

# **SOVIET TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN TRANSITION (1985-91)**

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## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the thesis entitled Soviet Trade Union Movement in Transition (1985-91) by Mahabir Singh for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) is his own work and to the best of our knowledge has not been submitted for the award of any degree of this or any other university. We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluations.



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## Abbreviations

AUCCTU	All Unions Central Council of Trade Unions (VTs & SPs)
BPF	Belorussian Popular Front
CC	Central Committee
CPSU	Communist Party of Soviet Union
FSOK	Federation of Socialist Social Clubs
Glaviki	National Industrial Trust
Gorkom	City Party Committee
IKAR	The initsiativnyi Kemitet assotsiatsii Robochikh.
KSI	Club for social initiative
LNF	Leningradskii Narodnyi Front
LSR	Left Social Revolutionaries
NEP	New Economic Policies
NPG	Independent Trade Union of Miners
NTS	emigre-christian democratic
OFT	Neo Stalinist Front of workers
RKK	Rates and conflicts commission
RSDWP	Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party
SKL	Soyuz Kollektivo Leaingrada
SMOT	Free interprofessional association of workers
SOTSPROF	Association of Socialist Trade Unions
SRKL	Soyuz Robochikh Komitetov Leningrada
STK	Council of Labour Collectives
TUs	Trade unions
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VSNKn	Supreme Council of National Economy
VTs & SPs	All Union Central Council of Trade Unions.

## **PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The present study is a modest attempt to understand the dynamic logic of the Soviet Trade Union Movement in the transitional phase of Soviet Society i.e. 1985 to 1991. Though, the study of trade unions, their nature, and their role as agencies of protecting and promoting the interest of workers in plural societies is a very old subject, yet, the role of trade unions in a state which self-proclaimed to champion the cause of working class, is of a particular interest. Many studies have been conducted on this subject during the soviet period of 1917-85. This study benefitted a lot from the earlier researches on the subject to understand the nature of the soviet regime, conditions of the working class and their organizations, and their role in policy formation of the soviet state. In the Transitional phase of soviet economy with Gorbachev becoming General Secretary of CPSU in 1985 to the collapse of the soviet empire in the last months of 1991 some western as well as soviet scholars made some effort to understand the fate of workers and their struggles in this period, but none has dealt thematically on the subject as important as the organizations of working class, old and new. This is a first systematic effort to understand and analyse the emergence of new workers' organizations, their ideology, their role in transitional period as protector and promoter of working class interests, and their alliances with different political formations in the struggle for supermacy between different ruling stratum in this phase of soviet economy and society.

Although, the internal and external cause of collapse of the soviet empire are still being revealed through different sources but some of the contradictions of soviet society and economy can be traced back to the launching of the socialist project itself with the coming of the October

revolution. In Chapter-I an attempt has been made to recapture analytically the historical itinerary of soviet trade unions in a specific kind of social formation i.e. before and after the October revolution, upto the 1985. In light of the understanding made of trade unions in the soviet period Chapter-II attempts to capture the Central theme of perestroika during which different ruling stratum made an efforts to break the passivity of soviet working class, to make it ally in the struggle for supermacy in soviet society. Workers as part of integral whole in the regime responded to the calls of political leadership, albert cautiously. It is only after availing the opportunities offered by beginning of political democracy workers responded to their 'immiseration' beset by economic liberalization. It led to crop up some new workers' organisations which led to the strike movement of miners of 1989 and 1991. In Chapter-III it is tried to demonstrate and establish the link between new workers' organizations and political leadership in these strike movements. Old unions also tried to reform themselves but workers hardly looked to them except in the case of benefits associated with their membership.

In Chapter-IV a sketch of changing correlation of forces in Soviet politics along with the emergence of regional nationalistic movements has been made which ultimately led to the disintegration of USSR. Counter coup made by Yeltsin ended the party monopoly over power. The end of the party monopoly over power and the emergence of new workers' organizations and their alliance with new political leadership led to the eclipse of the official trade unions. Making a final analysis in Chapter-V I tried to understand the present state of Trade union organizations and their movement in Russia, highlighting some of the hopeful signs of its

revival banking upon the heroic traditions of the Soviet working class. But given the dismal state of affairs in Russian economy and lack of will in political leadership Russian working class gives a sense of its isolation nationally and internationally. This is also very true of workers' organizations.

On account of the lack and accessibility to the original resources I made this limited effort to treat the subject of which the possibilities for further exploration are still immense. In this effort I have been helped and inspired by some of my most near and dear ones without which this manuscript would not have been completed. I really fail to find the words of praise for my supervisor Prof. Devendra Kaushik, who has been very kind, cooperative and democratic in supervision. He corrected me like his son even where I have committed blunder. I really love and respect him. Secondly, my parents positively charged me by making a bit soft negative taunt about me, the good intentions behind such moves under no circumstances can be made even a subject for rethinking. My wife and my friends also made sometimes a timely interventions to remind me of my job. I feel grateful to them. Again, I thank everybody, whosoever he/she is, who has directly or indirectly cooperated in this effort.

November 12, 1998

*Mahabir Singh.*  
( Mahabir Singh )

## CHAPTER-I

# THE SOVIET TRADE UNIONS IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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If we look at the organic development of trade unions world over; it may intrinsically be related with medieval guilds protecting and promoting the interests of persons involved in the same trade. These guilds were small commodity producers (handicrafts or peasant industry) who later on developed as capitalist manufacturers, and consequently the factory owners (large scale machine industry), in their body and soul the modern bourgeoisie. The nature of these medieval guilds was inherently contradictory as there was a hierarchical structure within them, and there was also an inter-guild competition, i.e., promotion of sectional interests. As inevitable, in the process of social division of labour the 'journeyman' stripped of their guild security moved along with their guild master as modern wage labourer in modern machine industry. From their medieval guild they retained their characteristics of organising professionally and promoting sectional interests socially. The organization and nature of modern machine industry also facilitated this process of organizing the workers in trade unions along with lines of medieval guilds. So the modern trade union which is a developed child of medieval guilds is association of workers of a particular trade or industry for the protection and promotion of interests of their members, not necessarily compatible with the interests of the rest of the members and sections of the society. By definition they are mediators or alleviators of



workers' interests but at the same time they conceal the contradiction unintentionally and exaggerate it intendedly. At the theoretical plane the scholars are divided mainly into two categories (the liberal Pluralists and Marxists), and loosely into four, another two categorised at criticist (they make every approach of industrial relation subjects to criticism) and post-industrialist. The liberal pluralists: According to liberal pluralists scholars of industrial relations the society is a functioning organism tending towards equilibrium, viewing society as possessing unity. This proposition consequently leads to the conclusion that contradiction between the employee and the employer are not structurally given and do not form permanent cleavage. So the two interest groups can meet and negotiate through the process of collective bargaining. The other conclusion of this assumption is that cleavage between the two are a matter of historical chance and with the evolution of society the contradictions are also likely to be resolved, because they drive from the authority structure of society and as the society is going to democratise the contradictions can also be resolved. There is contradiction in this approach as it sees the employees and employers only as two different interest groups negating the role of environment in shaping their contradictions while at the same time claiming that they are given within the authority structure of society, implicitly admitting that it operates under certain social-historical conditions. The scholars who can be put under this category are Lord Danovan, (1968), H.A. Cleg, W.E.J. Mac

Carthy, A. Fox etc. (1972), Clark, Karl (1964), A. Flanders (1970).

The Marxist scholars view the society as characterised by the private ownership of means of production which consequently give rise to a peculiar kind of authority structure in society. The deep, permanent, structural division is likely to remain between those who sell their labour power and those who purchase it. The contradiction can be resolved only through a constant and direct struggle against capital. This approach looks at the trade unions as a social as well as industrial phenomenon. The strikes are permanent and ineradicable. The collective bargaining as an institution to resolve conflict can only influence the form of struggle but cannot prevent it. The scholars who can be placed under this category are L. Trotsky (1969), V.L. Allen (1971), T. Clarke and L. Clements (1977), H. Benyan and T. Nicols (ed.) (1977) and R. Hyman (1981).

The Criticists : Between these two approaches of industrial relations fall another category of scholars who may be called criticists. They present a critique of liberal pluralistic school of industrial relations. But lack a conception of the agency for the transformation of capitalism, beyond the gradual spread of social enlightenment which departs little from traditional Fabian thinking. They also question certain basic assumption of Marxism with regard to the revolutionary role of working class. They however, can be grouped in the category of radicals on the

basis of their conceptual frame. The scholars who can be included in this category are J.H. Goldthrope, Michael Maan (1981) and G.D.H. Cole (1960).

The Post Industrialists appears to be talking about the end of capitalism and emergence of post capitalist society 'The mass society', 'welfare state' etc. Their argument is that, inequalities in society are declining, with the working class emulating the life style of middle class. The industry according to them is managed by professionals not by capitalists themselves. The professionals seek a balance between diverse groups, (to this they call managerial revolution) resulting in acquisition by the state of characteristics of neutrality rather than class partisanship. The scholars included in this category are J.K. Gallbreath (1968), Dennial Bell (1960) and F.Zweig (1961).

Further conceptual understanding necessitates separation of categories like trade union movement from working class movement and workers movement. A trade union movement is necessarily a movement of workers organised in a particular trade or more than one trade for the betterment of material life of its members. "This economic struggle is a collective struggle of workers against their employers for better terms in the sale of their labour power, for better conditions of life and labour."<sup>1</sup>

So a trade union movement is a working class movement not necessarily in the interest of the whole of working class, although it can

be if it is directly associated with working class movement, whereas working class movement is not strictly a movement of workers in organised trade but it concerns with the conditions of all social classes. It has always a perspective of reorganising the society on egalitarian basis and the general emancipation of society along with it. It is not generally sectional, temporary and contradictory. It is essentially political in nature and puts primacy of politics over economics. For the concept of workers' movement we may attribute it neither the characteristics of trade union movement like narrow, parochial and sectional tendencies nor of working class movement as the emancipation of all social classes which is not in their agenda. It is rather generally spontaneous and fragmentary. It is generally economic in nature but may acquire political character if circumstances directly lead to that direction.

Howsoever divergent in their social-theoretical presentation these approaches might be, regarding relative role of trade-unions they have of necessity to encounter the very concrete operational ways. The present study will refer to specific methodological disputes only in passing, wherever necessary, keeping the stated categories in the background.

A concrete operational approach has guided the investigation into the nature of Soviet Trade Unions, their relationship with CPSU and their role in formulating social and economic policies at their work place

in the post 1917 period. It is proposed to discuss the condition of Russian working class and their organisation before 1917, the condition of Russian economy in general and industry in particular in pre-1917 period, different class forces at play and their relationship with working class. Role and place of the working class in carrying out the socialist revolution will also be discussed.

In its evolution the course of Russian Industry was no different from World experience. Lenin observes, "The fact quite clearly show that the main trend of small commodity production is towards the development of capitalism, in particular towards the rise of manufacture; and manufacture is growing with enormous rapidity before our very eyes into large scale machine industry. Perhaps one of the most striking manifestation of the intimate and direct connection between consecutive forms of industry is the fact that many of the big and even the biggest factory owners were at one time the smallest of the small industrialist and passed through all the stages from "Popular production" to "Capitalism."<sup>2</sup>

### **Class Struggle in Manufactory Stage**

Industrialization came to Russia later than in the majority of western countries, although the first 'industries' were already in existence by the sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup> This is true of the craft industry and so far manufacturing is concerned it developed only in the 18th Century.

"The eighteenth century witnessed a very spectacular, though short lived, rise in Russian mining and general industrialization. But the serf oriented Russian industry proved incapable of competing with Western industries - based on hired labour - as soon as machine began to spread in these countries towards the end of the century... it actually delayed by at least a century the coming of industrial revolution in Russia."<sup>4</sup> So the problem of industrial working class in Russia surfaced only in the later half of the Nineteenth Century, although the workers' discontent can be traced with the Pugachav Revolt in the 18th Century. It was not a new phenomena in Russia it simultaneously happened in French Revolution and American War of Independence. Although it can not be said that participation of Russian workers in Pugachev revolt was wholly identical with participation of French and American workers as "the specific features of class struggle in industrial countries are deeply rooted in national soil and are conditioned by the traditions of a given country, its distinctive history and culture."<sup>5</sup> "Even in Russia, where serfdom had 'assumed a neo-feudal forms', foci of Capitalist Relations appeared from time to time in these countries, although they were unstable until 1760's and died down one place to flare up at another."<sup>6</sup>

The proletariat of the manufactory period was everywhere not only a deconcentrated, dissociated but also an extremely heterogeneous mass structurally. This circumstance is extremely important for understanding the essence of new classes, for an analysis of the forms of

its exploitation and the class struggle in that period."<sup>7</sup> In Russia such manufacturers became conspicuous in the textile industry over the last few decades of 18th century. They sprang up in wood working, shoe making and other fields."<sup>8</sup> "From the end of 18th century the emerging proletariat was on the whole represented by two contingents of workers. Hired workman were peasants on quit-rent and wage workers in the true sense of the word. The later were in a greater numbers in the manufacturing industries and fewer in the mining industry. The emerging proletariat in Russia included, first as in other countries, workers of petty bourgeoisie enterprises, manufacturers of various kinds, as well as of factories (from the 30's and 40's of 19th century)".<sup>9</sup>

Because, the manual tools were still the basis for capitalist production in the manufactory period, the complete realization of all its properties (of capitalist relations of production) including full subordination of labour to capital was not yet feasible. The machine basis technology required for this which was still non-existent. The entrepreneurs were still unable to enslave the workers completely, because the employers themselves and their production depended on skillful craftsman. "Capital is constantly compelled to wrestle with the insubordination of workmen," "these runs to complaint of want of discipline among the workmen" such was the root cause of peculiar condition of labour struggle in manufacturing stage."<sup>10</sup>

"For all that no proletarian class movement in the true sense of the word existed at that time (manufactory stage), because the working class itself had not yet formed. Even if the labour struggle took the form of open protest it could not be regarded as a working class movement. As Marx said, "In the manufactory period the struggle of the proletariat is latent or manifests itself only in isolated and sporadic phenomenon." Strikes as Lenin noted, "expressed the class struggle in embryo, but only in embryo". Again as Marx underscored, "the content about wages in manufactory presupposes manufacture, and are in no sense directed against its existence."<sup>11</sup>

The fragmentary nature of Russian workers' struggle in the manufactory period can be seen in the whole of 18th and early 19th century. For instance Frynov silk factory workers struggle from 1800-1880, the struggle of the Voznesensk Textile workers (Dimitrov, Moscow regions) which also lead to the promulgation of the first law dealing with the employment of children in factories, struggle of Krasnopole's Paper mill workers in the St. Petersburg Gubernia in 1777. These and similar cases show that there has been persistence, endurance and a sense of collective action among the Russian working class.<sup>12</sup>

Serfdom was a constraining factor in Russian economic and social life. The industrial development was at a very low ebb, and consequently the economic and social organizations of Russian working



class were weak. It was only after the abolition of serfdom and 'reforms' period a phenomenal growth of Russian industry as well as the Russian working class can be marked. So far the organizations of working class are concerned they were not in step with the pace of industrial and working class development because of the nature of the regime, and the cultural gap between intelligentsia and the working class, while the former was under the influence of West European social and political development and latter was springing up from serfdom.

The great reforms abolished the serfdom but did not give any social, economic and political rights to industrial workers whose number was just as small as 565,142 in 1860.<sup>13</sup>

So the first attempt of creating workers organizations in Russia was undertaken by revolutionary intelligentsia, the Norodniki. Even the "South Russian alliance of workers" in Odessa which the Soviet authors claim to be proletarian organization in Russia was headed by such representative of radical intelligentsia as Ye.Zaslavesky and a number of Odessa university students, teachers etc. The only important figure among workers ranks was Obnorsky - but he had been involved with political activities for a long time and, before going to Odessa he had spent a number of years as an emigre in close contact with the German worker's movement.<sup>14</sup> As there was a gap between the politically charged

leaders demands and immediate economic interests of workers, the later responded actively to economic demands and remained passive to the anti-czarist political passions.

