic and political situation was completely dominated by the civil war and the ensuing general disorganisation of production. The essential aims of trade union policy at that time were to organise industrial workers with a view to providing them with the bare necessities of life, to furnish drafts for the Red Army, and to carry out the militarisation of labour. The functions of the unions were not yet clearly defined; in addition to tasks specifically their own they performed others that generally devolve upon the public authorities. For instance, they took upon themselves the duties of the Commissariat of Labour when, in agreement with the Government, they fixed wage rates, standards of output, etc. Membership of the unions was compulsory and they were financed by the State.

It was at this time, too, that some prominence began to be given to the question of legalising the *de facto* official status of the trade unions by formally declaring them organs of the State. No decision was taken, however, for a number of influential trade unionists were opposed to an immediate official status on the grounds that the workers were not yet educated up to it politically. Lenin himself advised caution. The First Trade Union Congress (1918) confined itself to expressing its conviction that "when the present phase of evolution is complete the trade unions will inevitably become organs of the Socialist State and their membership will necessarily comprise all persons engaged in productive work."¹

This point of view was confirmed in 1919 by the Second Trade Union Congress. While the unions were not legally incorporated in the State machinery, however, they certainly acted as though they had been. Not only did they take over the duties of the Commissariat of Labour, but they also took an active part in the nationalisation of private undertakings and in the management of industry; for instance, they operated nationalised industrial undertakings, either directly or through their membership of the bodies directing State industry. As the Soviet regime strengthened its hold, friction arose between trade

¹ Verbatim report of the First Trade Union Congress, Petrograd, 1918. (In Russian.)

union Communists and Communists in control of industry. The principle of committee management of State undertakings slowly gave way to the principle of personal management, and the trade unions were gradually ousted from the direct control of industry. This process was hastened by the introduction of the new economic policy (N.E.P.).

It was soon found that trade union policy had to be adapted to the new economic policy. In the first place, it was anticipated that the capitalist would reappear and that the unions would have to fight him. Secondly, the nationalised undertakings must henceforth pay their way, or, in other words, rationalise their methods and put an end to the ever-recurring deficits of the "War Communism" period. Consequently, in the interests of production they might be called upon to pursue a policy contrary to the immediate interests of the workers.

The new trade union policy was decided upon by the Eleventh Congress of the Communist Party in 1921, although it was not applied until the following year. This policy left membership of trade unions voluntary but made the payment of contributions by members compulsory. Voluntary membership, however, was subject to economic and political disadvantages inflicted on non-unionists which made membership practically compulsory. The payment of contributions improved the finances of the unions considerably and finally closed the era of deficits.

The functions of trade unions under the new economic policy gave rise to lively discussions both at the Eleventh Communist Congress, which settled the trade union policy to be followed, and at the plenary session of the Central Trade Union Council (February 1922), which had to accept the decisions of the Party.

The first controversial question was that of the participation of the trade unions in the management of industry. Several trade unionists and some Communists outside the trade union movement wished to retain the key positions that the trade unions had secured at the beginning of the revolution in the management of industry, while the Communist economic officials tried to drive them out of these positions one after another on the ground that trade union interference only delayed the revival of industry.

The Congress decided that the unions were no longer to be directly concerned in the management of undertakings, which in future should be under individual managers with full personal authority and responsibility. The unions, while still having a

voice in the preparation of industrial plans, the appointment of managers of undertakings, etc., were to regulate their relations with industry—this was the chief innovation—by means of collective contracts of employment conforming to the labour legislation and, in particular, the Labour Code put into force at the end of 1922. Resort to collective agreements raised the problem of labour disputes. At the beginning of the revolution strikes had been encouraged and even supported by the Government to help the unions in the struggle against private employers. When industry and transport were nationalised strikes took on a different aspect. Lozovsky, then one of the Russian trade union leaders and now Secretary-General of the Red Trade Union International, declared that “the workers have carried through the revolution, expropriated the bourgeoisie, and made works and factories public property; will they next make demands upon themselves and back them up by striking and disorganising production? This would be a flagrant contradiction, and it is only natural that strikes should be ruled out as a weapon of the Russian trade union.”¹ After protracted discussions the Communist Congress decided that the right to strike should not be entirely abolished, but that strikes “harmful to the general interests of the country and the working class” should be considered an instrument to be resorted to only in the last extreme.

