

WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

IN SOVIET RUSSIA

(Editor's Note: This is the ninth of a series of special articles on Russia which Mr. Foster was commissioned by The Federated Press to write. Previous articles told of the origin of the unions in Russia and of their extraordinary growth since the revolution. The present form of organization was described. Mr. Foster now sets forth the functions of Russian unions.)

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER, Federated Press Staff Writer.
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Moscow.—The trade unions occupy a position of power and influence in Russia such as is enjoyed by no other labor movement in the world. So great is their weight that Lozovsky, president of the All-Russian trade unions, is able to state truthfully that there have been no important measures of any kind entered upon in soviet Russia unless the consent of the trade unions has first been secured. As things now stand the labor organizations take part in many activities. They participate immediately in the government through direct representation in the soviets. They carry on all sorts of welfare, health, educational and disciplinary work in the mines, mills and factories. They also have an important share in the management of industry, as we shall see in a later article about the supreme economic council, the organization which superintends production and distribution.

But the principal function of the Russian unions is to regulate the wages, hours and working conditions of labor. In this sphere they are supreme. Utterly unlike the labor organizations of other countries the Russian unions do not have to submit their "demands" to their employers. They submit them to themselves, as the responsible controllers of this phase of Russian industry. That is to say, they constantly survey the industrial situation and see to it that the workers enjoy the best conditions possible under the economic circumstances. When the unions decide upon a certain policy within their jurisdiction about all there is left for the governmental powers to do is to formally endorse it. This is indeed a different situation from that in other countries, where the workers have to fight for years against parasitic employers and repressive governments to secure even the most trivial reforms.

The October revolution fundamentally altered the functions of the Russian trade unions. Before that great event these organizations were, like the unions of all other countries now are, essentially fighting bodies whose aim it was to wring every possible concession from the exploiters. But the revolution wiped out these capitalistic enemies and set up in their stead of the employer the proletarian state. As this body is composed of workers and inspired by labor ideals the unions do not have to fight it for concessions—on the contrary, they are themselves fully entrusted by it with the regulation of labor conditions and made largely responsible for the continuation of industry. Thus the revolution has brought the unions out of the era of industrial warfare and into that of industrial peace. It has changed them from organs of combat to organs for carrying on production.

A long evolution has been required (and it is by no means finished yet) to change the trade unions from militant fighting bodies into peaceful producing organizations. An indication of some of the phases of this evolution may be instructive:

In the fierce industrial struggles just before and after the October revolution the Russian workers developed a militancy of spirit practically unknown in western countries. One of their weapons for carrying the war to the capitalist was the "shop committees." These shop committees, to begin with, were mostly independent of the unions. This was because at that time the latter, either through their craft form or numerical weakness, or both combined, usually did not include all the workers, whereas the very breath of life of the shop committees was that they acted in behalf of all the workers in given plants and industries.

In the last months of the Kerensky regime the shop committees conquered great power. They wrested from the employers a large share of control over the labor and business sides of production. This power they greatly increased in the industrial turmoil which followed the October political upheaval. In fact, they became the cutting edge of the industrial revolution. To a great extent they were the means used by the workers to confiscate the factories. Often they simply drove off the capitalists (who were usually doing their best to sabotage and ruin the industries) and took charge themselves.

In many cases the shop committees tried to carry on production. But they were not a success. All they were able fighting or

organizations they soon showed that they were unfit to manage industry successfully. Much confusion resulted from these local bodies trying to operate the big factories which, considering their markets and raw material supply sources, are essentially national in character. Consequently the militant shop committees, having fulfilled their war-like mission, had to give way.

Eventually the newly organized national unions came to the front, expanding themselves into industrial organizations and taking in all classes of workers. They amalgamated the shop committees into their official machinery and restricted their activities principally to the local control of labor in industry. To a large extent the national unions took over the supervision formerly nested in the shop committees. But now the national unions, in turn, are also gradually yielding their direct control over industry, which has largely passed into the hands of the various boards and committees of the supreme economic council. To begin with, the national unions insisted upon proportional representation in and practical control over these economic bodies carrying on production. This was a natural result of their fighting instinct, their intense suspicion of all outside bodies and their determination to protect the revolution at all costs.

With the passage of time, however, the national unions are diverging from this militant policy. They are becoming convinced that their capitalist enemies are finally defeated and that the new order of society can be trusted with the operation of industry. Moreover, they are learning that to carry on industry special ability is necessary and that this ability must not be hedged about with red tape or ignorant meddlers. Hence, the tendency now for them is not to insist upon "mechanical representation" in the producing organizations, but to aid in the selection of able executives, and when these are selected, to give them power to go ahead in purely technical matters.

How far this evolution will go, to just what extent the trade unions will lay aside their militancy and take upon themselves the ways of peaceful industry, will of course depend upon the general course of the revolution. One thing, however, everyone here is certain of is that the unions, containing and controlling the multitude of the workers as they do, have before them a future of constantly expanding service and influence.