The another workers' organization was "Northern Alliance of Russian Workers" which was for the first time organized by workers' themselves: Khalturin a carpenter and same Obnorsky , the aim of the alliance was liquidation of the existing political and economic order. An another organization namely 'Peoples' will' was also working which was joined by Khalturin later on. 'Moscow Workers' Alliance' was also one among them.<sup>15</sup>

Besides, these organizations of workers with political overtones there were certain other non-political mutual aid societies of workers like Jewish Artisans' Kheveras which later developed into tough, clandestine, trade union in 1890, Bristele Workers' Union in 1894, and similar mutual insurance and pension funds began to develop in Railways as far back as 1850. Although this question is hotly debated that whether these peaceful mutual-aid societies were originator of Russian trade unions or not. The Russian revolutionaries like Ryazanov, Kolokolmior who had struggled to form revolutionary social democratic cells among Russian industrial workers bitterly attacked this notion.<sup>16</sup>

## **Workers' Legal Position and Industrial Legislation in Russia**

"Theoretically, workers' legislation started in Russia in the eighteenth century, and the first law stipulating a ten hour working day for all artisans and their assistants was issued by Catherine the great in 1785... it must also be remembered that Russian workers' had more official holidays each year than workers in any other European country."<sup>17</sup> Between 1886-93, a set of laws came into force governing the hiring and firing of workers. In 1876 first law forbidding the employment of youths in gunpowder factories was promulgated. In 1880's and 1890's these were followed by a series of laws forbidding the industrial employment of children below the age of 12, employment of those below 15 years of age for more than eight hours a day, night employment of youths below the age of 17 and for all women in the textile plants as well as in the underground work like mines.<sup>18</sup> According to Walking the bitterly anti-czarist Bolshevik historian Pokrovsky stated that the labour policy of czarist government had been the major grievances of bourgeoisie, and that it had led them to turn against the autocracy after 1905.<sup>19</sup>

But what mattered most to the Russian workers was the fact that at the same time the British workers were much better paid, while German workers were protected by more efficient insurance schemes. Again, "these labour laws were not accompanied by laws stipulating

penalties for the non-observation of these legislation... even there was no official recognition of status of working class and workers had no professional organizations to fight for their right".<sup>20</sup> What F. Naumann, a German historian of social movements, wrote in criticism of Bismark's labour policies can suitably be applied to the labour policies of Russian government as well. Nauman wrote, "all the laws for the protection of workmen are a poor substitute for the free activity of trade unions."<sup>21</sup> To substantiate this point the law of May 24, 1835 may be cited which obliged employers to issue to their workers paysheets on which the agreed condition of work and all payments were to be recorded. Under this law workers were forbidden to demand any change in the conditions before expiry of the contract while employees were given free hand to sack workers at a formal notice of 2 weeks.

Two laws were issued in 1845, first outlawed the night work for children while second outlawed the strike and put it on the same footing 'as revolts against authorities established.'<sup>22</sup> Besides, in 1859 an imperial commission was set up to modernise the whole system of industrial legislation. The industrial upsurge of 1870's, based on mechanization and hired labour and accompanied by an increase in strikes resulted in the great wave of industrial legislation of 1880's and 1890's, which began with the law of 2 June 1882, 5 June 1884, 3 June 1885, and that of 3 June 1886. All these labour legislations as Tugan-Baranovsky thinks were caused by the strikes and other forms of industrial violence of the

period.<sup>23</sup>

## Industrial Growth and Condition of Working Class

**Table 1**

1861 agrarian reform brought out the phenomenal growth of Russian working class in number as well as in its strengths. It can be seen from the following table.<sup>24</sup>

Year	No. of workers	Percentage in relation to population
1866	493000	0.8
1885	616000	0.7
1893	1213000	1.3
1896	1405000	1.5

This statistics include only the European Russia.

The structure of Russian industry in 1902 can be seen in the following table<sup>25</sup>

**Table 2**

Enterprise with	No. of enterprises	No. of Workers
1 - 5 workers	11,701	27800
6 - 50 workers	14,189	240000
51-1000 workers	5,000	950000
Above 1000 workers	300	700000
Total	31,190	19,17,800

The above statistics indicate that a large section of Russian workers was concentrated into medium size i.e. 51-1000 workers and large scale industries in the industrial centres.

We can have an another look at the number of workers engaged in different sectors of economy in 1894.<sup>26</sup>

**Table 3**

1. Total Adult Male Workers Population	15500000
2. Agriculture Wage Workers	3500000
3. Factory Mining and Railway Workers	1500000
4. Building Workers	1000000
5. Lumbar workers, navvies, Railway builder, Goods loader and unloader, all kinds of unskilled labourer in industrial centres	2000000
6. Workers occupied at home for capitalist, working for wages in manufacturing industries (Not included in factory industries)	2000000
TOTAL about 10000000 wage workers Women & Children 25% of total wage labourer	2500000
No. of total adult male wage workers	7500000

From the above table it can reasonably be concluded that about half of the total adult male workers population was engaged in the production of material values. The part of this vast mass of wage workers had completely broken with the land, and lived entirely by the sale of their labour power. They included the great majority of factory (undoubtedly

also of mining and railways) workers, and a section of construction and ship building workers, and unskilled labourer, fairly large section of workers employed in capitalist manufactories and the inhabitants of non-agriculture centres engaged in the home work for entrepreneurs.

The above statistics signify that the relative surplus population (or reserve army of unemployed) was created by the capitalist mode of production.

The industry wise wages can be seen from the following Table 4.

**Table 4**

Industry	Men	Women
Machine-Building	24 Roubles	—
Factory Hands (All Factories)	18 Roubles	9 Roubles
Textile	17 Roubles	7 Roubles
Leather	17 Roubles	—
(Textile) Print work	16 Roubles	6 Roubles
Cottong Spinning	14 Roubles	11 Roubles
Chemical	13 Roubles	—
China & Pottery	12 Roubles	4 Roubles <sup>27</sup>

The level of workers discontent can be seen from the following table.

**Table No.5**

Year	No. of Strikes	No.of Participants
1895	68	31,195
1896	118	29,527
1897	145	59,870
1898	215	43,150
1899	189	97,498

The largest number of strikes occurred in enterprises with over 1000 workers.<sup>28</sup>


Although the numerical strength of Russian Industrial workers was small in relation to the total % of population but their strength was greater than their numerical strength in concentrated industrial regions, in medium and big size of industrial establishments. Another reason of their strength was that a Russian industrial worker was completely rootless and insecure as he had to travel a long distance from his village to find employment in the industry. He could not return home for the sowing and harvesting his little piece of land, which isolated him completely from his usual environment, and threw him into a strange, explosive and bitter atmosphere of industry. St. Petersburg the most sparsely populated province, was highly industrialized centre of Russia, comparatively better paid and always in demand for workers.

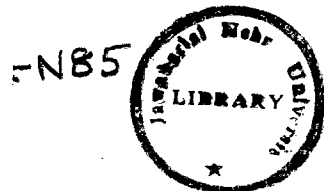


It may also be seen that the collective actions of workers in the last decade of 19th century were progressively increasing with larger participation. This clearly shows that despite the "progressive" or "retrogressive" workers legislation the regime could not stop or satisfy the workers to win them to its side. Although, legally the workers associations were banned, strikes were prohibitory yet the workers' collective action continued to swell despite all odds. It may be due to the revolutionary nature of Russian intelligentsia which led them to action. It has always obfuscated the nature of working class movement as Lenin put it this way: "In Russia, however, the yoke of autocracy appears at first glance to obliterate all distinctions between social democratic organizations and workers' associations, since all workers associations and study circles are prohibited, and since the principal manifestation and weapons of workers' economic struggle — the strike is regarded as a criminal offence."<sup>29</sup>

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It can also be deduced that as half of the working population was 'reserve army of labour' many of the workers' must have been taken for safeguarding their jobs as well as the living conditions, leave aside for better ones. But the mixed nature of workers' demands (economic as well as political) clearly established a link between social democracy and workers' movement.

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Thus it can be concluded with reasonable certainty that the Russian workers at the end of 19th century were gaining class consciousness for different reasons. Working class organizations like trade unions were not operating but some little mutual aid societies and friendly organizations were there. They (workers) had no political or civil rights. The tight screw of regime on workers' economic and political activities put a premium to the social democratic politics, gaining workers to their side. The low salaries and longer working hours (60% of Moscow enterprises had a more than 13 hours day to more than 15 hours per day)<sup>30</sup> are clear evidence of their miseries. Factory laws were poorly implemented by inspectorate. "The Russian factory inspectorate had to a great extent become the protecting body for the employers."<sup>31</sup> Lack of sufficient holidays as Lenin observed, "even in the leading industries of advanced countries the system of holiday for workers is disgracefully inadequate, not to talk of Russia."<sup>32</sup> "An extremely unhygienic environment, the combination of dwellings and working rooms, which turned the dwellings of home workers into a hot bed of health hazard and occupational diseases."<sup>33</sup>

### **Russian Trade Unions from 1905-17**

Before 1905 the strikes which occurred in Russian factories were almost entirely unorganized and represented little more than spontaneous outburst of revolt against intolerable hardship.

In 1905, the trade unions received their great impetus to grow. But even at this moment they were eclipsed, as organs of the recalcitrant workers... In the period of repression after 1906 the trade unions suffered almost complete extinction.<sup>34</sup> The supremacy of revolutionary politics over trade unionism became apparent in the first Russian revolution of 1905. The czarist autocracy was greatly weakened; the trade unions for the first time enjoying the full freedom of organization and gained considerable membership. Nevertheless, their role in the turbulent strike movement of that year was only secondary. In the St. Petersburg, the capital and the centre of revolution, they were completely overshadowed by a new institution that had spontaneously spring into being the Council of Workers' Delegates, the first soviet in history. The so-called regime of June 3, banned the trade unions and their members were severely punished for participation in strikes and other economic activities. But some trade unions were allowed to exist under close police supervision.<sup>35</sup> The labour movement was in a state of depression from 1906-12, when a political revival was manifested itself in many strikes. This revival was for a time interrupted by the outbreak of first world war.<sup>36</sup>

### **October Revolution and Trade Unions**

In 1905, trade unions counted 250000 members while it rose to 1.5 millions during the first months of 1917. This can be accounted for the newly won political freedom. But the practical role of trade unions in

revolution did not, however, correspond to their numerical strength. It was even less significant than in 1905.<sup>37</sup> As Carr remarked, "when they (trade unions) revived and spread after February 1917 revolution, they were once more overshadowed in the consciousness of the most active and radical workers by the prestige of the Soviets; the trade unions, though they now enrolled largely increased number of workers, played no role whatever in the October revolution.<sup>38</sup> They (trade unions) were relegated to the background not only by the Soviets by also by the factory committees.

### **The Great Trade Unions Debate and Positions of Different Political Formations**

The dilemma of trade unions under socialism dimly foreshadowed in the early history of Marxism. The Marxist programme in its entirety constituted what could be described as a 'labour policy'. It drew the logical consequences from the theory that labour is the sole source of value; and it made the industrial proletariat both the artificer and the main beneficiary of the coming revolution. It could not disinterest itself in the demands which were the staple of trade unions platforms under capitalism — higher wages, the eight hours day and so forth. But these demands pre-supposes the capitalist system, and could be only secondary features in revolutionary programme. The main purpose of the workers should be to overthrow the capitalism, not to improve there own

position within it. The items which figured as minimum demands of the workers in the communist manifesto and in later party programmes prepared basing itself on the understanding made by it, were important not so much for their own sake, but as stepping stones to the revolutionary goals.<sup>39</sup>

This attitude was responsible for the somewhat skeptical mistrust of trade unions displayed by early Marxists. The first international had to pick its way delicately between those of its members (mainly the English group) who thought trade unionism, an all important form of organized labour activity and those (mainly French and Germans) who were inclined to dismiss it as irrelevant, if not prejudicial, to the revolutionary struggle and to the future of socialism. Resolution passed by Geneva Congress in 1866 recognised that trade unions were necessary and vital 'so long as capitalism exists but warned them against the pursuit of 'narrow' aims and urged them to 'strive for the general emancipation of millions of oppressed working people.'<sup>40</sup>

The habit of the organizing workers under trade unions and pursuing the narrow self-interest of a section of workers relegates the primary of revolutionary cause into the background and generates the tendency which Lenin often called 'Trade Unionism' in a pejorative sense. Lenin, in 1902, in 'what is to be done?' attacked the "economist" group of Russian social democrats for 'lapsing from social democracy into trade

unionism'. In a similar way he attacked the German social democratic party calling it 'revisionist'. He argued that 'the political struggle of social democracy is far broader and more complex than the economic struggle of the workers with the employers.'<sup>41</sup> He further elaborated, "for the socialist the economic struggle serves as the basis of organization of workers in a revolutionary party, for the consolidation and development of class struggle against the whole capitalist system. But if the economic struggle is regarded something self-sufficient, then there is nothing socialist in it."<sup>42</sup>

He further elaborated the point, "to assist in the economic struggle of the proletariat is the job of bourgeoisie politician. The task of the socialist is to make the economic struggle of the workers assist the socialist movement and contribute to the success of revolutionary socialist party."<sup>43</sup>

This dialectical contradiction that modern industry tended to organize the proletariat for class struggle, to shape its collective mind and to discipline its will but it was also true that the unity of working class was being constantly disrupted by centrifugal forces, that its class consciousness was constantly disintegrating, and that its collective will was being dissipated in pursuit of the most diverse and contradictory objectives. This formed the background against which Lenin viewed the respective roles of various labour organizations, and analysed the

relative antagonism between trade unionism and political socialism.<sup>44</sup>

In light of this theoretical understanding, the relationship between party and trade unions could not be free from some dualism. The auxiliary role of trade unions was emphasised in a resolution adopted by the fourth congress of Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (RSDWP) in April, May 1906, in which Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were united. In this Congress Bolsheviks passed the resolution for all party members to join the trade unions but cautiously, they were in favour of "non-party" character of trade unions rather than the "political neutrality" of trade unions. After the regime of June 3, the so-called 'liquidators' among the Mensheviks were inclined to confine themselves to such forms of activities as were tolerated by the government. The London Congress of RSDWP of 1907 also tabled a resolution that Social Democrats should give up their aspiration to lead the trade unions. It invoked sharp protest from Lenin and the resolution was not put to vote.

In February 1908, the Party (RSDWP) suggested the 'Fractions' and 'cells' formation within trade unions which later on became the characteristic for communist method of organization. As the revolutionary fervour proceeded in 1917 this Controversy over the work and role of trade unions vis-a-vis party attitude towards them became a matter of serious concern between different political formations. The Soviets were dominated by Mensheviks who nominally favoured the

trade unions political neutrality. This claim was not very strongly based on the fact that under Menshevik leadership the trade unions supported the Kerensky government and his war policy. The Menshevik advocacy for neutrality was mainly a form of their opposition to the growth of Bolshevik influence in trade unions. At this stage Lenin expounded the idea of "workers' control" over industry. It was to be a sort of dual control of employers and workers over industry, a condominium in which the workers were to train themselves for future exclusive management and progressively to widen the sphere of their responsibility. Trade unions were expected to play their part in establishing 'worker's control'.

In every factory or workshop of any significance, its immediate purpose was to control by the workers 'on the spot'. At this stage Bolshevik appeared as adherents of the most extreme decentralization of economic power, which gave the Mensheviks opportunity to charge them with abandoning Marxism in favour of anarchism.

After assuming power after the October revolution Bolshevik came into direct confrontation with Factory Committees as centralization of political power and economic control was now indispensable if the newly formed soviet government was to survive but all factory committees aspired to have last and final say in all matters affecting their respective factories. A few weeks after the upheaval, the factory committees attempted to form their own national organization which was



to secure their virtual economic dictatorship. Bolsheviks now called upon trade unions to render a special service in the nascent soviet state and to discipline the factory committees. By the end of 1917 a compromise reached between the factory committees and trade unions as factory committees were to form the primary organization upon which trade unions would work but by the same token they were incorporated into the unions. The unions now became the main channels through which the government was assuming effective control over industry. This was roughly the situation when first All Russian Trade Union Congress assembled in Moscow in the second week of January 1918. This gave rise to a great trade union debate between Bolsheviks themselves vis-a-vis other political formations.