The resolution of the Eleventh Congress contains the following declaration²:

The ultimate aim of a strike under the capitalist regime is the destruction of Government authority and the annihilation of the governing class. In a proletarian State of a transitional type like ours, on the contrary, the activities of the proletariat must be directed only towards consolidation of the proletarian State and proletarian class government. To this end war should be waged on bureaucracy, the faults and weaknesses of the Government, the class appetites of capitalists who have escaped government control, etc.

Hence, in the case of friction or disputes between groups of workers and institutions or organs of the working-class State, it will be the duty of the unions to help smooth matters out as quickly and as satisfactorily as possible, and this by seeking to gain for the workers they represent the maximum of advantages compatible with the development of the proletarian State and proletarian economy and the interests of other bodies of workers.

¹ Lozovsky: *Les Syndicats russes et la N.E.P.* Paris, 1922.

² Proceedings of the Eleventh Congress of the Russian Communist Party, Moscow, 1922. (In Russian.)

The resolution asserts that the only "just and reasonable" way of settling disputes is to call in the trade union organisations, which must try to end them as quickly as possible. When, for one reason or another, a strike cannot be avoided it can only be considered lawful if it has been approved by the union; and it must be ended as quickly as possible. Broadly speaking, it is the duty of the trade unions to do what they can to prevent strikes by seeing that labour legislation is properly applied and collective agreements carried out. They must also make the workers understand that strikes are harmful to the Soviet State in general and the working class in particular.¹

Although, so far as the protection of labour is concerned, the trade unions were bound by the general policy of the Soviets, during the new economic policy they displayed considerable activity, chiefly in the spheres of collective agreements and wages. They not only saw that the conditions laid down in the Labour Code were respected, but they also sought to secure additional advantages. Naturally they frequently came into conflict with the State industries, which had their own interests to protect. These conflicts were not always settled in favour of the unions; in most cases they resulted in a compromise or an adverse decision.² The conclusion of a collective agreement was almost always the occasion of a dispute. The directors of State undertakings complained of this attitude of the trade unions, which they considered prejudicial to production. There were many instances of directors considering themselves entitled to ignore certain onerous provisions of collective agreements or to infringe them openly. In spite of repeated protests by the unions these officials were seldom called to order by the labour courts. As time went on the differences between the trade union leaders and the heads of industry became more and more acute. To the reproaches of the trade unions that they had systematically broken collective agreements, the industrial chiefs retorted that in a Soviet State the unions had not only rights but also duties, and these duties they had almost consistently neglected. In particular, the discipline of the workers left much to be desired. The

¹ It should be added that Soviet legislation does not explicitly prohibit lockouts. But, as a Soviet author writes, "in our State industry there can be no recourse to lockouts, for a proletarian State cannot use this means of exerting pressure on the workers." (P. AVDEYEV: "Labour Disputes in the U.S.S.R." (in Russian). Moscow, 1928.)

² The percentage of disputes settled in favour of the unions has never been more than about 30.

union leaders were accused of nullifying, by their hostility or inaction, the efforts made to restore discipline ; of neglecting the problem of the productivity of labour ; and of continually demanding increases in wages without troubling whether the output of labour was increasing in proportion. The trade unions admitted that they had not done much to restore discipline, but accused the industrial chiefs of trying to speed up work and reduce cost prices at the workers' expense while at the same time taking no steps to improve the organisation of the undertakings and the supply of raw materials.

Obviously, under the Soviet regime it was anomalous that the conflict should thus deepen between the State as employer and the unions as representing the workers, whom the Government and the Communist Party considered that they themselves fully represented.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADE UNION POLICY SINCE 1928

This hybrid policy was only the trade union aspect of the new economic policy, and came to an end with the latter when the Communist Party, abandoning it together with faint-hearted attempts at the restoration of private enterprise in industry, decided to hasten the industrialisation of the country under a regime of all-embracing State ownership and control.

