Gudok

By Wm. Z. Foster

When the Communist Party came into control in Russia, upon overthrowing the reactionary Kerensky regime, one of the tasks that it saw clearly before it in laying the foundations for a real workers’ society was that of building a system of proletarian journalism. Tremendous strides have been made in this direction, and many new methods have been worked out which are of the utmost importance to the working class of the world.

Among the many splendid proletarian journals that have been developed since the revolution, the Gudok (The Whistle) takes high place. This daily paper is the official organ of the railroad workers. The union, which is industrial in character and numbers 815,000 members, has various other publications, including a Siberian daily with 22,000 circulation, and several monthly and semi-monthly journals. But its pride is the Gudok which ranks along with the Pravda and Izvestia as the greatest papers in Russia. Its circulation is 274,000 daily and it is constantly rising. That of the Pravda is 600,000 and the Izvestia about the same.

The Gudok was founded in 1920. At first it was subsidized by the government and issued free of cost to the subscribers. Its circulation was about 25,000. It ran up to 75,000 in 1921, but with the introduction of the New Economic Policy, when the Gudok, like so many other institutions, was put on a self-sustaining basis and the subscribers had to pay for it, its circulation dropped off about 50%. But since then it has rapidly picked up until it has reached its present gigantic figure. It is steadily extending its mass of readers, who are found not only among railroad workers, but in the ranks of the working class generally. Last year it produced a financial surplus after paying all expenses.

The Gudok is one of the most popular papers in Russia. Its organization, both in respect to the make-up of the paper itself and its connections with the masses, is magnificent. Labor papers of the world, especially dailies, would do well to adapt themselves, so far as is practicable under capitalism, to its revolutionary methods. The paper is not a mere trade paper, though it is issued by the railroad workers’ union. Its scope of activity covers the whole world of economics and politics. It informs the workers of the greatest political events and problems of the world, and it also digs down deep into the everyday life that they live.

The paper is thoroughly departmentalized. Ordinarily it has six pages, except once a week when it has a special double page in the Ukrainian language. Each of the pages is devoted to certain specific subjects. It will be well for us to glance at them briefly. The first page is devoted to news of the general social and political life of Russia and the world at large. The items are brief and to the point. The yellow journalism of capitalist papers finds absolutely no place in the Gudok. Page two is devoted to special articles on the general political situation, economic life, and Party affairs. This might be called the intellectual page of the paper, using the term intellectual in a...
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Number of Rabkors on the Various Russian Railways covered with the network of committees, which bring the paper to the masses most effectively. The convention elaborated plans for the further extension of the "Rabkor" system in all its ramifications and to make the Gudok more than ever the real mirror of the aspirations and experiences of the railroad workers. Elaborate charts were presented the convention showing the rapid development of the Gudok and the "Rabkor" system which is its foundation. By the end of 1924 there were 5870 intermittent and 4425 regular correspondents. The most careful analyses are made of the make-up of these correspondents from the standpoint of age, sex, occupation, Party membership, etc. A feature of the workers' journalism which is common in all industries but especially well-developed among the railroad workers are the wall papers. These are big poster-like affairs containing articles, designs, cartoons, etc., made up by the workers and posted on the shop walls. Many of them are extremely beautiful. The workers are intensely interested in them. They deal with the immediate problems of the factories and the news of the workers' lives. On the railroads there are 2000 of such wall papers regularly appearing. At the convention of the "Rabkor" prizes were offered for the best specimens of these wall papers. An interesting one was composed by adult workmen bitching in an illogical and mangled Russian. The messages composed by these workers just emerging from the darkness of illiteracy were touchingly beautiful.

The Russian railroad workers are very proud of the Gudok. And well they may be. It is a magnificent specimen of proletarian journalism, and it is just entering upon an era of much wider development and effectiveness. It is a type which the workers of the world can well study. When it is compared with the pitiful sheets gotten out by the American railroad unions, it stands out as a mountain against a lot of molehills. Speed the day when the railroad men of all countries will be equipped with as splendid intellectual weapons as the Russian Gudok.