### **The High Pitch of Trade Unions debate**

The issue before the Congress was in the words of Mikhail Tomsy, the leading Bolshevik trade unionist, whether the trade unions should tie their fortunes to those of Soviet government or whether they should remain independent organizations of workers' economic struggle. Tomsy said "Even before the October revolution the general condition of industry compelled the trade unions to give up strike action... now when the proletariat has assumed the political and economic leadership of the country and removed the bourgeoisie from the management of industry the struggle of the workers for the improvement of their positions has

naturally had to take on new forms, the forms of an organized action through the trade unions and through various regulating bodies, upon the economic policy of the working class as a whole. The sectional interest of groups of workers have had to be subordinated to the interest of the entire class."<sup>45</sup>

Against this Mensheviks assuming that given the backwardness and feudal character of Russian society this revolution could be only a bourgeois revolution hence the independence of trade unions. Maisky a Menshevik at Congress stated this position in the following, "Comrades, ... we still, still think that our revolution remains, as we, used to say, a bourgeois revolution, and that trade unions have therefore to perform their customary job... I suppose that capitalism will unfortunately very soon reassert itself with all its might and power. I think therefore that if capitalism remains intact, the task which trade unions are confronted under capitalism remains unaltered as well."<sup>46</sup>

Martov gave a very sophisticated version of above positions opposed Lenin giving following explanation:

'Government do not represent the working class only. It can not but be the de facto administration connected with the heterogeneous mass of toiling people, with proletarian and non-proletarian elements alike. It can not, therefore, conduct its economic policy along the lines of

consistently and clearly expressed interests of the working class. The trade unions, as exponents of strictly proletarian interests, should reserve their freedom of action vis-a-vis the government'.<sup>47</sup>

Another dimension was added to above discussion by Lozovsky and Ryazanov as they argued that so long a socialist revolution in rest of the Europe and in the whole world do not occur the possibility of occurring a counter revolution are prominent in the Soviet union. In that case, working class should not loose even its single weapon of struggle against bourgeoisie. Although Lenin did not agree to Martov's position at this stage but he had to agree to it three years later.

The Congress of Trade Unions could not bring itself to declare that the trade unions would at once form part and parcel of new administration - at best it spoke about their statification in vague and conditional terms:

"As they develop trade unions should, in process of present socialist revolution, become organs of socialist power, and as such they should work in coordination with, and subordination to other bodies in order to carry into effect the new principles. The Congress is convinced that in consequence of the foreshadowed process, the trade unions will inevitably become transformed into organs of the socialist state and the participation in trade unions will for all people employed in any industry be their duty vis-a-vis state."<sup>48</sup>

During the civil war trade unions whose membership rose to 3.5 million transformed themselves into the organs of civil war. As the civil war dragged on the trade unions called up and armed 50 percent of their own members. This speeded up the process of total socialization, at first, as matter of military rather than economic policies.

The second All Russian Congress of Trade Unions (January 1919) placed more emphasis of the 'state functions' of trade unions. At this congress Tomsy stated "At this moment when trade unions regulates wages and conditions of labour, when the appointment of commissariat of labour, too, depends on our Congress, no strike can take place in Soviet Russia." Lenin spoke about "inevitability of trade unions statification". This doctrinal position of Lenin was linked with the conception of "withering away" of state. But how it will take place, whether trade unions will absorb the state or state will absorb the trade unions? This question was not resolved nor even addressed.

At this stage a new institution of Russian industrial administration came into being, apart from trade unions, it was Supreme Council of National Economy (VSNK<sub>h</sub>). It started gradually extending its control, through the management of National Industrial Trust (Glaviki). Trade unions had to be reorganized so as to correspond with vertical administration of industries. VSNK<sub>h</sub> was set up in cooperation with trade unions but it soon acquired identity of its own. More often both

institutions came into conflict. VSNK<sub>h</sub> was inclined to regard unions as an auxiliary, whereas, at least, some trade unionists held that the actual direction of the industry was a prerogative of unions. This conflict aggravated when VSNK<sub>h</sub> secured the cooperation of a number of technical specialists and old time economic administrators, upon whom many trade unions habitually looked with atmost distrust. This development gives a symbolic significance of developing class apparatus within different branches of industry at that time.

The Ninth Congress of the Party (March-April 1920) and Third All Russian Congress of Trade Unions (April 1920) marked a new turn. The two new measures stood in the centre of the debate: (a) the introduction of individual management in industry in place of management by committee and (b) Further militarization of labour and formation of labour armies.

The individual management was seen as reappearance of autocracy in industrial administration. Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin met the objections of individual management by saying "individual management does not in any degree limit or infringe upon the rights of working class, or the rights of trade unions, because class can exercise its rule in one form and another, as technical expediency may dictate."<sup>49</sup> A resolution submitted by Trotsky and adopted by the Congress said the

organization of industrial management, "should be carried out by agreement between the organs of Supreme Council of National Economy and the corresponding organisation, central council of trade unions."<sup>50</sup>

At the Third Congress of Trade Unions Trotsky defended the labour armies, which means a "type of labour that is socially regulated on the basis of an economic plan, obligatory for the whole country, compulsory for every worker". Menshevik raised objection to it saying any compulsory labour will not increase productivity.

In this way Trotsky proclaimed the unrestricted rights of the proletarian state to use the labour power of the nation in the way it considered proper and the duty of the trade unions to concern themselves with the worker as a producer not as a consumer.

In the later years Trotsky himself became the strong critic of a labour policy of which he had unwittingly been an inspirer. Trotsky's philosophy of labour came to underlie Stalin's practical labour policy in the thirties, but Stalin and his adherents had never admitted it. Trotsky's theory was not only embodied, but also exaggerated and brutalized ad absurdum.

Throughout 1920 the trade unions were in a ferment. Trade unions openly protested against the interference of party in their affairs. AUCCTU split into two groups, one led by Trotsky (Productionist), and another by Tomsky who insisted on the need for trade unions to resume

in some measures, the defence of the interests of their members. The Central Committee and Politburo of the CPSU twisted sometimes to Trotsky's and at another times to Tomsky's view which led the matter to the 10th Party Congress in March 1921.

As the controversy unfolded various groups merged with one another and in the end only three resolutions were put before the Congress (1) one motion put forwarded by Trotsky and Bukharin urged the complete statification of the trade unions. (2) A motion emanating from the so-called worker's apposition (its leader was the former Commissar of Labour, A. Shlyapnikov) demanded the transfer of entire economic administration to the trade unions. Lenin backed by nine other members of Central Committee tried to strike a balance between the two, that is, a well known platform of ten.

Trotsky also advocated the subordination of trade unions to the economic administration, abolition of commissariat of labour and managerial post to the bourgeoisie technicians who have become full members of union. He advocated the wage policy on the basis of (a) Shock competition between workers at production (b) the levelling out of wages, at least in so far that premium for high output should be paid out only after a real minimum wage had been secured to all workers. Earlier he emphatically favour wage differentiation.

The workers' opposition postulated the domination of trade unions over the state, abolition of normal economic administration, and its substitution by trade unions. They forcefully said 'in practice the leadership of the party and government bodies have in the last two years systematically narrowed the scope of trade unions' work and reduced almost to nil the influence of the working class associations in the Soviet State.' 'The party and economic authorities, have been swamped by bourgeois technicians and other non-proletarian elements, displayed outright hostility towards the trade unions, a hostility which reflected bourgeois class hatred of the proletariat.

'The Platform of Ten' led by Lenin resolved, that 'The present situation urgently requires that trade unions should take a more direct part in the organisation of production not only through detailing their members to work in economic administration but through the whole of their machinery as well. But, apart from this, the whole tenor of the motion suggested the need for the strictest subordination of trade unions policy to the government. Nevertheless, the idea about the statification of trade unions was described as erroneous on the ground that it will not help to improve Russia's economic position and that trade unions absorbed by the state would not be able to perform their proper functions. Describing the trade unions as the school of communism the Leninist motion enumerated the following task before trade unions.



- (i) To study systematically the work of economic administration.
- (ii) Exercise functions of control and inspection.
- (iii) Participation in the working out of economic plans and production programmes and fixing economic priorities.
- (iv) To study the labour process from technical angle.
- (v) To take part in building up the machinery of economic administration
- (vi) To work out ways and means of combating infringements of labour discipline etc.<sup>51</sup>

Danniel Bell aptly remarked about this struggle that, 'from 1917-21 the issue of industrial administration was the most sensitive indicator of the clash of principles about the shaping of new socialist order... it was the most continuous and provocative focus of actual conflict between communist factions. Similarly, Rosa Luxembourg made the following comment about Bolshevik policy of labour, "The ultra-centralism asked by Lenin is full of sterile spirit of overseer. It is not positive and creative spirit, Lenin's concern is not so much to make the activity of the party more fruitful as to control the party - to narrow the movement rather than to develop it, to bind rather than to unify it."

Not only this the Bolshevik attitude towards opposition was very harsh. The delegation of British labour party which visited Moscow in June 1920 to end the allied intervention in Russia was provided an illegallly printed appeal to socialist everywhere asking for the support for nearly 200 socialist and anarchist imprisoned in Moscow.

## Trade Unions During NEP

At the tenth party Congress Lenin initiated the new economic policy which introduced a mixed, socialist-capitalist economy. Soon afterwards, private capital, Russian and foreign, was readmitted into industry and commerce, while the state retained its commanding post in large scale industry. This change was bound to create a new situation for the trade unions. The Forth Congress of AUCCTU, was convened in May, 1921. During this Congress Bolshevik members stuck to the position of Party regarding trade unions decided at the Tenth Party Congress, while the left social revolutionaries and Mensheviks pressed for the complete separation of trade unions and the state, on the ground that under NEP the workers would be compelled to defend their interest against private and state capitalism. The resolutions of LSR and Menshevik were voted down by the Bolsheviks who were in majority. In the Eleventh Party Congress in March, 1923 party asserted the Leninist principles of 10th Party Congress but added certain elements to it. It was now reemphasised that the unions ought to support the claims of labour in private and leased enterprises and also in such socialized concerns where workers suffered from bureaucratic deformations and encroachments, with capitalist remnants. "It can be said that during the first phase of NEP, emphasis was fairly widely placed on unions' role as defenders of workers immediate interests, especially when collective labour agreements were concluded each year."<sup>52</sup>

In the later part of NEP, the individual management instead of management by committee was now to be firmly established. "The main task of the proletariat after it has conquered power... is to increase the volume of output and... raise the productive forces of the society... (This) demands that managements of factories should concentrate full power in their hands... any direct interference by trade unions with the management of enterprises must in such circumstances be regarded as absolutely harmful and inadmissible."<sup>53</sup>

Tomsky who opposed these views was asked to go to Turkistan leaving behind his trade unions work. Trotsky argued that although many trade unionist had become industrial managers, the trade unions as bodies were loosing influence, especially as workers promoted to managers tended to lose touch with their original unions. For this party urged the new worker manager to remain a good trade unionist. This productionist view point found eloquent expression in the resolution of 12th Party Congress (April 1923), the first congress Lenin did not participate. The party was now engaged in building up, on the basis of monopoly of power, the monolithic state. The subordination of trade unions was one of the prerequisites as well as result of this process. "From 1925-26 onwards, when the drive for industrialization was developing, emphasis fell more and more on the educative role of trade unions — and this was interpreted as meaning, above all, that they must give direct backing to increasing production and fulfilling the economic plan."<sup>54</sup>

The mass unemployment persisted throughout the NEP due to industrial and agricultural overpopulation. At the height of NEP about 2 million people were without job. The reserve army of unemployed performed in Russian economy the same function as in any other capitalist country. The real wages were considerably below 1914 level. Fear of unemployment prevented workers from demanding higher wages and pressing the trade unions to staking their claims. The mass actions were reduced as NEP progressed. The workers' participation in strikes heightened in 1925 but afterwards it progressively slowed down. It can be seen from the following table:

<u>Year</u>		<u>No. of Workers</u>
1924	:	24000
1925	:	34000
1926	:	33000
1927	:	20000
1928	:	less than 20000

The number of individual disputes progressed as Schmidt, the then Commissar of Labour disclosed at Eighth Congress of Trade Unions, that the number of disputes involved 2.5 million workers.<sup>55</sup>

In 1927 CC of CPSU ordered a large scale release of redundant labour from state industry and worked out higher norms of output and asked the workers to cooperate with economic administration in the

process of rationalization. Trotsky, Zenoviev and Kamnev vehemently protested against it charging the economic administration and trade unions that the emphasis was not on higher technical efficiency but on exacting more physical exertion from the workers. The past years have been characterized by sharp increase in labour conflicts most of them being settled by compulsory rather than by conciliatory measures.

### **The Emerging Character of the Soviet State**

The nature of Soviet state is studied from various angles since its inception. Those who say that October revolution was not conducted by and not reflected the urge of the mass of Russian people, as Lenin and his followers seized the state power in the name of proletariat, would be arguing unwittingly for the most authoritarian and autocratic regime of czar. Was czar a democrat and ruled Russia in the interest of the majority of people living in that country? Answer is definitely no. An American Writer Dunn said "No matter what our conviction, we have to admit that Bolsheviks are hammering out a startling new mechanism in the field of political control. These experiment deserve scientific study, not hostile armies, intelligent criticism, not damning epithets."<sup>56</sup>

Walter Lipmann, editor in chief of the New York times, in his illuminating study of all Russian news which appeared in New York times in early period of revolution, has proved the stupidity, inaccuracy and falsehood of the 'facts and fabrication, which have passed as news.'<sup>57</sup>

Mortov as one of the most prominent opponents of Bolsheviks wrote at that time "understand, please, what we have before us after all a victorious uprising of the proletariat — almost the entire proletariat support Lenin and expects its social liberation from the uprising..."<sup>58</sup>

Again, Tonnycliff says "The Russian revolution brought to power a much mature, better organized and politically conscious working class".<sup>59</sup> Commenting upon the Russian revolution a renowned historian of 20th century E.H. Carr said "Russian revolution will continue for long to polarize opinion, being hailed by some as a land mark in the emancipation of mankind from past oppression, and denounced by others as a crime and a disaster."<sup>60</sup>

A long time associate of Russian Planning and economy Charles Bettelheim called it the "establishment of proletarian power,"<sup>61</sup> in his widely known volume of class struggle in U.S.S.R. So not even a single serious scholar till date has contested the character of Russian revolution other than the proletarian or proletarian peasantry coming to power representing the majority of the Russian populace.

But from 1917 onwards a whole lot of changes occurred in Russian social formations, in its polity, economy and consequently in the balance of class forces resulting into the changes in class relations among different social formations. This is a matter of particular interest to understand the future development in U.S.S.R.

Although, the differing viewpoints were very much prevalent within Bolshevik leadership about the character of Soviet state, most of them thought an international proletarian revolution is the only guarantee to make the revolution deeper inroads inside the Soviet society. When it was realised that revolution did not trigger in other parts of Europe Lenin retreated from his earlier position of 'war communism' and formed an alliance with peasantry with new strategic insights. Lenin time and again repeated that only a long term strategic-alliance with peasantry is the only guarantee to save the revolution in Russia. In the mid 1920s when other European social democratic parties looked as following revisionist policies, Stalin immediately propounded the theory of "Socialism in one Country". This proposition was immediately challenged within party circles with stringent opposition by the Bolshevik like Trotsky, Bukharin, Zinoviev and Kamenev. Trotsky first saw the Soviet worker's state with 'bureaucratic deformation' and later on as a "degenerated workers state".

Trotskyites even in the last quarter of the present century saw the Soviet state as 'workers' state' with degenerated bureaucracy. A well known Trotskyite theorist, Ernest Mandel said Stalinist theory of Socialism in one country 'expressed primarily the petty-bourgeois conservatism of bureaucracy, as well as the mounting appetite of party apparatus for privileges of power.'<sup>62</sup> Describing the laws of motion of Soviet economy Mandel said, "the concept of transitional society is

utilized to analyse the laws of development of Soviet economy. A transitional society is not defined by the simple combination or articulation of old and new relations, but instead is understood to be a formation with relations of production specific to this transitional period. The decisive feature of these new relations is the conscious distribution of the means of production and labour power through the plan. The distribution of consumer goods, however, still maintains the commodity form. Consequently economic order is governed by the conflict of two antagonistic logic — the logic of the plan and logic of the market."<sup>63</sup> Thus for those who see the Soviet union as 'degenerated workers state' in last analysis form the opinion that workers and a section of party apparatus should raise the banner of revolt against the corrupt degenerated element and establish a truly socialist society. This position is supported by Isaac Deutscher, Maurice Brinton, Simon Clarke and Donald, Filtzer.