The new regime radically changed the status and functions of the trade unions. Clearly the disappearance of the private employer left no excuse for retaining class warfare on the trade union programme. And even as regards State undertakings this programme had to be substantially recast, for a rigorous system of economic planning left no room for the freedom of action that the unions had hitherto enjoyed, especially in the framing and conclusion of collective agreements. The essential feature of the new economic system is the plan. The plan must cover all the elements of production : raw materials, cost price, labour, etc. As regards labour, the plan specifies the wage bill, the output, and the number of workers. Hence collective agreements can only serve to adapt working conditions to the requirements of the plan. The protection of labour also is limited by the economic and financial provisions of the plan. Moreover, furtherance of the interests of production comes first and foremost in trade union activities.

This drastic change in labour policy took the trade union leaders by surprise. It was with some anxiety that they

contemplated the necessity of altering the very basis of their activities. The hesitancy of the Central Council is plainly shown in the resolution that it prevailed upon the Eighth Trade Union Congress (December 1928) to adopt concerning the Five-Year Plan for the economic reconstruction of the U.S.S.R. This resolution, while approving the principle of industrialisation and the Five-Year Plan, was very reserved as to the prospects of carrying the Plan out. It also expressed certain aspirations and set forth certain principles that the Central Council considered essential to the success of the industrial programme.

The resolution of the Congress asserted that the reconstruction of Russia on a basis of State Socialism (a step towards Communist Socialism) could only be achieved "if the line of communication is maintained unbroken between the proletariat leaders—the Communist Party—and the mass of industrial workers, and through them the millions of peasants. Along this line of communication—the trade union organisation—the concentrated will of these leaders must be conveyed to the largest possible number of workers, and this without any hitch."¹ But in the view of the Central Council this was only possible if the protection of the workers' interests was reinforced, for "the bureaucratic contempt for the needs of manual and desk workers by which certain industrial chiefs betray their excessive zeal and ignorance of the proper methods of smoothing out economic difficulties, and the supineness of the trade unions in the face of this attitude, threaten to sever the connections established through the unions between the Communist Party and the bulk of the working class."

The Central Council was sceptical of a policy of industrialisation which it condemned as being too hasty and likely to call for too great material sacrifices on the part of the workers. It accordingly induced the Congress to insert in the resolution a paragraph demanding that the execution of the Five-Year Plan should be accompanied by a substantial increase in real wages. Further, the trade union leaders considered that accelerated industrialisation, and especially the industrialisation of agriculture, might endanger the economic equilibrium of the country. "In seeking to hasten the economic development of Russia," declared the resolution of the Congress, "the pace set should not

¹ Resolution of the Eighth Trade Union Congress, Moscow, 1929. (In Russian.)

be too quick for the country, for this would destroy the equilibrium between industry and the rest of the economic system, and especially agriculture.”¹

This attitude of the trade union leaders could not but be disavowed by the heads of the Communist Party. Immediately after the close of the Trade Union Congress the Party launched a violent press campaign accusing them of “trade unionism” [*sic*], of “crypto-menshevism”, and, what was most serious, of having tried to withdraw the unions from the influence of the Party. The Sixteenth Conference of the Communist Party (April 1929) decided to dismiss the Executive of the Central Council so as to restore the unions to the authority of the Party. In execution of this decision, Tomskey, Chairman of the Central Trade Union Council since the beginning of the revolution, and most of the Executive were relieved of their posts and replaced by Communists believed to be more favourable to the Party’s policy.

