

REPORTS AND ENQUIRIES

The Economic and Social Activities of Trade Unions in Poland

The role of the unified trade union movement in Poland is now determined by an Act of 1 July 1949 giving the trade unions a legal status that in effect embodies the principles of organisation followed since the war, and by the rules defining its functions under the new economic and social régime of the country, which were adopted by the Second National Trade Union Congress, held at Warsaw from 1 to 5 June 1949. The general report on the post-war activities of the unions which was submitted to the Congress by the Polish Central Trade Union Committee¹ forms the basis of the following survey, which deals first with economic questions and then with the situation of the workers.

DEVELOPMENT OF PRODUCTION AND PRODUCTIVITY

The mobilisation of workers for the three-year production plan (1946-1949) has been the main task of the Polish trade unions. From the first, the trade unions organised technical production conferences with the object of initiating the masses of the workers into the problems of labour and production organisation in the undertakings and developing the system of output competition.

The report of the Central Committee shows the progress that has been made in industrial and agricultural production, and in transport. Table I below, relating to the coal mining industry, and table II, relating to industry in general, indicate a steady increase in productivity.

¹ *Sprawozdanie z działalności Komisji Centralnej Związków Zawodowych* (Warsaw, 1949).

TABLE I. AVERAGE OUTPUT PER WORKER PER DAY (VOLUME IN TONS)
IN THE COAL MINING INDUSTRY, 1946-1948

Date	Underground workers		Underground and surface workers	
	Amount	Index	Amount	Index
December 1946 . . .	1.64	100	1.15	100
December 1947 . . .	1.69	103	1.24	107
December 1948 . . .	1.80	109	1.33	115

TABLE II. AVERAGE PRODUCTION PER WORKER PER HOUR
(VALUE IN 1937 ZLOTYS) IN DIFFERENT INDUSTRIES, 1947 AND 1948

Industry	1947		1948	
	First quarter	Fourth quarter	First quarter	Fourth quarter
Petroleum	4.25	4.60	4.77	6.81
Metallurgy	6.23	7.55	9.21	10.31
Chemical	6.29	7.39	9.49	10.44
Metal	3.16	3.85	3.70	4.10
Electricity	3.90	5.53	5.46	6.22
Ore mining	1.92	2.13	2.11	2.43
Textile	3.07	3.39	3.14	3.43
Paper	4.18	4.46	4.48	5.08
Hides and leather . .	3.71	4.67	4.67	6.23
Wood	2.10	2.63	2.64	3.31

Encouragement of Competition among Workers

The principal means of arousing the workers' interest in the problem of increasing output is found in the development of their competitive spirit. In Poland a concerted effort on these lines was first made in the youth movement. It is only from July 1947 onwards that the trade unions have undertaken the organisation of output competitions among the workers, at first in the mining industry and afterwards in other branches of economic activity. While at the beginning the competition was mainly between individual workers, it has gradually become a collective movement in which workshops, undertakings or even entire branches of industry take part.

The development of output competitions in the mining industry is shown by the following table:

TABLE III. NUMBER OF WORKERS PARTICIPATING IN OUTPUT COMPETITIONS IN THE MINING INDUSTRY, SEPTEMBER 1947-JANUARY 1949

Date	Competition between individuals or small groups	Collective competition
1947		
September	2,183	1,728
1948		
January	11,113	8,945
April	20,222	16,082
November	61,534	54,105
December	67,097	50,005
1949		
January	43,825	47,202

In other branches, too, the system has made steady progress. Thus in the textile industry, competition began in September 1947 with the participation of 92 undertakings and 46,660 workers; in 1948, an average of 80,000 workers took part in competitions between their undertakings. Between February and December 1948 the competition figures for the metallurgical industry increased from 22 foundries with 12,366 workers to 35 foundries with 53,000 workers. A similar development is reported in the metal, chemical and paper industries. Out of 343,000 railway workers, about 200,000 took part in the competitions.

One result of these competitions has been to distinguish from the mass of the workers a number of shock workers who constantly exceed their allotted output and who have in many cases achieved surprising figures. With a view to stimulating this movement, bonuses to a value of several thousand million zlotys have been distributed. The income of the shock workers has thus risen considerably, in addition to which their taxes are reduced by 30 per cent.