Another view about the erstwhile Soviet union is that it was a 'State Capitalist' society. The most profound champion of this view is Charles Bettelheim. He says "The development of productive forces can never, by itself, cause the capitalist form of division of labour, or the other bourgeoisie social relations, to disappear. Only a class struggle developing under the dictatorship of the proletariat and correctly led... can bring about the disappearance of capitalist economic relations, by attacking the capitalist division of labour, and at the same time, the ideological and political relations that make it possible for relations of



exploitation and oppression to be reproduced."<sup>64</sup> The problematic of the 'productive forces' unilaterally subordinates transformation of social relations to the development of productive forces.<sup>65</sup> Again, "under the cover of state ownership, relations of exploitation exist today in U.S.S.R. which are similar to those existing in other capitalist countries. It is only the form of these relations that is distinctive there. This distinctive form is state capitalism, and we have known since Engle's time that state capitalism is merely capitalism 'pushed to an extreme."<sup>66</sup>

Refuting the Stalinist conception of socialisation of means of production in defence of Soviet Socialism Bettelheim said 'mechanistic identification of legal forms of ownership with class relations' is false analogy particularly where the transition to socialism is concerned. Further he goes onto say "The reinforcement of State was identified with the reinforcement of socialism. The denial of social contradiction was combined with praise for the dictatorial apparatus. The 'workerism' means that certain qualities of workers (like discipline and self sacrifice) were used as a means of repression and that the existence of a 'worker base' was seen as a guarantee of the party's revolutionary character... on economic front socialism was increasingly identified with a planned economy subject to objective laws — an organized form of capitalism."<sup>67</sup>

Chris Harman, also characterises the wrestwhile Soviet state as capitalist one. But his standpoint is different. He says that Stalinist

ruling stratum of 1929 faced with two choices (1) follow the logic of capitalism and accumulate in order to further accumulate or (2) face subjection to international capitalism. This was the demand of the situation for the Stalinist ruling stratum to maintain in power or give way to the left opposition policies. Ruling stratum knew how to defend itself and it had to turn upon every other class of Russian society, to subordinate them to the needs of accumulation. "That is why the year of the end of independent trade unions, was the year of the abolition of the right to strike and was also the year when the first time wages were forced downward by the bureaucracy."<sup>68</sup>

Another shade of opinion regarding the nature of Soviet state expressed by Paul Sweezy. He said, "Soviet state apparatus presently (1976) be viewed as constituting a new ruling class". He proposed that Marxism accept "the hypothesis that proletarian revolution can give rise to a new form of society, neither capitalist nor socialist."<sup>69</sup>

The third characterization of wrestwhile Soviet union is of 'actually existing socialism' in Soviet and East-European countries. The pioneer of this school of thought is Rudolf Bahro.<sup>70</sup> He said, as all those involved are well aware, the rule of man by man has lost its top layer. The alienation and subalternity of the working mass persist in a new phase "The New system only corresponds in a small way to the principles it proclaims, betraying its own goals and not achieving any thing new. The

entire potential of the system had been demolished as a result we can see... the same ideological bankruptcy of power structure." He goes on to say, "abolition of private property in the means of production has in no way meant that immediate transformation into the property of people, rather whole society stands propertyless against state machine. The "essence of the 'actually existing socialism' is conceived as one of the socialization in the alienated form of stratification, this being based on traditional division of labour which has not yet been driven to the critical point at which it topples over."<sup>71</sup> Another scholar of this school Elmar Altvater agree with Bahro and identifies the following characteristics of 'actually existing socialism'. (1) Primacy of politics rather than primacy of economics refuting Bettelheim thesis. (2) The 'unified mechanism' of domination (3) Continued existence of old division of labour as basis of domination (4) Political dispostism as a form of domination (5) Bureaucracy as institutional form of despotism (6) Scarcity as the basis of reproduction of bureaucracy. (7) Social immobilism.<sup>72</sup>

Last but not least are those who continue to call Soviet union a proletarian state, which to a greater extent proved to be a emotional signpost for the revolutionary masses in the third world countries and orthodox Marxist scholars everywhere in the world. Some of them, supported Soviet union albeit apologetically like E.H. Carr saying it was better to have revolution in such backward and autocratically governed society rather to have no revolution at all.<sup>73</sup> The biggest of the apology for

massive military build up and the continued repressive practices and single party rule is the encirclement of Soviet union by imperialist powers and the fear of enemy infiltration in workers' state. The other scholars who follow the suit are like Albert Szymanski, Michael Goldfield and Melvin Rothenberg. In this short characterising attempt of wrestwhile Soviet union we may see the tendencies polar apposite to each other in looking at the Soviet state. On the one hand we may see, the Soviet intellectuals except a few like Roy Medvidev, radicals in the third world and a few scholars in the western world supporting the Soviet cause albeit-apologetically, and on the other hand scholars like Bettelheim" who says that calling the october revolution of 1917 as socialist one would be a "grand illusion of 20th century". For further understanding let us have a look at the trade unions and labour policies of Soviet union in the next 60 years from 1928-1985.

### **Trade Unions and Labour Policy from Planning period to the exit of Stalin**

The discussion on trade unions and labour policy in the planning period of economy during the Stalin era is appearing more and more elusive and contradictory for lack of correct information and little access to related documents. As Isaac Deutscher said, "Soviet literature on this subject provided a wealth of information throughout the first decade or so after the revolution, when trade unionism was often subject of

dramatic controversies inside the Bolshevik party, even than the facts and data published were not always reliable. Since the late 1920's, however, the sources of information have been progressively drying up. The monolithic nature of the regime has precluded any frank and honest discussion of this as of most other issues".<sup>74</sup> The first issue was the industrialisation. As the ruling stratum went ahead for the planning of rapid industrialization, the trade unions tried to resist such a move. "It is difficult to say exactly what was the attitude of the mass of trade unionists, since they never had the chance to speak their own mind frankly."<sup>75</sup>

At the dawn of massive industrialisation the Eighth Congress of Trade Unions was held in December 1928. This was the last time Tomsky appeared at Congress as recognized leader of trade unions. He revealed that "industry has been troubled by many unofficial strikes which had been due to the trade unions paying inadequate attention to the needs of the masses, to their being detached from masses and showing contempt for the small matters of worker's life." He demanded real election in the union. Rank and file, he went on to say, were afraid of speaking their minds for the fear of being charged as LSR's, and Mensheviks.<sup>76</sup> The Eighth Congress of trade unions in which Tomsky was sacked and Kagnovich took over and four months after in April, 1929 the Sixteenth Conference of party took place in which all apposition elements were silenced and regime took a monolithic shape.

Under the planning period, the problem with which the planner had to contend was the extreme shortage of industrial labour. The unemployment ended, "on March 13, 1930, Michail Sukunov, a Moscow plumber, finally got a job. When he left the labour exchange, the door closed and Soviet commentators pronounced that this event symbolised the end of mass unemployment in U.S.S.R."<sup>77</sup> In the scarcity of labour the rural surplus population was transferred by concluding annual labour agreements between collective farms and industrial management. This involved 24 million people between 1926-39.<sup>78</sup>

The Soviet trade unions firmly discouraged strikes, and behind the unions stood the political police. So trade unions leadership colluded with party leadership against the rank and file of the workers. Fluidity of labour was the substitute for strike. Millions of workers downed tools and left their place of work to hire themselves somewhere else. On September 3, 1930 Central Committee of CPSU proposed that workers employed into industry should accept the obligation to remain in the factory for a specified period. Special incentives were given to those who honoured the obligation, and trade unions bycotted the 'deserters at production'. 'Labour exchanges were closed to stop the fluidity of labour.'<sup>79</sup> Industrial managers, chronically short of labour and desperately anxious to reach their target of output, were certain to disregard the sanctions decreed and to give a job to any 'deserter' from another factory who applied for one. Donald Filtzer put this phenomenon

albeit differently. He said, planned economy led to the planlessness and remarked that "Labour shortages set in motion a spiralling deterioration of the situation. As shortages developed managers began to hoard labour and recruit more workers than the plan allowed... labour turnover skyrocketed and with it the insecurity of the factory managers over their inability to hold onto workers."<sup>80</sup> So a pattern of complicity between workers and enterprise managers was established in this period. "The low pay economy was instrumental in encouraging managers to maximise the recruitment of labour."<sup>81</sup> The system of continuous production along with 'socialist competition' and 'shock work' resulted in wear and tear. The inadequate and often non-existent repair and maintenance caused more problems. The pressure on wages, longer working days, speed ups, increased hostility and discontent, leading in most extreme form of strike, although perhaps more usually involving go-slows. This resulted in the planlessness of the plan."<sup>82</sup>

As the plan period progressed this fluidity continued as also the rigorousness of the measures taken against it, reaching its culmination during the war period. Factory Managers responsible for the fulfilment of the plan targets never allowed these punitived measures to be implemented in full scale. A labour decree on December 28, 1938 was declared with more stringent measures against labour and absenteeism. These were the demotions, terminations, making insurance benefits with longevity of service, pensions, forced labour camps which become

substitute to the stage of unemployment in capitalist countries. "In 1933 Soviet government abolished the People's Commissariat of Labour forcing the trade unions to establish a people's inspectorate of safety, and under the pressure of dictatorial demands of regime the AUCCTU disbanded its own labour inspectorate."<sup>83</sup> "Collective agreements by 1935 had quitey passed out of existence."<sup>84</sup>

The principle of "Socialist emulation" which was enunciated at 16th Party Congress of 1929 relied on symbolic and heroic traditions of working class as no individual material incentives were given to any worker. But in 1931 the wage equalization was firmly denounced and new wage scales with wider differentials were introduced. The role of the RKK was again attacked. "Most striking feature of this period was the gradual narrowing the scope for dispute. Policy disputes under the aegis of centrally fixed targets and indices, with the acceptance of the conditions of code as the norm, and in the absence of trade unions' rights, the disputes almost entirely disappeared at the enterprise level."<sup>85</sup> For the occurrence of a dispute "the emphasis shifted to individual failings, unrelated to any weakness in the system caused by economic and social factors; instead they were the exceptional cases which arose despite the system."<sup>86</sup> During the Five Year Plans, the output of consumer goods industry was rigidly fixed in advance, the trade unions were left with no scope for bargaining over the national wages bill, even if they had wanted to bargain, because it would lead to inflation.



Along with the wage differentiation, the piece-rate system was also introduced. Output above the norm was paid according to the new scale of rates increasing with the output. Where the piece-rates were technically impossible to measure, time bonuses served to stimulate intensity of labour. 'Brigade piece-rates' were special form of payment introduced in the industry where the output of the individual worker could not be measured in piece rates but output of the whole team lent itself to such a measurement.

Then comes the Stakhanovism. The socialist emulation became inhibited competition between individual workers. Trade unions favoured 'shock work' rather than this principle. In 1935 Stakhanovism took its place. The difference between the two movements was one of degree. "The emulation in output associated with Stakhanov method was more intense and brutal than the older system of shock work."<sup>87</sup> This mode of payment under Stakhanov movement was against the understanding of Marx who stated that, "piece wages is the form of wages most in harmony with the capitalist mode of production". Commenting upon the wage inequality in U.S.S.R., Deutscher observed, "the inequality between classes is less than elsewhere. But the inequality inside the working class between various groups of workers, has certainly been much greater than in any other country."<sup>88</sup> Stakhanovism made Russia a classical country of labour aristocracy. Ordinary worker, middle

and lower level trade unions functionaries, ill health and old age workers were the worst sufferers of this movement. They showed resistance to this movement but in disorganised form and by various means.

This concealed opposition prepared the ground for the great purges of 1937-38, of which trade unions were the chief victims. The victimisation of workers, peasants, trade unions functionaries and middle level management of industry took alarming proportions during the Stalin era, with the liquidation of so-called 'opposition group' left or right. Party monolithism tolerated no criticism and dissent from the official line. The great pressure for heavy industrialization made the matter worse. "The forced labour system was developed on mass scale in the early 1930's and expanded remorselessly until Stalin's death in 1953."<sup>89</sup> Robert Conquest put the estimate of deaths between 1930-38 at about seventeen million people.<sup>90</sup> Stephen Cohen puts this figure at 9 millions by 1939.<sup>91</sup> Jerry Hough further brings down this figure to 75000-200000 range<sup>92</sup> Stephen Cohen whose high figures have just been cited, was a consistent opponent of American policy in the cold war, and insisted that Stalin and Stalinism rather than communism and October revolution were responsible for the repression of 1930's. Roy Medvedev the dissident Soviet historian who regarded himself as Leninist, also made extremely high estimates of the number of persons repressed under Stalin.<sup>93</sup> According to Alec Nove, "evidence seems consistent with the view that tens to eleven million people perished in the thirties with the

peasant numerically the main victim."<sup>94</sup> On the number of prisoners in camps, colonies and prisons in 1939-40 Victor Zemskov described by Conquest as 'a thoroughly reliable researcher' opines that the statistical data adduced by R.Conquest and Stephen Cohen are exaggerated by almost 500 percent. Thus there are widely different claims and counter claims regarding the 'harvest of terror' under Stalinism. But none of the scholars has refuted that there was no terror at all. This terror led to the atomisation of Soviet work force which facilitated the entrenchment of Stalinist bureaucracy in power. This also resulted in lack of internal economic coordination which made effective planning impossible.

By the 1942 trade union organizations had virtually ceased to function in most part of the country. It was only in 1944 that under the charge of Kuznetsov trade unions began to be reorganised and in 1947 AUCCTU reintroduced enterprise collective agreement. It was precisely at this crucial moment that the Tenth Trade Union Congress was convened in 1949 after a long gap of 17 years. In this Congress the major focus remained on production and productivity. Some of the delegates managed to air complaints concerning trade union officials' neglect of members' need. A new class had emerged within trade unions. The credential committee of the tenth Trade Unions Congress reported that only 23.5% of all delegates were workers, 43% full time trade unions officials, 39% members of central committee of trade unions, 9.4% from

technical intelligentsia (as compared to 2% in earlier Congress) 85% of delegates had some governmental awards, 71% delegates had secondary or higher education.<sup>95</sup>

The next step in the unions' efforts at protecting the workers from management abuse came in July 1951, when judicial directives annulled the 1938 requirements forcing factory trade unions and management officials to consider attendance and production records in the distribution of welfare benefits. However, an immediate and dramatic increase in labour discipline violations temporarily ended further liberalization measures.<sup>96</sup> The eleventh Trade Union Congress held in June 1954 underscored the desire of trade union leaders for something more than proforma adherence to union rules and regulations.<sup>97</sup> By 1955 attempts to force compliance with central union decrees had expanded to include greater adherence to rules governing working and living conditions of all union members.

Following the 20th Party Congress at which Party and Trade Union spokesman demanded the rejuvenation of factory union offices. The U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet decree of 25 April, 1956 on decriminalizing industrial absenteeism and truancy soon ended the labour's dependence on management. A new group of commentators produced a more comprehensive theory of labour whose purpose and level of sophistication was very different from that of the twenties. Solidifying the

administration into management and government elite, and the absence from any organised pressure for reform, gave a new purpose to the theory. Now its aim was to justify, to find a rationale for existing relationship. The new theory stated that, "in socialist enterprises and institutions, where labour relations are those of comradely cooperation between people, free from exploitation, there are not and can not be opposing interests between the administration and workers. Both sides of the labour relationship are equally interested in fulfilment of production plans, in the strengthening of labour discipline, and in further systematic improvement in material conditions and cultural services of the workers."<sup>98</sup> This new theory, by laying the blame for labour disputes on the remnants of capitalism, wiped out any need to look at the practices of the last 20 years; it exonerated the present system from blame and thus made every study of the system unnecessary. In this regard, E.H. Carr aptly observed, "They (Soviet trade unions) survived at the logical cost of their integration into state machine. The organs of the workers and the organs of the workers state could not go their separate way."<sup>99</sup>

The Khrushchev period can best be understood as an attempt to operate the Stalinist model without reliance on harsher administrative measures. Emphasis was placed on incentives, at the same time the scope of local union activity was increased and attempts were made to encourage workers participation in the organisation of production.<sup>100</sup> Khrushchev warned economic managers of the evils of 'departmentalism'

and proposed that regional economic councils replace central economic ministries. The U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet meeting of 7-10 May 1956 ratified most of Khrushchev's plans, abolishing nearly all of the central economic ministries creating about 105 regional economic councils in their place. Khrushchev stated that Unions faced a similar fate.<sup>101</sup> Given the power struggle within CPSU, Chairman of AUCCTU Grishin, at its meeting of 11-15 June 1957 enunciated an agenda for trade union reform that included a greater union role in economic management, wider rights for regional and local union agencies, as well as further development of production conferences, workers' meetings, and technical societies.<sup>102</sup> Grishin spoke for the retention of Trade Union Central Committees, but only some Central Committees were to be retained with the merger of forty seven central union committees into twenty three by late 1957. In the Twelfth Trade Union Congress held in March 1959, all the principles which the Party Plenum of December 1957 had adopted were reaffirmed. Party leaders singled out three primary agents through which workers participation could take place. These organs were the factory trade union committees, production conferences, and the enterprise collective agreement. After the fall of Khrushchev in 1964, Party leaders no longer portrayed the unions as building block of some future communist society, as had been the case under the Khrushchev. Yet formal party support for union efforts to improve living and working conditions of workers continued throughout the 1960's and the 1970's.<sup>103</sup> The management lost

out during the Khrushchev period. Under the wage reform, wages rose more than salaries, in some cases the latter fell. Also a new premia system, introduced in 1959, tied managerial premia to fulfilment of the cost indices and economies in the wage fund which further affected managerial earnings. Management position in the enterprises was affected by increase in workers' and unions' rights.<sup>104</sup>