The new Executive of the Central Council published a manifesto² addressed to all trade union organisations, inviting them to dismiss forthwith all trade unionists opposed to the industrialisation policy of the Communist Party and the Soviet Government. The unions were also strongly urged to look after the needs of production and see that the workers did their duty and kept strict discipline. At the same time, the Central Council called on the unions to fight against the bureaucratic methods of the industrial chiefs, but emphatically declared that the principal task of the time was to increase the efficiency of labour. “In the Soviet Union”, ran the manifesto, “the proletariat must fight for the consolidation of the State, the development of socialised industry, and rationalisation, so as to crush the hostile classes and their allies once for all and prevent the return of capitalism.”

For its part, the Central Council of the Communist Party issued an Order³ conferring absolute authority on heads of undertakings, and prohibiting the trade unions from interfering in industrial management and hampering the responsible managers.⁴

¹ Resolutions of the Eighth Trade Union Congress, Moscow, 1929. (In Russian.)

² Manifesto of 6 September 1929. (*Trud*, 6 Sept. 1929.)

³ Order of 7 September 1929. (*Pravda*, 8 Sept. 1929.)

⁴ It is interesting to note the interpretation put upon this change in trade union policy by the chiefs of State industries, in whose official organ the following passage appeared: “Until recently the trade union leaders were inclined to omit from their

Nevertheless, the new trade union policy still met with considerable resistance, for numerous trade union officials were opposed to it at the outset. The unionist workers, especially the skilled workers or former Social Democrats, also made a stand against this policy, in which they saw only the intention of the Government to speed up work without doing anything for the workers.

Once more the Communist Party weighed the trade unions in the balance and found them wanting. The Executive of the Central Council was again replaced by other Communists more favourable to the Party's new policy. The Sixteenth Congress of the Party (July 1930) re-examined the problem and outlined the new trade union policy. The Congress first stigmatised the attitude of many trade unionists as "opportunistic, hostile, and 'trade unionist' [sic]". It sharply criticised the policy that Tomsky had followed and many others seemingly still wished to follow. The resolution continued :

The late opportunist Executive of the Central Trade Union Council was incapable of understanding the duties of the unions during the period of economic reconstruction ; worse still, it opposed the efforts of the Party to reorganise the unions with a view to correcting their mistakes. When these mistakes came to light as the Party launched its Socialist offensive . . . the late Executive of the Central Council still strove to eject the Party from control of the unions. This was an extremely dangerous anti-Leninist policy because it set the unions against the Communist Party.¹

The new trade union policy is expressed in the Congress resolution, which calls upon the trade unions to devote themselves primarily to production and to leave no stone unturned to improve the efficiency of labour² :

The unions must now apply the methods of Socialist emulation by resorting to "shock workers" and mobilising labour generally. They must fight bureaucrats who ridicule and try to paralyse Socialist emulation ; and they must fight workers with petty middle-class ideas who are still imbued with the traditions and customs of the capitalist era, regard the Soviet State as a capitalist State, and try to

daily duties their share in the campaign for stiffening labour discipline, expanding individual output, and executing the plan. They also considered the conclusion of collective agreements to be the best means of extorting the maximum of concessions from the industrial chiefs at the minimum of cost to the unions. But the situation has changed, and unless we are mistaken the change will be real and lasting." (*Torgovo-Promyslennaya Gazetta*, 4 June 1929.)

¹ Verbatim report of the Sixteenth Congress of the Communist Party, Moscow, 1931. (In Russian.)

² *Ibid.*

work as little as possible for it while getting as much as possible out of it.

The trade unions should on the one hand seek to encourage good workers, and on the other proceed with the organisation of disciplinary courts composed of the best shock workers and serving as a basis of operations against all workers who infringe the discipline of labour and prevent effective Socialist emulation. One of the most important tasks of the unions is to explain to the masses that the workers are not working for capitalists but for their own State and for the welfare of their own class. Realisation of this will release vast forces that will aid industrial development.

The resolution also invited the unions to take part in the drawing up of economic plans, but without interfering in the management of industry, and to make use of the workers' initiative for the development of production.

A process of purging and reorganising trade union officialdom was put in hand as a result of the decisions of the Communist Congress. It was only in 1932 that after several postponements the Trade Union Congress finally met, and it then accepted without discussion the new trade union policy laid down by the Communist Party.