The organisation of the competition movement, which had first developed spontaneously in local unions, was gradually defined more concretely. Competition committees were set up in the central offices of trade union federations; and finally, in 1948, on the occasion of the "competition in honour of the Unification Congress of the Workers' Parties", a central executive body was created—the Central Competition Committee, which is assisted in its task by a network of decentralised committees. At the same time, competition committees were initiated in various undertakings.

According to the report presented to the Trade Union Congress, however, these bodies have not always done their work satisfactorily. In many cases, they have been inefficiently conducted. The system of recording and checking output is not yet considered adequate for the requirements of long-term competition. Among the defects

of trade union action in this field, the Congress singled out "red tape" and the bureaucratic spirit for particular condemnation.

In its resolution on economic questions, the Congress "definitely confirmed that the trade unions must give first attention to their tasks in the sphere of production", which consist in "mobilising the initiative of workers and employees with a view to achieving, and even exceeding, the targets set by the economic plans".

The essential means of reaching this objective, according to the resolution, is "the socialised form of competition among workers in the struggle for increasing productivity, reducing costs and expanding social income. The trade unions must try to interest new sectors of the working population in output competitions. They must see that the competitions are properly organised, lend unceasing practical assistance to the workers taking part in the competitions, especially as regards the fixing of the objectives to be attained, either by individuals or by groups, and record and appraise the results obtained. All the trade union bodies—from the local branches to the National Council—are responsible for the development of competition within their respective spheres."

In order to eliminate present shortcomings, and ensure the future development of competition, the resolution demands :

(1) that daily contact should be established between the trade unions and the workers taking part in competitions ;

(2) that the attention of trade union leaders, and especially of the members of works councils, workers' delegates, shock workers, foremen, technical staff and young workers, should be focused on the effort to develop the competition movement ;

(3) that the trade unions should give active and unceasing assistance to the managements of undertakings with a view to overcoming all technical and administrative obstacles to the development or organisation of output competitions ;

(4) that the shock workers should be treated with more consideration than hitherto.

The other measures for the increase of productivity recommended in the resolution include the organisation of production conferences by the trade unions, the fight against absenteeism by every possible means, the encouragement of inventors and "rationalisers" and the adoption of a wage system in which due account is taken of output.

SITUATION OF THE WORKERS

Collective Agreements

The principal means by which the trade unions have sought to improve working conditions since the war is collective bargaining.

The growth in the number of collective agreements shows the development of this method. The figures for the socialised sector of industry during the period 1945-1948 are as follows :

	No. of agreements	No. of supplementary agreements
1945	20	2
1946	70	40
1947	75	162
1948	81	192

In the private sector, the Central Trade Union Committee registered the conclusion of 175 agreements and 20 supplementary agreements. However, according to its report the number of agreements at present in force considerably exceeds these figures. Since the date of publication of the report a large number of agreements have been concluded, both in the socialised and in the private sectors of industry.

The trade unions have also shared in the preparation of the new regulations for public officials.

Wages

The war and enemy occupation of the country had completely disrupted the relation between prices and wages, and one of the first tasks to be tackled was that of revising wages and securing for the workers a minimum of subsistence. At the same time, in order to check a tendency to inflation, the correspondence between wages and labour productivity had to be maintained. Hence, the first compulsory schedules of 1945 fixed wages at a relatively low level, which corresponded to the low level of production. At first the minimum of subsistence was secured by the payment of part of the wages in kind (foodstuffs). Subsequently, a large number of allowances and bonuses were introduced, supplementing the basic wage, with the result that by June 1946, for example, the basic wage averaged no more than one third of the total remuneration of an industrial worker. This situation led to a general levelling of wages and tended to hold back the rise in productivity. Several wage reforms were therefore introduced, designed to remedy this state of affairs.

In January 1949 a rationally co-ordinated wage system was instituted by means of collective agreements in various branches of economic activity, covering about three million workers. According to the report submitted to the Trade Union Congress by the General Secretary of the Central Trade Union Committee¹, the principal objectives of this reform were the following :

¹ *Działalność Związków Zawodowych w Polsce Ludowej* (Warsaw, 1939).