Although some of the theorists supported Khrushchev in his de-Stalinisation programme and economic revival, they reacted sharply to his half-hearted de-Stalinisation and some of his 'rightist' economic policies. Isaac Deutscher writes, "de-Stalinisation was half-hearted, inconsistent, incoherent and therefore unsatisfactory... Khrushchevism did not reject the big Stalinist lie in favour of truth, it sought to replace it by a set of half-truths only. This led inevitably to much cynicism, hate and dangerous disillusionment, without offering the youth, young intelligentsia and workers any positive idea or any positive political method capable of filling the vacuum left by the destruction of idols and taboos."<sup>105</sup> He further adds, "there has been widespread discontent with the sluggishness of farming, with bureaucratic rigidity and chaos in some sectors of industry, and above all with the lack of resembling anything like workers' control or workers' participation in the management. All this resulted in the persistent gulf between the ruler and the ruled, for the workers and lower grades of intelligentsia feel that they are deprived of their rights and that all that matters in social and political life is

settled in an arbitrary way by the people at the top."<sup>106</sup>

Although Deutscher did not agree with the proposition that there was a tendency to restore capitalism in Soviet union, but he maintained that a, "new groundswell of a peculiar kind of reaction and conservatism is unmistakable."<sup>107</sup> Another economist commenting upon the centrally planned economies made a reference about U.S.S.R. of Khrushchev and Brezhnev period that "Soviet reforms began in 1957 when Khrushchev abolished most of the industrial ministries and established regional councils to which the individual enterprises were subordinate. It was believed that the councils would be more responsive to local needs, but the organisation replicated the centralised system on regional basis. Khrushchev successor eliminated these regional councils in 1965, on the ground that they created unnecessary duplication, and introduced a new reform based on the idea of economist Yevsei Liberman. This re-instated the industrial ministries but gave more decision making power to the managers of the enterprises and increased the role of profit as a criterion for allocating resources and bonuses as an incentive for production."<sup>108</sup>

Evidence suggests that during Khrushchev and Brezhnev period unions got a considerable influence in the various party fora as is evident from the increasing number of central committee members and politburo from AUCCTU. Grishin's successor, Aleksander N. Shelepin was the first AUCCTU Chairman to hold full membership of Politburo in thirty eight



years. On the one hand the unions at highest level were gaining influence in the party but at the local level they seemed not working in favour of rank and file. In April, 1966 Chairman Grishin noted, "that union officials do not always fulfil their responsibility and pressed union organisations to act more effectively on behalf of workers."<sup>109</sup>

The half-hearted de-Stalinisation of Khrushchev era and consequently re-assertion of crypto Stalinist elements in Brezhnev period, economic assertion of party apparatus and bureaucratic assertion of middle level union organisation led to the disillusionment of rank and file during 1960's and 1970's. All this led to the sporadic workers discontent and sometimes open revolt against authorities in 1960's and in early seventies. "A wave of particularly acute workers struggle began in a number of towns across the country, which at times assumed the character of open revolt."<sup>110</sup>

In Temir-Tau (Kazakhstan) in the autumn of 1959 a serious workers' struggle took place. Workers were dissatisfied with their extraordinarily bad living conditions and low wages. In Aleksandrov (Valadimir oblast) open confrontation of workers with militia in 1969, people's revolt against 'Fascist drunkards' militia in Dneprodzerzhinsk (Ukraine SSR) in the summer 1962, spontaneous protest enmass against the election of a worthless individual to the position of power in 1962 in Odessa, workers uprising in Novocherkarsk against the nationwide

doubling of price of meat and dairy products in 1962, coupled with a 30% reduction in the rates of pay at the electric locomotive manufacture plant in the said town. It was reported that for three days the town was virtually under workers' control. Another event which is extremely important is the naval sailors mutiny on a cruiser, the flagship of the pacific fleet. So in the Soviet union unlike old Russia, there were no broad strata who were likely to support the regime in times of crisis.<sup>111</sup> In October 1968 at AUCCTU Meeting, secretary N.N. Romanov reported that approximately 60% of all dismissals by the management throughout the entire Soviet union took place without trade unions' approval, and the figure for Uzbekistan (77.4 percent) Georgia (73.4 percent) and the Altai Region (69%) were even higher.<sup>112</sup>

In 1970's attempts were made for the formation of independent trade unions. In 1978 Vladimir Klebnov, the prime mover in the formation of an independent workers organization — the free trade union associations — invited a major crack down on dissidents with an increase in the number of arrest and trials. Klabnov who was a miner asserted that 12-15 workers died every year at Bazhanova where he had worked because, output targets were unrealistically high; men often had to dig coal twelve hours a day instead of the normal six. Injuries under such conditions made 600-700 men a year idle. Miners had to work in high temperature. In the mines of Donestk oblast only 7 out of the 15 permanent cooling plants were functioning and many mobile

air-conditioners were out of action.<sup>113</sup> A year later in 1979 a similar group — The Free Interprofessional Association of Workers (SMOT) met similar fate. So what Khrushchev and Brezhnev sought in their own way, was to end the excesses of Stalinism without dismantling the system that gave rise to them. To do so they were willing to pay off blue collar workers with more money as long as greater income did not mean greater power.<sup>114</sup>

In the last part of Brezhnev era (1979-82) the industrial production was only increasing at the rate of 2-3 percent per year. There were enormous problems with energy, coal, transportation. Agriculture production began to decline. In 1979 the gross agriculture products were less than in 1978, and decreased in 1980 as well. 1981 was an especially poor year; figures on grain were not even published. In 1982 harvest was bad. The amount of food purchases from abroad increased and food and supply at home took a sharp turn for worse, the sale of meat and dairy products were going for special curtailments. In the majority of industrial centres some rationing had to be introduced. The free market, which sold food at higher prices, assumed larger proportions.<sup>115</sup> Andropov who took over after Brezhnev initiated a campaign to improve labour discipline, he rooted out some inefficient administrator and opposed corrupting influences, sacked many incompetent people holding government posts. He outlined reforms of educational system, later pushed through in 1984

by Chernenko.<sup>116</sup> But at the same time he continued the policy of crushing the dissidents ruthlessly as it was prevalent in the last phase of Brezhnev era.

Chernenko put forward a more open democratic party organisation and increased public participation in the Soviets. Greater attention was to be paid to public opinion, with larger role given to trade unions in management. He wanted more decentralisation and opposed distortion associated with personality cult.<sup>117</sup> With the demise of Chernenko a new leader of post revolution era stepped in office with innumerable ideas of reforming Soviet society, polity and economy with greater vigor and energy, which led to the dramatic events to follow that unfolded the drama later on.

### **Soviet Trade Unions (1917-1985): An Overview**

Soviet trade unions were vertically organised on the basis of trade and industry on Leninist principle of democratic centralism, along with administrative structure of Soviet government. There remained little room for horizontal contacts between different trade unions as the lower bodies were strictly subordinated to higher bodies. At plant or factory level the factory committees which included all employees of factory (blue color and white color) were chief spokesmen of worker's interests, and elected directly by the assembly of workers through open ballot. If factory employed large number of employees the 'shop'

committees and 'floor' committees could be formed but strictly under factory committee. Although theoretically, the membership of trade unions was voluntary and non-capitalist worker's organisations could be formed, but practically it was not possible because of intolerance of unofficial organizations by the regime, and benefits (like insurance, holiday homes, bonuses, training, schooling and kindergarten for workers children, factory farms, pensions) distributed and associated with the membership of officially recognised trade unions. The Directors of industries were appointed by higher administrative bodies in consultation with troika i.e. factory committee, local party committee and management of industry. The factory committees were always vulnerable to local party committee as it could influence the opinion of factory committee via its members operating in party 'fractions' and 'cells' among workers.

Collective agreements were the hallmark of workers bargain with management for production quotas, structure of wages, gradation of job (with which pay was tied, as is noticed that persons with same skill were graded differently in different trades which gave rise to the wage differentiation within a grade itself) piece rates, bonuses and incentives. Though, the collective agreements were suspended at the height of Stalinist era.

For the resolution of Labour disputes between a factory committee and management, and between individual worker and the latter, RKK (Rates and Conflict Commission) were elected with equal number of its members by factory committee and management, till 1957 when Khrushchev replaced them with Labour Dispute Commission. If any involved party in a conflict did not agree to the decision of RKK, it could go to the court. The planned nature of economy decided production target and wage proportions centrally, which left little room for maneuverability either of production targets by management or for wages and conditions of work by the local unions. As the targets were unrealistically high, the managers (who were solely responsible for the fulfilment of production quota) tried to hoard reserve labour (which was possible in low wage economy) to fulfil targets. There grew a complicity between labour unions, workers and management because workers could avoid harsh discipline, labour unions could avoid criticism of higher bodies and of course, management fulfil its production targets.

The productionist approach of Soviet plan overloaded the plants which gave rise to three shift system; leaving little time for repair of wear and tear for which no body was responsible which gave rise to disputes (about 90% disputes were of such nature). Disputes also arose due to the pressure of fulfilment of plan targets. It is these disputes which were the bone of contention between individual workers and management. The disputes between labour unions and management were over jurisdiction.

The unions played passive role or distanced themselves in majority of cases of disputes between worker and management and developed a tendency for settlement of the cases by courts. In doing so unions distanced themselves from the rank and file, because they were also the attestee of production plans and labour laws. The short supply of raw material and spare parts gave opportunity to make shoddy deals between different plant managers and agencies of market which gave rise to corruption in an alarming manner. This complicity between local labour unions, workers and management never allowed any central labour law to be implemented in its full scope, if these laws were not in their common interest. The unrealistically high production targets resulted in conflicts between labour and management. The management resorted to dismissal of workers illegally, allowing them less holidays, confiscating bonuses and deducting pay over indiscipline etc. The whole concept of discipline was production oriented.

The emphasis of building heavy industry in scarce material resources led to the neglect of small consumer goods industry which created almost always the shortage of consumer goods in the market, giving rise to the black market operations. From the 1930's to the end of cold war, pressure of military build up against NATO allies, and economic conception of development (catch with west, surpassing west, development of productive forces etc.) led to a thrust towards building armaments and heavy industry and their (heavy and arms industry)

establishment found much significance in the overall structure of Soviet establishment and consequently influenced the whole pattern of Soviet development till the end of Soviet state itself. The pressure on production and productivity in short supply economy led to the bourgeoisie methods of management i.e. one man management, piece rates, incentives, bonus and greater wage differentiations. These measures even if they did not strengthen the class inequalities led, at least, to maintain them, resulting in giving a kind of authority structure in the society. This gave a sense of alienation to the working class, and a dormant kind of legitimacy to the regime. The fear of illegitimacy from the very outset of Soviet state led it to acquire a monolithic character and a sense of disbelief in its very constituents. It led them to have their separate ways under the subaltern nature of consciousness of workers which established a relationship of master and servant.

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that the establishment of a socialist society called for a proper understanding of the importance of continued class struggle in the phase of transition from Capitalism to Socialism. The experience of building socialism of a more formal type in the erstwhile Soviet union has only highlighted the problems that beset the path of transition.



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## **CHAPTER-II**

### **PERESTROIKA AND TRADE UNIONS**

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Brezhnev maintained a stable compromise between factions within apparatus while simultaneously raising people's standard of living. It was necessary to guarantee significant and consistent economic growth so that each social group could increase its share of cake without affecting the interests of others, and to a certain degree this objective was achieved. From mid 60's to late 70's workers' income grew rapidly and their way of life changed.

With the beginning of 1980's the contradictions and errors of political regime and economic mismanagement which had been concealed over many years began to drift to the surface and opinion had formed among the most varied strata of society that Brezhnevism had exhausted itself. An inconsistent modernization of the way of life had generated new demands and in the end, new dissatisfaction. People's felt themselves (as younger generation came in) more independent and demanded respect for their civil and human dignity.

The so-called dissidents never proposed a programme of social transformation. They advanced the abstract programme of human rights and defence of the freedom and dignity of the individual which divorced them from the real problems of the masses. As a result the dissidents pinned their hope more and more on diplomatic pressure from without. Academician Andrei Sakharov, who initially favoured socialism with 'human face', had little by little, adopted a liberal standpoint and many

of his statements ( on Vietnam and detente) were utilized by American hawks in their efforts to strengthen their position morally. "The most surprising thing is that the dissident movement, though, in desperate need of detente, practically never recognized this fact. Many in the dissident milieu welcome the coming to power in the west of such figures as Margret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan as a sign that "at long last a decisive stand had triumphed in the free world".<sup>1</sup> In late Brezhnev period workers in the government apparatus were genuinely interested in definite changes, but at the same time, were afraid of punitive measures likely to be taken against them. The industrial management apparatus was dissatisfied with departmental bureaucracy at the center but, at the same time, was tied to it by indissoluble bonds. The relations between the 'Captains of industry' and the local party apparatus were shaped in a similar manner. In the opinion of the left this limited the reformist potential of the technocracy, even in the implementation of a moderate technocratic project. Successful changes could only be begun on initiative from the above, but could only be completed by a mass movement from below.<sup>2</sup> By the beginning of the 80's such ideas were being developed in the pages of three Samizat journals - Varienty (Alternatives), Poiski (Searches) and Levyi Povorot (Left turn).

Because of the crisis in the dissident movement and the weakness of the left, official reformism remained only the real alternative to Brezhnevism. The reformist experts were mainly clustered around

research institutes in Moscow, Novosibirsk and Leningrad. The mouthpiece of Reformist EKO under the editorship of Abel Aganbegyan and Tatiana Zaslavsky attempted to combine scientific profoundly with popularity of exposition. Although, reformist current had numerous supporter in the most varied strata of society, but it could not count on the support of any broad social group.

Paradoxically, what the left saw as the greatest failing of the liberal experts' project - Namely, its vagueness and lack of direction - assisted the formation of a broad and diverse coalition of supporters of change.<sup>3</sup> Everyone desired renewal, the problem was that its meaning was not uniformly understood.

In Andropov's time a resolute struggle was launched against corruption, which had become virtually a way of life for Brezhnev elite. Some activists of left groups who had been arrested in 1982 were released and their places in Lefortovo prison taken by embezzlers and bribetakers. But Breznev's supporters, in practice, killed off any reformist project started by Andropov like educational reforms.

The death of Chernenko and the selection of Mikhail Gorbachev as general secretary in spring 1985 brought an end to the protracted interregnum.

## Conditions of U.S.S.R. Economy in 1985

The data in the table below suggest that the Soviet growth rate picked up in the mid 1960's but then continue to decline, particularly from the mid 1970's, the Soviet economy shifted into a less desirable, lower productivity growth path. These figures says American economist Edward H. Hewitt, that troubled the Soviet Leadership more than any thing else.<sup>4</sup>

As the Soviet economy was forced to adjust to slower economic growth rates, internal tensions over resource allocation. Hewitt's study indicates that during the 1970's the main burden of the growth slowed down on investment and defence spending rather than consumption. Of course, consumption growth slowed alongside the general downturn in output growth, but for the investment the change was more dramatic. In the first half of the 1970's per capita real income grew each year on average by 4.4% and investment by 7.7% in the second part of the decade both increased by 3.3% per annum, as a result there had to be a much steeper cut for investment than for consumption. But in the early 1980's things began to get much tighter for the consumers. In the first half of the decade investment growth accelerated slightly to 3.5% per annum while consumption growth fell back to 2.1%. As to defence, the data is patchy but the CIA view, again reported by Hewitt, is that upto 1976 spending grew roughly on par with output at 4% per annum. Beyond that date it

slowed to around 2% per annum. Whatever the precise figures there is little doubt that all sectors were being squeezed by the deterioration in economic performance from 1975 to 1985.

**Table-I**  
**Soviet Growth And Productivity**

Annual Average % growth Rates

Year →	1961-65	1966-70	1971-75	1976-80	1981-85
Output	6.5	7.8	5.7	4.4	3.5
Labour productivity	5.5	6.8	4.6	3.3	3.1

Source: E.A. Hewitt, *Reforming the Soviet Economy; Equality versus efficiency*. (The Brookings Institutions, Washington DC, 1988), p.52.