THE PRESENT RÔLE OF THE TRADE UNIONS

The new trade union policy, which is nothing but the Communist theory of trade unionism translated into practice, has been tersely summarised in the words: "All for production!" This was the watchword of all trade unionists loyal to the Party and organs of the State, whose primary duty was the stimulation of production. The official theory argued that the main object was to develop industry so as to reconstruct the national economy on a new basis; this would make it possible later on to improve the workers' living conditions and compensate them for the sacrifices required of them to-day.

The first consequence of the new policy was the cessation of labour disputes. Whereas up to the dismissal of Tomsky and the other trade union leaders press accounts of labour disputes were legion, once trade union policy had taken the new turn they all vanished as by magic. It was, however, a perfectly natural phenomenon. As explained above, labour disputes had always been considered by the Communist Party as an anomaly in the Soviet State. Now that the economic life of the country was regulated by plans to the last detail, there could be no question of discussing, still less of altering, the policy laid down; all that remained was to make it practicable.

The new policy was also reflected in the character of collective agreements, which no longer confined themselves to fixing working conditions but explicitly bound the workers to conform to the standards of quantity and quality of output required of them by the economic plans. It is a significant fact that before the annual renewal of collective agreements a circular is now sent out, by the various Commissariats responsible for State industries and transport in conjunction with the Central Trade Union Council, to the various undertakings and their combinations (trusts, unions), as well as to the trade union organisations, furnishing them with precise and detailed instructions as to the terms of the collective agreements to be concluded. The circular for 1933 contains the following passage¹:

The main objects of the national economic plan for 1933 are an increase in the efficiency of labour (14 per cent.), a decrease in the cost of production (3.9 per cent.), and a real improvement in the quality of manufactured goods.

To achieve these objects the Commissariats for heavy industry, light industry, the food industry, the timber industry, transport, agriculture, and sovkhozes (State farms), and the Central Trade Union Council hereby order all industrial undertakings and their combinations, as well as trade union organisations, to effect improvements in 1933 in the efficiency of labour and the quality of manufactured goods through the instrumentality of collective agreements. To this end they must adapt themselves to the methods of production in the new undertakings, improve the theoretical and practical knowledge of the workers, engineers, and technicians, and establish strict proletarian discipline.

The industrial managements and the unions must keep the balance between wages and labour output in conformity with the economic plans and exercise strict control over the funds earmarked for pay rolls. They must immediately bring the number of manual and desk workers back to the levels fixed in the plans, and reduce the frequency of interruptions of work and the quantity of spoilt work.

The circular also ordered the managers of undertakings and the trade unions to put an end to arbitrary expenditure on wages and non-observance of wage scales, and to grade workers according to their real qualifications. Every irregular increase in wages, every form of bonus or extra wages, every payment for spoilt work, and, in general, every payment not in strict accordance with the law was to cease completely. "As regards the payment of labour the primary purpose of collective agreements is to counteract the consequences of the equalisation of wages. Workers in the principal occupations and those employed on

¹ *Trud*, 5 M arch 1933.

trying or unhealthy work (e.g. foundry workers) will be paid at relatively higher rates. The piece-work system will be applied wherever possible."

It should be noted that these directions implied a complete reversal of the wage policy that the unions had previously advocated. In fact, the Eighth Trade Union Congress, which had to state its views on the policy of industrialisation and the Five-Year Plan, was very reticent as to the generalisation of piece rates. The Congress also recommended the continuance of the policy of equalising the wages of skilled and unskilled workers. This policy had been pursued since the beginning of the Revolution, but although it seemed to meet the wishes of the mass of the trade unionists it had militated against production.

In the speech outlining his policy to the heads of State industrial undertakings¹, Stalin inveighed against these tactics. He declared that the equalisation of wages sprang from the Communist principle that everyone should give according to his powers and be paid according to his needs. This principle could only find its application under a Communist regime, whereas, under the regime of State Socialism then applied to the Soviet economic system, wages must be based not on the workers' needs but on the quantity and quality of the work done. "We can no longer admit", he said, "that an iron founder, for instance, should be paid the same wage as a sweeper, or an engine driver no more than a copyist."