(1) the establishment of a single system of wage payment in cash ;

(2) the abolition of rationing and the raising of basic wages to compensate for the abolition of ration cards and the rising price of certain goods and services ;

(3) the introduction of the wage tax in branches of industry which had formerly been exempted ;

(4) an average 10 per cent. rise in wages, with a view to reducing unfair discrepancies between the various branches of economic activity ;

(5) the introduction of new output standards, guaranteeing a continuous increase in wages corresponding to the increase in productivity.

The reform has thus made it possible to simplify the wage system and institute wage planning and control.

Nevertheless, a difficult task remains to be accomplished as regards the fifth objective stated above, as was pointed out in the Congress resolution in the following terms :

We have not yet worked out a wage system that entirely conforms to the socialist principle of payment according to the quality and quantity of the work done. In particular, wage differentials are not sufficient to stimulate the vocational training of workers. Another problem not yet solved is that of grading wages as between various branches of economic activity according to the relative importance of each in the development of the national economy . . .

If we are to fix equitable piece rates and output bonuses—and this is essential to economic planning and to the optimum use of the means of production—we must have a suitable system of technical output standards. This is why the Congress instructs the trade union movement to take an active part in the work of job classification and the fixing of technical standards for all fields of activity.

Working Conditions

On the subject of working conditions, the report set forth the various improvements obtained by the workers since the war, whether through legislation or through collective agreements, and stressed the new role of the trade unions in this sphere.

As regards the engagement and dismissal of workers, the collective agreements stipulate, in accordance with the Works Council Decree¹, that the decisions taken shall first be agreed between the management and the works council, and that cases of disagreement shall be referred to the joint conciliation board.

The length of the working week has been limited to forty-six hours : eight hours on five days of the week and six hours on Saturday. The collective agreement for the mining industry provides

¹ Cf. INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE : *Legislative Series*, 1945—Pol. 2 A ; 1947—Pol. 1.

that underground workers shall receive eight hours' pay for seven and a half hours of actual work.

The trade union bodies in the undertaking must participate in the assignment of workers to their jobs and the determination of output standards. The collective agreements provide for the establishment of central output standards boards for the various branches of industry, on which the trade unions for the branch concerned are represented. By an Order issued in March 1949 joint boards were set up to determine output standards in undertakings.

The new collective agreements require undertakings to promote the rationalisation of production and to reward workers who show initiative. In some industries "inventors" whose invention has led to a general raising of the standard of output are entitled during six consecutive months to be paid for their increased output at the rate based on the former standard.

The length of the annual holiday with pay, which used to be eight days for all workers, has been increased to fifteen days for those with not less than three years' service in the same undertaking, and thirty days for those with ten years' service.

The 1949 collective agreements pay special attention to social services in undertakings. Among other things, they require employers to utilise for social purposes the total amount of the credits allocated for this purpose by the plan. The works councils supervise the administration of these social funds.

The collective agreements also contain clauses relating to the specific problems of various economic branches, such as the free supply of working clothes in certain occupations, safety devices, hygiene, etc.

Lastly, the agreements protect workers against dismissal who are released from their work in order to carry out social or public duties. They prescribe the conditions under which the necessary premises are to be placed at the disposal of the workers for the establishment of the workers' clubs or works canteens run at the employer's expense; in undertakings employing 200 persons or more, the employer is required to appoint a full-time manager for the workers' club.

Trade Union Supervision of Business Transactions

In addition to their work in the domain of wages and working conditions, the trade unions possess an effective means of defending and strengthening the position of the workers through the part they play in supervising business transactions from the social point of view. The Central Trade Union Committee is represented on the special board which was set up by a Decree of 7 December 1947 to combat illegal trading and economic abuses, and a trade union representative has been appointed as manager of the executive office of this board.

Recent trade union action in this field has developed in two directions: on the one hand, the unions, in co-operation with the works councils, furnish information concerning abuses and illegal practices reported in the undertakings; and, on the other, they appoint certain of their members to the supervisory and special boards set up to deal with speculation and the high cost of living.

The work done by the supervisory boards from July 1947 to the end of 1948 appears from the following table.

TABLE IV. ACTIVITIES OF THE SUPERVISORY BOARDS, 1947-1948

Year	Checks carried out	Persons participating in the checks	Establishments checked	Proceedings instituted ¹			
				For illegal price-raising	For illegal hoarding	For failure to mark prices, etc.	Total
1947 (July-Dec.)	9,468	77,010	213,353	18,812	2,330	24,152	45,294
1948.....	17,800	108,984	329,090	22,576	2,570	30,849	55,995
Total..	27,268	185,994	542,443	41,388	4,900	55,001	101,289

¹ The fines imposed as a result of the proceedings totalled 1,203 million zlotys.