**Table-II**  
**Things Get Tighter-The Economic Squeez**

Average Annual % Growth Rates

Year →	1971-75	1976-80	1981-85
Output	5.7	4.4	3.5
Consumption (Real Income per Capita)	4.4	3.3	2.1
Investment	7.0	3.3	3.5
Defence Spendings	4.0	2.0	2.0

Note: Defence Data from CIA, Source Hewitt.

When Mikhail Gorbachov came to power in March 1985 he was faced with two immense and interrelated tasks: how to reinvigorate the

economy and how to give the people a sense of direction for the future. For this purpose he initiated many measures, which confronted him with multitude of but few answers.

### **Trade Unions During First phase of Prestroika**

It was a usual practice in the Wrestrhile Soviet Union that after the death of a big leader some new policy changes were expected. As Roy Medvedev observed, "while the speeches at funerals stress continuity, most of the population's first thought will be of the changes in the society and the government ushered in by a change of ruler."<sup>5</sup> In the first phase of Prestroika Gorbachev made his intentions clear for the restructuring of the economy and the democratization of polity which was necessary ingredient for the success of reforms. By the time of 27th Congress of CPSU in Feb. 1986 Gorbachev made necessary changes in the leadership of Central Committee of CPSU and Politbureau to make his plan of reforms a success. The 'veterans' of Breznev era, "Romanov, Tikhonov and Girishin were to give up their post. But at the regional level it was more difficult to do so as it happened with the Kozakh Party leader Kunaev, whose fall led to disorder in Alma-Ata in Dec. 1986. It was done not to end the clientelism of Brezhnev period. It was more a manifestation of underlying currents within the CPSU. The appointment of Murakhovsky as first Deputy Prime Minister by jumping over three or four other persons, was one such manifestation.

Razumovsky the new head of organization department, incharge of cadres, was an old ally of Gorbachev, new interior minister and Yakovlev new head of the propaganda department of Central Committee of CPSU was appointed because of his personal friendship with Gorbachev. The Gorbachev faction was undoubtedly triumphant at the 27th Party Congress where it consolidated its success by electing a new central committee and the idea of economic transformation and democratization was reinforced, at least in general formulations. Thus the "period of prestroika which lasted from the spring of 1985 to the spring of 1986, can be called a time of struggle within the apparatus."<sup>6</sup> In June 1986 three new politbureau members were co-opted by new leadership namely Slyunkov, Yakovlev and Nikonov, all belonging to the group of Gorbachev.

In the first phase of prestroika Gorbachev tried to mobilise workers around his project of economic reforms via democratizing the party and the new party programme. In the 27th Party Congress Gorbachev highlighted the continued importance of the working class for the acceleration of the economy. He said "we count on the support of working class because the party's policy is their policy."<sup>7</sup> Further, with a view to mobilizing working class against bureaucracy he said at the Trade Union Congress in February 1987, "either democratization or social inertia and conservatism. There is no third way."<sup>8</sup> Underlying the importance of working masses for reforms programme, Gorbachev

addressing the Hungarian workers said, "we see the key to success in the vital work of the masses and into broadest development of their initiative. This cannot be achieved without further development of socialist democracy, which offers the working people a real leading role, the role of true masters of production, society and the state."<sup>9</sup> But despite the repeated call by leadership and enacting law to separate the state and government from the party and laying greater emphasis on party organizations to work according to their defined respective roles the old Trade Unions continue to align with management and discouraged any move of working people uniting from below. Trade union apparatus adopted the wait and watch policy till the emergence of new movement of working people in the second half of prestroika. It is because of their fear of being marginalised that the trade unions perhaps opposed the new law on labour collectives.<sup>10</sup> Commenting upon the mood of workers David Mandel said that, "dissatisfaction with existing system is today no less strong than in the rest of the population. If workers have so far shown no particular enthusiasm for reforms, it is not because they oppose change. It is rather that they have doubt in the nature of change that is being offered to them."<sup>11</sup>

For further understanding the dialectics of workers response to concrete proposals of restructuring and their impact on workers in the factories it is necessary to look at the concrete proposals for reforms. The logic of the market reforms was to place the enterprise under to place



enterprise under a 'cost-accounting regime' (Khozraschet), doing away for the most part with obligatory plan targets, and giving them broad autonomy to pursue profit within a regulated market context. The state would continue to plan the economy but through indirect methods i.e. through control and manipulation of such economic levers as prices, credit, taxation and competitive state contracts.

This reform ended job security, since layoffs and bankruptcies become possible. It also put an end to wage guarantees, since wages were to depend much more than before on the actual performance of the enterprise, as measured by profit, i.e. what is left from sales after various payments have been made. The reform provided for two methods of calculating wages, one more radical than other (radical was officially preferred but rarely applied).

- a) Basic wages were paid as part of fixed costs according to state norms and so were guaranteed. But bonuses and premiums were paid out of profits, after other financial obligations had been met, and thus depended upon enterprise performance.
- b) No part of the wage was guaranteed. Wages were paid out of what was left after meeting other financial obligations. In this case, the entire wage depended upon enterprise performance as measured by profits.<sup>12</sup>

The goal of reforms as often stated was to increase wage differentiation in order to enhance the incentive role of the wages. For this end, reduction of the social wage in incomes would follow which was to be carried by price reform, the reduction or elimination of subsidies and the establishment of user fees for services that were free. 'Levelling' stood officially condemned as economically inefficient and socially unjust. It was claimed that egalitarianism contradicts the 'Socialist-principle of distribution according to labour'.<sup>13</sup>

The reforms thus aimed at tightening things at the shop floor level. The goal was to create a common motivation among managers and workers to discover and release productive reserves, to increase individual and enterprise efficiency. In Gorbachev's words, "The well-being of workers will depend upon the abilities of the managers. The workers should, therefore, have real means of influencing the choice of director and controlling his activity."<sup>14</sup>

To achieve the above mentioned goal, in spirit of general democratization of social life, the enterprise democracy provided by the U.S.S.R. Law on the State Enterprises' (Association) with its two main features (a) The election of the managerial personnel by workers, (b) and the empowerment of workers' collective councils to participate in management decisions and in monitoring their execution.

The elected management was to express the interests of the state and the labour collective that of workers; but the law did not explain what

would happen when the interests of the state and the labour collective came into conflict. Similarly, the director was elected by the collective but he had to be confirmed by a higher agency, which could force a new election if it did not like the winner.

At this stage the role of trade unions in defence of workers rights came under scrutiny. The call to revive trade union democracy and to restore the union functions as defenders of workers' interests appeared as strikingly incongruous element. This call was given by AUCCTU Chairman Shalaeve at the trade union Congress in February 1987. This also became the central theme of trade union organ 'Trud'. The provision for self-management and elected managers, whose aim was to overcome alienation and foster a real sense of ownership, was meant to obviate the need of trade unions. Even if conflict arose between labour and management, certainly the trade unions could be no more effective in resolving them than labour collective councils, which after all were to be elected by same people and were supposed to possess broader powers.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Impact of Reforms in the Factories**

The initial enthusiasm for the election of managerial personnel by workers waned very early. Where workers looked to elections as a means of changing things, they only too often had their hope dashed. The head of the department of ideological work of the Party Institute of Social Sciences concluded, "The participation of workers in the management still remains a wish, a goal, rather than reality. Only 14% of those

surveyed felt themselves the master at work, 39% thought there was no owner (in the sense for the responsibility of the fate of enterprise). The attitude comprises 'wait and see' policy".

David Mandel citing the 'Trud' of 8 July, 1988 noted that the trade unions, had not responded to calls for change: in conflict between workers and management not to speak of the conflict between workers' interests and that of state, they solidly remained behind the latter. A survey conducted by central trade union council found that only one or two workers out of every hundred would turn to their trade unions in disputes involving wages.<sup>16</sup>

A worker from Kharkov province wrote in 'Trud', "It is no secret to anyone that trade unions do not always take the side of workers. That may not be tragic if it is a minor issue and not one of principles. But when management takes revenge against a worker for criticism, and the trade union is either silent, or worse, supports the administration?"<sup>17</sup>

According to published reports, Prestroika failed to create in the workers a sense of ownership. Not only it had not reduced their alienation from enterprise management, it appeared to be intensifying their attitude of opposition, a sense of 'us against them'. It did this by breaking down the old basis of collusion under the "command economy" without creating new basis for economically healthy worker-management cooperation.

David Mandel opined, "On circumstances of intensifying opposition and conflict between workers' and management, neither the political leadership nor the enterprise management can really be interested in facilitating independent workers' organizations. Such organization could sabotage the reform, and perhaps even threaten political stability. In private, Soviet social scientists often advocate a firm hand, if not cavaignac, to push through the reforms or else they emphasis the need for a 'responsible democracy' as opposed to what the people, 'unfortunately' want a 'democracy of desires'.<sup>18</sup>

At the June 1988 Party Conference, convened to discuss democratic reforms, the only speaker even to mention Trade Unions was the Chairman of Central Council of Trade Unions. The theses published in preparation for the conference said nothing about the popular collective councils, which were officially intended as a form of democracy on the enterprise level.

Thus at the end of the first phase of prestroika, workers even after the introduction of 'Glasnost' or democratic reforms like 1987 law of State enterprises in which election of directors of state enterprises by workers, legal guarantee against the abuse of power of officials, introduction of real secret ballot and multiple member constituency, nomination of candidates from below and independent individual and collective initiative in economic and social life, bore no significant change in the life of workers and power relationship at the work place.

Management apparatus and trade union aristocracy almost strictly adhered to their earlier positions for different reasons. There was much less idealism and enthusiasm among workers who often took a detached and cynical attitude towards authority."<sup>19</sup> Patrick Flaherty said, "bettle lines has been drawn within Soviet power elite. The conservatives are supported by established elite strata whose authority is grounded in basic industries and the directive administrative apparatus, the reformers represents younger professional power elite strata who are bent on overturning the power equilibrium in their favour with catchy economic and political reforms in which workers had little faith, looking for new ways and means to defend their rights."<sup>20</sup>

### **The Second Phase of Perestroika: Its Failure**

If the first phase of perestroika was marked by the introduction of certain political and economic reforms, invoking enthusiasm among intelligentsia and liberals but certainly not among workers, its second phase ended in utter failure and consequently the division within the liberal political apparatus and politics of rhetoric. It is necessary to analyse its effect on workers in general and Trade Unions in particular.

The first trouble point in the second phase was the implementation of wage reforms and review of skill classification. The wage reform was supposed to be carried out in close consultation with the workers. The skill classification according to government instructions was to take place in two stages. In the first stage, a commission of workers

and management representatives was established. For the classification of skills this commission was to go into the case of each worker individually in close consultation with his or her other brigade members, brigade leaders and departmental head. Only in this way a preliminary evaluation about the skill of a worker was to be made. In the second stage, the worker was invited before the commission and informed of his or her classification in accordance with the new unified skill-rate handbook. If the proposal has a demotion, it was subject to an explanation and the worker was provided with the opportunity to defend, through testing his or her skill level. The wage reforms were also to be introduced gradually, as the enterprise assembled the conditions and the means necessary, in particular those required for raising the basic wage rates, which were to constitute the major part of the total wage, as the share of bonuses and other supplementary payments were declining significantly.<sup>21</sup>

But managers in a hurry to show results, often resorted to old trusted methods. A group of workers at Simsk assembly factory complained to 'Trud', against the manner in which management had recently introduced the reforms. The director called the meeting of the workers, but not to discuss ways of raising productivity and economising on labour, but to get formal approval for the change that had already been decided without the workers' participation'. In fact, the director announced an across the board 20% reduction of bonuses and demotion of all the workers to lower skill grades.<sup>22</sup> The vice director of the

department of industrial production and wages of the central trade-union council admitted that in many cases the procedure of reclassification of workers' skill was brutality violated. He said, "the first stage is totally omitted, and the affair begins with an order that the worker is told to sign. This is in total contradiction with the process of democratization of the entire life of our society".<sup>23</sup> A Lavina further observed, "to make the matter worse, this arbitrary and authoritarian approach is after all accompanied by unconcealed discrimination against women. At some factories workers were told to look for work elsewhere if they did not agree with the demotion."<sup>24</sup>

In workers' letters to media and other state organs they often complained, "that the management sought 'malicious joy', 'Why such humiliation' 'they insulted us' etc. "Does the administration really think', concludes the letter, "that it can pass off this force as a restructuring? "Is this what prestroika consist off?" The whole factory is buzzing: so this is the prestroika".<sup>25</sup>

Thus the introduction of the 'Cost accounting regime' designed to restore the 'socially just principle' of 'Payment according to labour', had led to the decline in wages of those workers who were not possessing very high skill. In such situations the labour collectives and trade union councils often condemned the strike and threatened to disband the brigade, or individual workers if strike was to be repeated. They would



often exclude some members from trade unions, this meant, among other things, loss of important social benefits, associated with the membership of trade unions.

The overtime (regulated by law) was often illegal to boot and became an another major source of open conflict in December, 1987, the workers of the Yaroslavl' Motor Factory struck for seven days for reducing the work schedule for Black Saturdays from 15 to 8. There was fierce struggle between management and workers, the labour collective council chaired by director himself ratified the schedule passed by management and so did the Trade Union committee without comment. A poll conducted by 'Izvestia' after the incident, 69% of workers respondent approved the Yaroslavl workers' refusal to work on 'black Saturdays'. All felt that the cause of strike was dissatisfaction with the organisation of labour, irregular character of production, the poor quality of materials and of the goods produced as a result thereof.<sup>26</sup> This strike showed forcefully that workers held management at all levels responsible for poor state of economy.

The management was not prepared to give workers any real say in running things. Workers, therefore, saw 'self-management as a trap to get them to take responsibility for failures of management and of the economic system as a whole.

Another important point of conflict was the delayed payment of wages. At Perm Motor factory the workers struck over delayed payment

of wages. The director was also the chairman of labour collective council. When he asked the workers that strike would reduce wages and that they (workers) had their own elected council, a turner replied simply that the "workers do not believe in that council."<sup>27</sup>

So what political leaders, managers, economists and journalists portrayed as legitimate attempts to eradicate the injustices of the preceding era, workers viewed it as unilateral abrogation by management longstanding arrangements regulating their mutual relations. The new arrangements often amounted to a deterioration of their immediate situation, and workers had little confidence that they might benefit from them at some later stage. In any case, it appeared to them that they were being asked to bear all the sacrifices. Faced with this, workers in their turn, were abandoning their tolerant attitude towards managerial shortcomings and the widespread failure to observe legal norms. They were encouraged in this by liberalization and democratization. As a result, conditions and practices which workers once grudgingly accepted were also becoming object of open conflict.<sup>28</sup>

This is quite a different understanding of the situation from that which one usually gets from social scientists, managers and journalists, who laid a good share of, if not all, the blame on the workers' indolence, indiscipline and corruption.

A new law on enterprises was enacted in 1990 which reneged considerably on the powers given to the labour collectives in 1987 law.

Managerial personnel except for Brigade leaders were no longer to be elected by the collective, the ultimate authority in the enterprise was to pass to a new enterprise council based on parity representation between managers and workers. If the 1987 law was inspired by radical Yugoslav self-management notions, the 1990 law was clearly based on the more tepid example of west German co-determination. When this was informed to Yaroslavel workers' by Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, visiting soviet factories at that time, there was uproar among the workers. The main reaction was that this was proof of how the system at the centre, despite new parliamentary institutions, remained undemocratic, the same bureaucratic system that delivered decisions from above without popular involvement.<sup>29</sup>

In this situation when there was irregular supply of raw material, no market or plan (because planing had been abandoned in traditional sense) mechanism existed to determine the prices of the goods and services, there was no effective coordination between buyers and sellers, and scarcity of consumer goods played havoc with the life of ordinary Soviet citizens in 1990-91. A new middleman namely 'Mafia' came into being which comprised, in the popular perception, a growing fusion of the bureaucracy, especially the economic administrator with the 'affairistes' of private sector.<sup>30</sup> The term most often refers to two principal kinds of related activities. The creation and maintenance of shortages by monopoly structures, and the illicit transfer of state resources and funds

into private hands. Both involves the collusion of administrators of the state sector with the 'shadow' economy, itself often indistinguishable from the legitimate private sector.