With a view to increasing the efficiency of labour, a general overhaul of standards of individual output was ordered in State undertakings, and was effected with the help of the unions. In many cases the result was a considerable increase in the daily quota of work, achieved either by speeding up the work or by making better use of the machines.

The new trade union policy is also evident in the opposition of the unions to any increase in wages beyond the estimates of the plan. But it would seem from statements by Weinberg, one of the secretaries of the Central Trade Union Council, that some trade unionists are not at all eager to fall into line:

We must treat trade unionists who repudiate the directions of the Communist Party in the matter of wages with the same severity as the Party applies to members who disorganise the grain front or any other battle front of Socialist economy. Trade unionists are sometimes

¹ *Pravda*, 5 July 1931.

heard to ask whether, as unionists, they ought to revolt because wages above standard rates are paid by some heads of undertakings. These unionists are afraid of what the workers will think of them. This is an unutterable shame and shows complete misunderstanding of the duties of Soviet trade unions. It is typical "trade unionism" [*sic*]. We must have done with this sort of "protection" of the workers' interests.¹

The fixing of piece rates schedules and standards of output, hitherto to some extent a matter for the unions in conjunction with the managements of undertakings, is falling more and more within the sole purview of the latter, as can be seen from recent orders concerning wages in coal mines and on the railways.

One of the new tasks of the trade unions is to speed up work by "Socialist emulation" and "shock work". The notion of Socialist emulation is not new : at the beginning of the Revolution the Communist Party repeatedly proclaimed that under the dictatorship of the proletariat the masses must strive by all means in their power to improve the economic structure of their own State. Lenin had proposed Socialist emulation as one of the best means to this end.² This proposal had not been dropped but had remained in abeyance. It was only in 1929 that the Communist Party gave the word to organise Socialist emulation with the object of bringing the largest possible number of wage earners under its influence and furthering the policy of industrialisation. At first, shock workers were singled out from the mass of workers for moral and material rewards and incentives. Gradually, however, changes were made so that it was not the shock workers who enjoyed special advantages, but the others who were penalised. For instance, social insurance was reorganised so that only shock workers were entitled to the maximum benefits. They have the first claim to places in rest homes and sanatoria, they are freer from food restrictions than other workers, etc. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that most of the workers, about two-thirds in fact, declared for Socialist emulation. However, it was soon found that among the unionists claiming to be shock workers some were not very active emulators. The unions were therefore instructed to purge the shock brigades and to raise the standard of emulation. In fact, this is now one of their principal tasks, as Postyšev, Assistant Secretary of the Communist Party,

¹ *Trud*, 24 Jan. 1933.

² Cf., for instance, the resolutions of the Tenth and Eleventh Congresses of the Communist Party.

recently declared.¹ Apart from Socialist emulation and the campaign against the equalisation of wages, he said, among the chief planks in the trade union platform should be propaganda for Communism in general and the present policy of the Communist Party in particular. The same is true of labour discipline: in particular, the unions must see to the strict enforcement of the Order respecting dismissal for unjustified absence.² Lastly, they have to look after the interests of their members so far as is compatible with the interests of the State and the policy of the Communist Party. Trade union action is essentially determined by the needs of production, before which everything else must give way.