The fundamental change in status of Russian trade unions from industrial war to industrial peace has naturally greatly altered their viewpoint in many matters. One of these that may be profitably mentioned relates to the question of strikes in industry.

In all capitalistic countries the right to strike is jealously guarded and fought for by the best and most militant elements in the working class. Moreover, this vanguard exercise it freely themselves and seek to get the great masses to do likewise. They consider it one of the best means to advance the interests of the workers.

But not so in Russia. Here the situation is just the reverse. Although the workers have the legal right to strike, the labor movement is decidedly against using it. It is exactly the militant workers who condemn the strike weapon and try to prevent the less advanced masses from making use of it. The explanation of this is perfectly simple and logical: the Russian unions realize that the supreme task before them is to reconstruct industry. They know that strikes in this country do not better the condition of those taking part in them, but only to make it worse, and render still more difficult the problem of rehabilitating industry. Moreover, they know from bitter experience that the counter revolutionists, who are fully aware of Russia's great industrial needs, systematically incite the backward masses to sabotage and labor walkouts. The fact is that strikes under the workers' government have been practically all the result of counter revolutionary activity, or the work of ignorant toilers rebelling against absolutely unavoidable cuts in rations, etc.

Strikes in Soviet Russia are nothing less than so much scabbing on the revolution. Hence the militants are dead against them. The best elements

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Chicherin, Commissar of Foreign Affairs of Soviet Russia, has an American private secretary who but for the accident of marriage to a Norwegian would still carry an American passport; Shatov, Minister of Railways in the Far Eastern Republic, was long an active member of the I. W. W. of the U. S. A.; among the delegates to the Communist Internationale in Moscow this summer are American-born Americans representing three continents—an American girl as one of the delegates of the Indian Revolutionary Committee; a former American college professor sent as a delegate by the French Communist Party of America; and the delegates of the Communist Party of America. If you enter Ludwig Marten's office in the Council of National Economy, or the Anglo-American Section of the Foreign Office, you will hear less Russian than the authentic accent of the Bronx and of Brownsville, Brooklyn. The American Government may be as cold as it will to Soviet Russia; the American people are well represented in the capital of the red flag republic.

There were, as far as I could discover, eight Americans in prison or partially confined in Moscow. I do not know the exact nature of their offenses—most of them were accused of some kind of espionage. All of them regularly received extra good rations through the Czecho-Slovak Prisoners' Exchange Mission, which acts as agent of the International Red Cross. In fact, they are almost the best fed people in Moscow. I glanced through a stack of their signed receipts. Emmet Kilpatrick, for instance, the American Red Cross officer captured with Wrangel troops—our Red Cross has always enthusiastically represented America in every anti-Bolshevik movement—received on June 7 two cans of corned beef, two prime beef, one of pork and beans, two pounds of bacon, five pounds of white bread, one of onions, a half-pound of butter, a quarter-pound of cocoa and as much coffee, one can of sweetened and one of unsweetened milk, salt, vinegar etc. This was a two weeks' supplementary ration in addition to regular prison diet. I saw his letter acknowledging receipt. "I thank you so much in the name of my Government and of the American Red Cross. I beg that in the future you will help me—I am very sick and weak. Very truly yours, Emmet Kilpatrick, American Red Cross." Kilpatrick was in fact sick; he had seen 44 days in the special Cheka prison, without supplementary rations. Other prisoners were Mrs. Marguerite Harrison, W. H. Estes, Thomas Hazelwood, John Flick, H. J. LaMarc, Dr. Janczura, and Kalamatchano, who was involved in one of the early counter-revolutionary plots. S. A. Vikoren of Grand Forks, N. D., R. B. Keeley, the engineer, and a Swedish-American named Harry Carlson, formerly employed in Moscow by the International Harvester Co., were free in Moscow but were not permitted to leave the city. I saw Keeley when he was just out of jail, apparently in excellent health, and also Carlson, who was very bitter against the government but whose five-months-old baby, which received both the International Red Cross milk and that supplied by a Soviet baby milk station, weighed 18 Russian pounds—more than twice its birth weight. I was present when

in the working class are unreservedly for bearing with present bad conditions and for fighting the thing through to final victory. And they know that this can only be done by staying in the work shops and helping to satisfy Russia's crying need for life necessities, a need which must be satisfied or the revolution will surely fail. They look upon slackers who go on strike with about the same contempt that good trade unions in capitalist countries do upon weak-kneed workers who sneak back to their jobs during industrial struggles.

Such is the natural and justified basis for the anti-strike sentiment in Soviet Russia, which some unscrupulous and ignorant trade union leaders have tried to make use of as an argument against the Russian revolution.

In my next article I shall deal briefly with labor laws and conditions in Soviet Russia.

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