Besides economic gains, the shortages also played a very useful political role (in such situations) for those interested in maintaining popular quiescence. People were so pre-occupied with their material struggle for survival that they had little time or energy for sustained political struggle. This is not to say that shortages were the result of conspiracy, though in some cases this hypothesis should not be dismissed. Because, as and when political tensions rose dangerously, the scarce goods were suddenly "thrown out" in the market.<sup>31</sup>

As the shortages grew more serious, the practice of selling 'defitist' directly in the enterprises had expanded. This was a common and quite effective tool in the hands of administration for reinforcing the workers' dependence. A worker who spoke against management might miss out. At the sametime there were never enough goods around, and the squabbling who was to receive what could seriously undermine solidarity within the collective. This practice had also a deeply corrupting influence on workers as they resold those scarce goods at a large profit in open market.

Leonid Sukhov, a taxi driver from Kharkov and member of the U.S.S.R. Parliament, expressed a widespread view when he suggested that 'someone' is consciously creating a desperate situation with the aim

of preparing the workers psychologically to accept any reform, including the market.<sup>32</sup> The "Democrats" argued that they lacked real power to change the situation. And, while there was much truth to this claim, they had done little to mobilise the population in order to change the correlation of forces. There was general reluctance on the part of "liberals" stemming from their ideological orientations as well as from more concrete political consideration, to apply 'administrative' methods - the only one that could be effective against 'Monopoly' - to rein in the "Mafia". As Vasily Leontieff has argued, Today's Mafia is tomorrow's class of "civilized" capitalists.

Direct robbery of the consumers was only one source of "Mafia" profits. Parallel to this, was theft from state in the form of Pocket Cooperatives,<sup>33</sup> and joint ventures set up by enterprise management for the illicit sale abroad or to the private sector, the raw materials and semi-manufactured goods.

Sub-contracting work to cooperatives was a common way of turning non-cash credits into cash. The transactions between state enterprise and cooperatives, (which were non-state enterprises), cash was paid out of the account of state enterprise by bank, allowing the state managers to receive kickbacks or salaries as member or employee of the cooperative. There were also fortunes to be made in foreign dealings. Most of the Moscow, "joint ventures" construction companies were too busy in importing and selling computers. As a Minister in the Latvian

government put it "Cooperative and joint ventures are often oriented not towards the production of consumer goods but, towards their redistribution. From the state's pockets to their own. That is, if we are to call things by their name, they are involved in speculation on a very large scale.<sup>34</sup>

Party apparatus was using its connections and illegally accumulated wealth to go into business. For example in Leningrad, the once mighty regional party apparatus had been reduced to 37 people. But they kept busy renting out offices to cooperatives, private banks and Foreign companies, even in Smolnyi Institute, an historic landmark and prime piece of real estate that rightfully belongs to people. They have also turned one of the committee's hotels into a joint venture.<sup>35</sup>

In December 1990, 3 members of District Soviet in Moscow publically accused its chairman, Ilya Zaslavaski, of "organizing monopoly structures, as similar to classic 'shadow' formations as two peas in a pod... Judge for yourself: The chairman of district soviet, Chairman of its executive Committee, and almost all his deputies, having become heads of district political structures, are at the same time directors of cooperatives, commercial banks and firms.<sup>36</sup>

### **Role of Official Trade Unions**

The official trade unions in U.S.S.R. were always directly enmeshed in ruling apparatus. Their leadership was secondary, but by

no means entirely powerless element in the bureaucracy. They were conveyor belts downward to the workers of party, ministerial and managerial decisions, recruiting station for those who showed the inclination and aptitude to rise in hierarchy; organizer of workers' passivity amidst ersatz display of mass support.

As Boris Kagarlistsy observed, "today, the central trade union apparatus, the AUCCTU is widely regarded as an 'empty shell' and workers perceived it harmless and irrelevant". The central apparatus had lost considerable power to Locals i.e. new independent workers groups and unions to which we shall come in the next chapter. The national leadership knew that it must evolve a new role: "we are the first year students in how to act as trade unionist," Alexander Kashirin, President of the Central Committee of autoworkers union said. They were caught, in a pincer movement between their declining power in the party and vis-a-vis the government, on the one hand, and the local unions' assertion of their independence on the other. But central leadership had accepted market economy' in principle, saying "there was no alternative."<sup>37</sup> There is a confirmed report in western media that leadership of AUCCTU played an important role in the decision to hold a referendum on the price reforms. Most significantly the AUCCTU leadership only timidly opposed the new law on enterprises despite the fact that it considerably retracted the democratic powers that workers had formally been accorded in 1987

law. In very similar terms the deputy director in auto diesel enterprise at Yaroslavl said, "Collective Council in the enterprises are no longer needed."<sup>38</sup>

It was very clear that the official unions, at least at national level had defined their role in terms of alliance with the managers. The AUCCTU accepted in 1990 the law on strikes which went well beyond the Canadian labour legislation in restricting the right to strike. Kashirin told Leo Panitch that "we see strike as a measure of last resort, each strike hurts another part of working class".<sup>39</sup> But the abolition of industrial committee of Regional Party apparatus which was a locus of party control over union and enterprise paved the way for transition of unions at local and enterprise level.

In March 1988 the drivers at Saratov transport enterprises struck work for the non-payment of wages after introduction of wage reform and cost accounting. A party meeting placed the blame with management. The trade unions and party organizations, who in the past reconciled themselves to indiscipline and poor work and now failed to prepare the workers for the shift to cost accounting.<sup>40</sup> These and many instances quoted above clearly impress that during Prestroika(1986-91) the role of official trade unions was of alliance with Party and management and skepticism towards new workers' initiatives. In this period there remained no possibility for new real departure. It was only after the collapse of werstwhile soviet union in August 1991 the situation



changed dramatically. In the following pages, it is attempted to demonstrate that workers' remained alligned to one or anotgher faction of the CPSU.

At first when Gorbachev took over he and his allies were seen confident that they could use the regime crisis proactively to establish a hegemonic relationship between a streamlined state and insurgent strata of an elite generation frustrated with stylized politics and impatient for liberalization which would at last free them to flex their potential formidable political muscle. For this purpose Gorbachov never lost an opportunity to scold audiences of an obdurate administrative elite that his government would not shrink from 'revolutionary' reforms.

Reform proponents could marshal a battery of alarming data to demonstrate that Soviet economy is faltering dangerously within its present organisational parameters. An influential economist said that the average yearly combined growth rate of the accumulation and consumption funds had tumbled from 7.2 percent to 3.1 percent over the past two decades, and an immediate declining in living standards had been averted only by shifting capital from investment to consumption.<sup>41</sup>

One Soviet official complained that the value of yearly waste in a single metallurgical combine in his district was equivalent to three times the annual housing construction budget for the entire area, and only 4% of this scrap was recycled.

Despite this sort of economic citation (which were real) Gorbachov and his team started Glassnost with (earlier discussed) political measures, including reshuffling of CC of CPSU and politburo. Alexander Iakovlev started calling Soviet Society as 'developing' or 'Advancing socialism'. The crisis could well be seen as techno-economic professionals finding new ambitious place in society and politics by replacing or displacing the generalist with non-professional education who constitute about 25-30 per cent of Party apparatus.<sup>42</sup> The first point of struggle between political elite in economy when liberals encouraged the horizontal relationship between local enterprises marked a pivotal and probably decisive break through for the proponents of extended marketization within reform camp. The old Guard resisted enterprises being granted the right to choose their own suppliers and customers because without the planning at local level it could create panic at all level.

A. Lukianov who was the Gorbachov brainstrust in his earlier period parted with Gorbachev. Yeltsin's Vulture capitalism started making enroads into Russia. A recently promoted member to politbureau in 1985, Edward Sherardnedze refuse to speak on policies of general secretary. He said, "My Georgians do not see towards Moscow for help". So during the first twenty months of his new deal, Gorbachev deplored the sullen resistance his policies had encouraged, and transferred cadre from post to post. Then having realized more quickly the missing 'human

factor' he called upon Soviets to take part in life of their factories, local soviets, and last but not least - the party itself by participating in elections.<sup>43</sup> The conservative apparatus thrown its full weight of inertia against it by not acting at all. By the 27th Congress the old Brezhnevite sidelined by Gorbachev and his associated in CPSU. But in the subsequent years there existed two camps within reformists, and other small groups like "socialist party" and Marxist Platform'. In the election of local Soviets in summer 1987, among those who failed at elections were regional committee secretaries, Chairman of executive committees of Soviets and their deputies. 'Several' leading candidates made it into the Soviet with difficulty their fate being decided by a majority of one or two votes.<sup>44</sup>

After the January 1987 Plenum of Party, political situation was suitable for the left. It was able to attract a growing number of people to its rank. The swift growth of informal associations began back at the end of 1986. The club for social initiatives, (KSI) and Prestroika club in Moscow became center of attraction. The spasenie (Salvation), For post (out post) were another groups. By the summer 1987 it was already possible to speak of mass movement in which thousand of people taking part in various regions and country. In August 1987 (KSI) held a conference in Moscow of 52 leading progressive groups and founded a 'Federation of Socialist Social Clubs (FSOK). It declared in favour of socialist pluralism, self-management of production, and the

democratization of planning. They also demanded the abolition of censorship and rights of clubs to stand their own candidate in election. The club unanimously declared that reforms must be carried out without a drop in worker's living standards and must maintain social provisions for cheap accommodation, free medical care, full employment etc. The stress was laid on the dangers of triumphant technocracy and of a substitutes of market fetishism for plan fetishism.<sup>45</sup>

On October 31, 1987 Yeltsin was forced to resign by A.Lukyanov and his alliance partners. In turn several conservative minded officials saw a chance of counterattack, several of club officials and workers were forced to abandon their job. It became extremely complicated to engage in any activity on an official basis. Later in 1988 Yeltsin was restored by Gorbachov himself. The conservative group in the apparatus was seriously frightened by the growth of left activism after the events of August and November, 1987.

With this, many representatives of the 'New generation' of apparatchics... were inclined to consider the fundamental task of prestroika fulfilled and to regard with apprehension any 'experiment' which might threaten their hard won prosperity.<sup>46</sup> The technocratic ideologists had suggested methods which, under a Veneer of radicalism, were completely acceptable to bureaucracy and had also proposed the retention of traditional structure within the economic and political system of society. After the fall of Yeltsin the technocrats and Stalinist

began to act more often as a united front, propogandising for a rise in prices, and for the elimination of those figures who, in their opinion, were too far to the left and on whom they have pinned the label of 'Vanguardism'.<sup>47</sup> In January 1988 well known Soviet Economist V. seliunin wrote that two years of prestroika has revealed the bankruptcy of fundamental concepts of official economic science. Now structural shifts are required in the economy it is necessary to turn from work for its own sake to people and their needs.<sup>48</sup>

But there remained a situation of uncertainty in Soviet political climate the balance of power situation remained like pendulum between different factions of CPSU and some newly formed organizations. As the economy went deeper into the crisis different factions within ruling elite played political football, with agony of the people. As government announced a "500 days plan' for "Basic orientation for the stabilization of economy and transition to a market economy," both allowed all forms of property and neither make specific provision for self-management, let alone for ownership or control by the work collectives. The conference of work collective council in September 1990 demanded that they (workers' collective councils) should be the one to choose the appropriate form of property for their enterprises. They discussed two forms (1) They could become owner collectively without paying the state, or (2) they could decide that enterprise remain state property that would be managed by council.<sup>49</sup>

In this uncertain transitional phase political leaders of all hues tried to get the mass support by suggesting different methods of crisis resolution. In this case political leaders, economists and commentators felt the threat of populism when Yeltsin said his own path to market does not mean rising prices, he did not reveal how, yet the population believed him.

This was a right wing populism no matter what the political slogans. It seemed that right wing populism with big mass support, racketeers, mafia, in a single word the whole degenerated lot of liberal technocratic apparatus with right wing press and intelligentsia came together to guillotinised the whole of the society. In an interview with Yeltsin, following a cravan market line, 'The Moscow News' did not even ask to clarify how he could concievably introduce the market without rising prices and effecting real incomes. 'Moscow News' even published an artical making an absurd claim that there was no capital accumulation in Sweden.<sup>50</sup>

So the Coup and Counter Coup of August 1991 can be seen in terms of struggle between right wing populism which made millions of working people destitute in coming years and between those who wanted to keep the market brutalities under curbs.

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### **CHAPTER-III**

## **MINERS' STRIKE MOVEMENT OF 1989 AND 1991: Rise Of Independent Trade Unions And Their Politicization**

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The history of independent workers' organizations throughout the Soviet period was, until the emergence of Gorbachev, a history of systematic repression. Even the most hesitant efforts to create such organizations presented a fundamental challenge to the legitimacy of the party-state, both in challenging the claim of the party to represent the interests of the working class and in challenging the organizational principle of democratic-centralism.<sup>1</sup>

Despite severity of measures against such organizations the Soviet state could not stop the informal organizations of workers at the shop level or sometimes at enterprise level. These workers' organisations were tolerated at this level by management to secure the cooperation of labour for fulfilling plan targets. But they remained outside the managerial apparatus of the state. The extent of independent workers' organizations under the old regime was much greater than had hitherto been suspected.<sup>2</sup>

Gorbachev sought the workers' cooperation in Perestroika by introducing a law on enterprises in 1987 designed to promote self-management. This law activated the workers but its ambiguities created more conflict than cooperation between management and workers, former not ready to give any real power to the latter which gave rise to many conflicts in the economy. As Perestroika went down deeper,

the ruling class sought its enhanced status by cutting back workers' rights through a new law on enterprises in September 1990 which further intensified the conflict.

The major sources of industrial conflict between 1987 and 1991 were implementation of wage reforms by management (discussed earlier), imposition of wage cut with imposition of quality control, move to self financing, failure to implement 1987 law on enterprises, imposition of black Saturdays and management's right to control.

The leaders of first independent workers' organization were typical activists with a long record of opposition. Vladimir Klebnov's Association of free trade unions which dated back to the late 1950's in Mekeyevka mine in Donbass, reestablished in 1987, but concentrating on organizing and protecting victimized and dismissed workers, and the emigre-christian democratic (NTS) was reestablished in 1988, while the SMOT (the free interprofessional Association of Workers) re-emerged from underground with the release of its leader in 1987.<sup>3</sup>

The workers' organizations which developed from 1989 had a rather different base, many of their leading activists being people who had held office in the party or trade unions at primary level in the first years of Perestroika, seeking to mobilize grassroot support for Perestroika 'from below'. For the purpose we see the workers movement in different parts of U.S.S.R., like Sverdlovsk, Leningrad, Togliatti,

Donbass, Kuzbass, Yaroslavl etc.

In Sverdlovsk a workers' union 'Rabochii' was founded by Victor Burtnik at the Turbomoter factory in March, 1987 around the demand for workers' self management following a strike in Burtnik shop. This group with the effort of Boris Kagarlitsky spread to a number of other rural cities like Perm, Magnitogorsk, and Chelyabinsk. This group was under close police and KGB attention. Later Rabochi joined rural popular front on its formation in September 1988 which declared itself to be based on 'Leninist conception of Socialism — as the living creation of working masses themselves' and concentrated on helping independent workers' group. At the end of 1988 Rabochi separated from Front and established itself with representatives of 22 enterprises with the aim of accelerating the growth of workers' committees, developing the principles of self management, and raising the theoretical level of workers. Its newspaper 'Robocheye Slovo' gives the impression of organised mass movement publishing reports of organised strikes but in fact they were weak and lacked political direction. It focussed on building its base upwards.<sup>4</sup> This organization was alleged to have links with KGB but a study has denied these links, though a convergence of interests with the Party apparatus can not be ruled out.

In Leningrad, Anna A. Temkina, characterised the workers movement as protest movement.<sup>5</sup> She said, the beginning of the first

stage in the birth of labour movement is difficult to date, although it continued in to spring and summer 1989. In 1986-87 the struggle was carried out mainly by individuals who were unable to force a change in the situation when they fought the will of the administration. In 1987 cases of collective production conflicts occurred. On July 18, 1988 drivers of First Amalgamated Public Bus Service (LPO AT I) declared strike against lowering of the wages. Strikes were also called at several other enterprises, most notably at Zveda associations in Volodarsky Woodwork Factory over distribution of bonuses. In 1987-88 in Leningrad the first club types of workers' organization arose like 'Robochaya initsiativa', 'Democratizatsiya Profsoyuzov' club and 'L. Pavlov study group'.

'Robochaya initsiativa' announced its existence in October 1987 and its aims were described by its chairman V. Tyagushev, as "keeping people on their toes." It represented intercity club founded in 1987 at Moscow. In April 1989 it was dissolved with continuous attack on perestroika activists but its existence remained, as one of its activist, - G. Kravchenko, was elected as a deputy on the Leningrad Soviet in 1990.