THE TRANSFER OF THE FUNCTIONS OF THE COMMISSARIAT OF LABOUR TO THE CENTRAL TRADE UNION COUNCIL

Trade union reform has recently been pushed a stage further by transferring to the Central Trade Union Council the functions of the Commissariat of Labour. On 23 June 1933 the Central Executive Committee of the U.S.S.R. issued an Order for "the amalgamation of the Commissariat of Labour of the U.S.S.R. and all its local organs, including the social insurance authorities, with the Central Trade Union Council and its local organs, and the transfer to the Central Trade Union Council of the functions of the Commissariat of Labour."³

This reorganisation is the natural outcome of the present economic and social policy of the Soviets. As stated by Cikhon, then Labour Commissar, at the third plenary session of the Central Trade Union Council (June 1933), which had to take a decision on the new reform⁴, trade union activities were steadily encroaching on those of the Commissariat of Labour. It was, in fact, the unions that were responsible for the application of labour legislation and labour policy. The Commissariat of Labour had come to work on parallel lines with the unions, but much less effectively because it was not in such close touch with production. Moreover, some of its functions had ceased to serve any useful purpose. During the period of the N.E.P. consider-

¹ *Trud*, 21 June 1933.

² The Order of 15 November 1932 provides that a single unjustified absence shall be followed by instant dismissal, involving withdrawal of the food card, and eviction if the worker's dwelling belongs to the undertaking.

³ *Izvestia*, 24 June 1933.

⁴ *Trud*, 9 July 1933.

able importance attached to the development of labour legislation, but now it was the adjustment of working conditions to the necessities of production that came first. Assisting the unemployed and finding work for them through the employment exchanges was no longer one of the main tasks of the Commissariat of Labour. The labour market had undergone a radical change owing to the abolition of unemployment insurance, restrictions on the workers' freedom to choose their place of employment, and a reorganisation of the placing system allowing undertakings to recruit their own workers without passing through the employment exchanges. Thus the Commissariat of Labour had lost much of its importance.

These declarations of the Labour Commissar were supplemented by a speech by Švernik, First Secretary of the Central Trade Union Council, in which he said¹ that the economic development and the industrialisation of the U.S.S.R. had brought about great changes in the labour policy of the Soviets. This policy was now aimed at increasing production, and to this end it was indispensable to stimulate the workers' zeal by establishing working conditions that gave them a material interest in increasing their output. In particular, wage policy and social insurance should be adapted to the needs of production. The trade unions, which supervised the workers and were in direct and constant touch with industry, would be in a better position for carrying out the new labour policy than the Commissariat of Labour, which had not worked satisfactorily. Moreover, in conferring upon the trade unions the duties formerly attaching to this Commissariat, the Communist Party hoped to improve the protection of labour and technical safety measures, the unions being better able to voice the real needs of the workers.

In its resolution² the plenary session of the Central Trade Union Council took note of the transfer to the Council of the functions of the Commissariat of Labour. The Council remarked that among the new tasks of the trade unions by far the most important was the management of social insurance. The unions would have to reorganise social insurance with an eye to the needs of production. An industrial should be substituted for a territorial organisation of the funds; benefits should be graded according to the national importance of the industry and the

¹ *Idem*, 4 July 1933.

² *Idem*, 12 July 1933.

quality of the workers, so that the best workers, the shock workers, and the workers with the longest service should get the most, and workers changing their employment too often, working badly, or demanding too much should get none at all.

The resolution also declared that the unions should improve technical safety measures, which were said to have been neglected by the Commissariat of Labour.

The new duties of the trade unions were defined in a Decree of the U.S.S.R. Government supplemented by an Order of the Central Trade Union Council.¹ Under these provisions, on 15 September 1933 the Central Trade Union Council and the various trade unions took over the funds and the movable and immovable property of the social insurance system, together with the responsibility for its management. The general direction and supervision of social insurance is exercised by the Central Council and its regional and local organs, in virtue of the principle of centralisation and on the basis of the territorial divisions of the U.S.S.R. Actual administration of insurance is left to each separate union, for insurance is henceforth to be organised by industry and by undertaking. Determination of the right to benefit and of rates of benefit is a matter for the works committees (the primary organs of the trade union), which must carry out the policy laid down by the plenary session of the Central Trade Union Council in the resolution mentioned above.

In addition to social insurance, the new tasks of the unions include factory inspection, as regards matters of law as well as of hygiene and safety, and the examination, registration, and enforcement of collective agreements.

¹ Decree of 10 September and Order of 11 September 1933 (*Trud*, 11 Sept. 1933).