With a view to preventing a rise in prices due to speculation, special regulations have been made setting up price control boards and fixing the bases for calculating profit margins. According to the report under review, 16 trade union representatives have taken part in the work of the provincial price boards, and 317 in that of the district boards.

Action taken by the Central Trade Union Committee to combat the housing shortage has led to the setting up of a special Housing Board attached to the Prime Minister's Office. On the recommendation of the local trade union councils, 70 local housing boards have been set up in the principal industrial centres. Thanks to the efforts of these boards, which are composed of trade union representatives, some 100,000 rooms have been allotted to the workers.

The trade unions also exert an influence on the tax administration, being represented on the "citizens' tax committees" whose function it is to fix public taxes and charges. Trade union members are also called upon to act as tax evasion supervisors, in co-operation with the tax administration authorities.

Promotion of Workers to Executive Posts

According to the Central Trade Union Committee's report, the promotion of workers to executive posts constitutes one of the main tasks of the trade union movement. The figures show how

the trade unions are carrying out their new task, of supplying supervisory staff to the various branches of industry and administration. The number of workers promoted to the higher grades was 1,967 in 1945, 6,803 in 1946 and 13,791 in 1948. The following table, prepared according to information supplied by the Minister for Industry, classifies the promoted workers by category and by industry as at 31 December 1948.

TABLE V. DISTRIBUTION OF PROMOTED WORKERS BY CATEGORY AND BY INDUSTRY¹, 31 DECEMBER 1948

Industry	Group I : Works managers and adminis- trators	Group II : Higher technical staff	Group III : Interme- diate technical staff	Group IV : Subordi- nate technical staff	Total
Coal mining	4	81	732	2,108	2,925
Metallurgy	6	9	95	1,075	1,185
Canning	2	6	38	53	99
Petroleum	—	10	69	72	151
Ore mining	47	46	156	408	657
Metal	46	42	428	1,550	2,066
Chemical	20	19	185	530	754
Textile	61	113	479	2,553	3,206
Hides and leather . . .	7	19	71	156	253
Wood	34	9	16	155	214
Paper	21	14	126	53	214
Sugar	3	10	228	197	438
Power stations	2	17	390	279	688
Fermented drinks . . .	23	6	32	47	108
Food	11	4	103	84	202
Readymade clothing . .	16	11	98	315	440
State Printing Works . .	10	66	38	77	191
Total	313	482	3,284	9,712	13,791

¹ Information is not available for the electricity and building industries.

Social Services

The unified trade union movement has made great efforts to develop social services for the workers and improve their administration. Substantial reforms have been made in social insurance, which remains in the foreground of attention. Social welfare is a new field of action opened to the trade unions, especially as regards the workers' recreation.

A social welfare fund, into which are paid sums amounting to 5 per cent. of the total wages paid by the employer, is devoted to the creation and upkeep of crèches, day nurseries, holiday camps and works canteens and the development of sports and cultural activities for the workers. In undertakings coming under the Ministry of Industry and Commerce alone, social welfare expenditure reached 4,200 million zlotys in 1947 and 7,000 million zlotys in 1948, and the credits provided for 1949 amounted to about 16,500 million zlotys. The trade union movement thus has at its disposal a powerful means of influencing the workers' living conditions.

Trade union activity in regard to workers' recreation is constantly increasing. Numerous holiday establishments have been transferred to the unions and substantial facilities are granted to workers travelling to the trade union recreational centres. Moreover, both employers and the State grant large subsidies towards holiday expenses.

According to incomplete data furnished by the Central Trade Union Committee, at least 600 holiday establishments with more than 30,000 beds had been placed at the disposal of the trade unions by November 1948, thus providing holiday accommodation for more than 500,000 workers in 1949. Holiday charges for 1949 were fixed at 450 zlotys daily per head, 132.50 zlotys to be paid by the worker, 160 zlotys by the employer and 157.50 zlotys by the Government.

Apart from its social work in the strict sense of the term, the trade union movement provides the workers with an extensive framework for the organisation of their sports and cultural activities.