The Democratizatsiya Profsoyuzov Club (KDP) was constituted in February 1989 with 30 active members and around 100 sympathizers. Its programme was to guarantee independence of trade unions from the state and their democratization, democratization of society, the

improvement of workers conditions and removal of anti-worker legislation - by organising various workers activities. The independent trade union 'spravedlivost' was formed on the basis of KDP.

The L.Pavlov study group "Social theory" discussed workers' problems and formulated the ideology of the future trade union 'Nezavisimost'.

Moreover, in 1987-88 (Free interprofessional trade unions) SMOT renewed its activities, in fact its activities goes back to 1978 when its leaders were arrested. L. Valkhonsky, A. Sokobov and V. Sytinsky worked for independent Leningrad trade unions which published the SMOT Bulletin. In later stage SMOT activities linked with those of TU 'osvobozhdeni' and the confederation of free trade unions. The management section of Prestroik club (already discussed) also had links with these organizations in Leningrad.

In 1987-88 campaign for workers' self-management in connection with passing the law on enterprises gave rise to several conflicts in which these clubs participated. In 1989 electoral campaigns there were open calls for independence of Trade unions and legislation for the right to strike.

The organising activities in the work place proved to be far more complex than 'on the streets'. Therefore, initiative for activity at the work place met with weak response. But the 'democratic movement' 'despite

demonstrating its support for workers' struggle at factory floor, did not usually go further than verbal support.<sup>6</sup> A new democratic government was established in Leningrad but, it like the democratic movement did not have strong ties with work collectives.

On June 11, 1989 a meeting of KDP took place, Robochoya initsiativa, the anarchist and other participated in it. IKAR leader L. Pavlov insisted that only workers should be on TU's, whereas KDP thought of its mixed composition excluding administration. After some time trade unions 'Nezavisimost' and 'Spravedliovost' establish themselves as independent trade unions.

As regards 'Nezansimost', only workers could be its members. It advanced the workers control over wages, over output and administration and finally workers self-management was its basic aim. It viewed its role in terms of working class struggle.

The 'Spravedlivost' had as its aim the struggle for more favourable conditions for the sale of labour power, improvement in working conditions and the abolition of disciplinary codes. It was oriented towards wide social base and everybody participated in it, apart from directors and other representative of administration.



In August 1989 a strike commission was formed, largely under influence of miners' strike. On 8 August 1989 democratic forces from the entire city for the first time gave special attention to the question of workers' position in society and in the factory.

On October 22, 1989 nine initiative groups signed a notice addressed to Leningrad workers announcing the foundation of 'Soyuz Robochikh Komitetov Leningrada'(SRKL). It acquired a certain international authority. Its representative participated in Solidarity's Second Congress at Lech Walesa's invitation.

The Nezavisimost' had a dual character. On the one hand, it was oriented towards general political democratization and on the other hand, to the workers class exclusiveness opposing them to the intelligentsia.<sup>7</sup> This organisation supported the miners movement in Vorkuta, provided them some money for support, gave radical slogans for workers class struggle, but did not take any initiative to support Vorkuta on the plea that movement is not mature enough to fight in such a way. Nezavisimost also gave a call to boycott the electoral campaign of 1990 saying that LNF is the liberal wing of ruling party while OFT (Neo Stalinist Front of Workers) as the imperial wing.

Representatives of workers' organizations also participated in All Union initiatives. The Representatives of SRKL, Nezavisimost and Spravedlivost participated in the work of the Congress of independent

workers movement and organization. At the beginning of summer new efforts were made to consolidate the workers' movement and create single coordinating centre at Leningrad in June 1990 a workers 'round table' met, ways of further joint actions were noted, but they were not put into practice.<sup>8</sup>

A new organisation came into being in the same summer of 1990 namely Soyuz Kolektivov Leningrada (SKL). It became very active in workers organization and participated enthusiastically with concrete programme and response to government plan of 500 days programme for a transition to market. It also participated in All Union Congress of Labour Collective Council from August 31 to September, 4, 1990. It gave a call to collectives to seize power at the enterprise level and to become managers, hiring the administration. It also demanded government resignation. SKL at its conference demanded removal of party committee from enterprise territory.

In January 1991 the first stage of the conference of workers' collectives took place at Kirov to discuss transformation of enterprises into shareholding companies. On February 12, Factory workers committees invited Boris Yeltsin to visit Leningrad and Kirov Factory. In March Boris Yeltsin and Prime Minister of U.S.S.R. V. Pavlov visited the Kirov factory. The essence of the issue was to whom will the Kirov factory belong? V. Pavlov proposed that not less than 50% of shares should be the

property of state and not liable to sale, whereas Boris Yeltsin called for its transition to Russian jurisdiction followed by sale of shares. Following it workers' committee discussed the question of enterprise transfer to Russian jurisdiction.

In January 1991 the SKL and various other labour organisations participated in action against the use of armed forces in the Baltic Republics.<sup>9</sup> 78000 people and 426 work collectives participated mainly from research institutes and non-production centers. SKL called on workers' collectives to engage in political acts to support the position of chairman of RSFSR Supreme Soviet, Boris Yeltsin, and Council of Ministers of the RSFSR on securing independence for the Republic, transition to market economy and provisions for social guarantees.

On April 23, 1991 Metro Construction workers demanded the removal of Komsomol and CPSU committees from enterprises and supported the miners' Political demands, arguing that the president of U.S.S.R. should resign, the U.S.S.R. Supreme soviet should be dismissed and that the post of union President should be abolished and power be transferred to a council of the federation. This showed the active public support for miners and close connections between political organisations and workers movement in Leningrad.

The organisations like Nezavisimost and other like minded organisations refused to cooperate with liberal organizations striving for

a capitalist path of development which they did not accept. Leningrad section of socialist party, St. Petersburg organisation of Anarcho-syndicalists and others, were for workers' collectives to determine independently, without any kind of buy-out, the forms of property, management and self management of their enterprises and also rejected the institution of presidential power. In this way a certain part of workers movement was attracted to socialist ideology and consequently cooperation with political movements of a socialist orientation.<sup>10</sup>

### **The SOTSPROF**

A major ambitious attempt to build an independent workers' organisation was launched by Moscow based Association of Socialist trade unions which was founded in April, 1989, and which co-sponsored the Congress of informal workers' organisations with VTs and SPs in July. It was based on an uneasy alliance between a small number of socialists, who formed the socialist party in December 1989, and a larger group of social democrats, who were themselves divided, with the right wing becoming ardent supporter of Yeltsin and transition to market economy. This led to the acrimonious struggle during 1990, from which the right wing of social democrats emerged victorious.<sup>11</sup>

'Sotsprof' split in summer of 1990, with one faction setting up a separate Russian Sotsprof in September, and expelling Sergie Khramoav,

the President of All Union Sotsprof in December 1990, only to be expelled in their turn by Khramov at second Congress of Sotsprof in February.1991. Meanwhile more active Ukrainian Sotsprof, like other independent trade unions set up its own organization in March, 1990.

Sotsprof was organised on professional lines, and not according to the branch principles. It owed its survival through 1990 not to its organizational activities, but to its political alliance with liberal camp. Boris Kagarlitsky accused the liberals of having 'bought' the organization by bribing members of coordination committee for the support of government programme of austerity measures', to oppose strikes and to purge the socialist from its ranks.<sup>12</sup>

It was the legal, political and material resources at the disposal of Sotsprof rather than its liberal policies and its conciliatory trade union rhetoric, that gave its appeal to workers seeking to organise outside the official structures.**13**

Although the total active membership of Sotsprof groups probably numbered in hundreds, it advanced rapidly in 1991 as a result of its political connections. It arranged for negotiations between the Moscow branch of the SOTSPROF and the official Moscow Federation of Trade Unions, and following Yeltsin's counter coup in August 1991 the Sotsprof leaders moved into the corridors of republican power.**14**

In spite of these workers organizations operating at above mentioned places with different ideological orientations of a number of other workers organizations, formal or informal existed throughout the U.S.S.R., in the period of perestroika especially from 1988 to 91. A local popular front of informal movements in 1988 was established in Togliatti which had its roots in broad informal workers' groups which led to the strike in 1987 at auto diesel plant. Later on it organised a first All Union Conference of Workers' Collectives councils in 1990 Against the new law on enterprises.

Similarly, in Yaroslavl workers' group 'Popular front' composed of major industrial enterprises was established, whose moving force was workers club of motor factory. Not only this, in the township of Andropov in the Lithuanian city of Kaunas, Kaunas workers' union was established to restructure the Trade Union Committee.

### **Miners' Strike Movement of 1989 and 1991**

In the Soviet coal industry over one million people were employed considerably more than in any country. The main coalfields in U.S.S.R. were Donbass in the eastern Ukraine and Kuzbass in westren Siberia, supplemented by various smaller coal fields scattered throughout the union. Of the 720 million tons of coal produced in U.S.S.R. in 1986 Donbass accounted for 259 Million tons or 36% whereas Kuzbass produced 160 million tons or 22% of total production.<sup>15</sup> The Donbass is

considerably older and Kuzbass began in the period of industrialization in 1920's. Whereas deep underground mining is practised in Donbass, open cast production dominates in Kuzbass. So Kuzbass coal produced cheaply than Donbass. The output of the coal Mining Industry has stagnated since mid 1970's, in course of the eleventh five year plan (1981-85), the shortfall in coal production amounted to 145 millions tons. The following table show the declining out put trend after Mid 1970's.

**Table-1**

Year	Output (Million)	Average annual increase
1950	261.1	
1955	400.0	27.8
1960	509.6	21.9
1970	624.1	11.5
1975	701.3	15.4
1985	718.0	1.7

Source: Bol, Shya Sovetskaya entsiklopediya, 3rd ed. Vol.26, 1977.  
P.M. Malvin, F.S. Bocharov and A.V. Likhobabin,  
Shakhtery-gvardiya Truda, Moscow, 1986, p.181, Quoted from  
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The century of intensive coal production in the Donbass meant that the miners have had to go ever deeper into the earth. The average

depth of underground mines in the U.S.S.R. was 410 meter, but in the Donbass 79 of the 156 mines were more than 700 meter below the surface and 15 were more than a kilometer deep.<sup>16</sup> The deeper the mine, higher the temperature and greater the complexity and expenses of pumping out water, ventilation, putting miners down to the coal face, and raising the coal. In recent years the investment in coal mines lagged behind (in Modern equipment & mine development) badly because of greater priority to oil, gas and Nuclear power.<sup>17</sup> One of the miners remarked that "My fellow cutter and I am using the same jack and hammers as fifty years ago."<sup>18</sup>

The July strike of 1989 could not have been a surprise to the Soviet authorities, it had been preceded in March by two brief strikes at Lidiveka and Kiror Mines in Donestek. At the Plenum of Donestek city Party Committee (Gorkom) on 24 June, 1989 the Miners' extreme discontent was expressed in a demand that the Minister of coal industry, Shchadov, should resign. Gorbachev himself, while visiting Donestek in June 1989, had been informed of the ferment and its background.

A multitude of discontent contributed to strike, yet the causes may be separated from Strike demands. Essentially, the outbreak of the strike was the result of frustrated expectations,<sup>19</sup> 50% respondents in a survey said the professional solidarity was the prime cause that led to strike. If the fear of disruptive economic reform was not in their mind the



appaling economic and social conditions were definitely behind it. The Soviet miners were well off in monetary sense but it was of no use if consumer goods were not available in the market which was the reason cited by 86% of respondents when asked about the specific grievances,<sup>20</sup> followed by low pay 79%, inadequate vacations 62% pension provisions 50%, high price 41%, poor housing 41% and frictions with management 83 percent.

But in all regions there was plenty of evidence of deteriorating labour relations within coal fields, but issue came to head with deterioration of economy, as bonuses were cut, deliveries of essentials and food supplies fell and 'uneconomic' enterprises were threatened with closer. In January 1989, the mines which were consistently running at a lose, were supposed to start shifting to full self financing, which seriously compounded the pressure.<sup>21</sup>

The July strike wave began when all the mines around Mezhdurechensk in the Kuzbass followed by the mines of the local Shevyakovo mine on striking, and on July 11th assembled in the town square to present their demands.<sup>22</sup> Although the strike of Mezhdurechensk was settled in four days, it had already spread throughout Kuzbass, reaching its peak on July 17th when 158 enterprises and almost 1,80,000 workers were on strike. A joint party-government- trade union commission was hurriedly dispatched to

Kamerovo on July 16th. It rapidly reached agreement with regional strike committee, which had itself only been established on 16th July and by 21st July everybody was back at work.<sup>23</sup>

The small but militant Vorkuta coalfield struck work on July 19th, and by 21st all of their demands had been met. The miners of Kazakastan and Donbass were persuaded to stay at work, with promises that the government would meet their demands without the need to resort to strike action, but they began to come out from July 16th, fearful that they would not share the gains won by Kuzbass workers. In Donbass the Miners distrustful of the governemnt did not agree to return to work until July 23rd.

There were four types of demands which were put forward by miners to authorities. First, were those effecting the structure and administration of coal industry itself like; full legal and economic autonomy for the mines from January 1st, 1990 and introduction of leasing and brigade contracting as form of work organization in the mines. The second group may be called 'bread and butter' demands. They ranged from pay, vacation and social benefits better housing and increase quantity of soap rationing. The third group of demands touched work and welfare conditions: Medical care, occupational disease, responsibility for safety and accidents, etc. Finally there were demands for the protection of worker-activists and strike leaders.<sup>24</sup>

The strikes were led by a relatively small number of activists, many of whom were party members and enthusiasts for perestroika. Between 25% and 40% of strike committee members were members of Communist Party, despite party instructions apparently from Moscow, that party members should not get involved into strike.<sup>25</sup> It seems most likely that in these regions the party apparatus was itself divided, with reformers surreptitiously encouraging the strikes.<sup>26</sup> The contacts between mines, and even more between coalfields, were limited and haphazard, so that information tended to be transmitted by rumour and press reports.<sup>27</sup>

The mine managers and local authorities insisted that they were not in a position to meet the workers demands because, although they had become self financing they did not have the resources to do so. In this way they sought to deflect the workers' anger on to the centre, and above all to the coal ministry in Moscow. In this way they channelised the workers' discontent to secure their own independence from Moscow. The Ministry found itself as the scapegoat for all failures of perestroika, caught between local administration and national government.

The Government immediately acknowledged the legitimacy of the miner's grievances, assimilating their demands to the movement of perestroika, and identifying the opposition to the miners as the conservative ministerial system and backward managers, while arguing

that strike action was unjustified and unnecessary because the mines' legitimate demands would be met. It is now known that military intervention was considered, but immediately rejected, although strikers were aware that force could always be used against them. The government negotiators gave in to all the workers demands.<sup>28</sup>

Governments' priority in responding to miners was to contain the strike, to neutralise or to co-opt its leadership and to demobilise the workers. Concessions made were largely at the expense of other workers. Food, cloathing and Medical supplies were diverted from other towns, while pay increases led to the local inflation hitting those workers who did not benefit from pay hikes. The promised rise in fuel prices would hit both consumer and workers in fuel intensive industries. So it contained the workers' movement by exploiting the divisions among workers that it had opened up.

Government authorities had been very successful in structuring the representations of workers, paving a way to the hierarchial structure to take place to match the hierarchial and bureaucratic apparatus at regional and national level which weakened the workers organization. Only the Kuzbass miners developed a stable regional worker's Committee, while attempts to form nationwide organisation made little progress.

The shift of emphasis from work place mobilization to political organizations was reflected in the selection of the town and regional strike committees. These committees came to be dominated by those who had the educational background and the organizational and leadership skill to serve as political representatives.<sup>29</sup>

Among the miners there were plenty of evidence of a powerful workerist anti intellectualism, expressed in their rejection of cooperation with any informal political organizations, in their reluctance to cooperate with engineering and technical workers, and in their demand for the dismissal of the managers. However this position was represented by a very small minority.

So far the demands of the miners were concerned as already noted were inaccordance with the general direction of prestroika, so that miners' strike also provided Gorbachev with an opportunity to attack ministerial powers. But in this struggle the interests of the workers were set aside. A survey in Donbass during strike 1989 showed that only 16% favoured the financial autonomy, although 33% favoured the arenda form of leasing to the work collective.<sup>30</sup>

The Mines in the ukraine finally passed to the Republican Sovereignty at the beginning of 1991, without an adequate price increase, immediately provoking a financial crisis. The authorities refused to set new prices. The impending bankruptcy of Donbass Coal Mines meant that

management was not able to respond to the workers demand for pay rises to compensate for inflation, and this was a critical factor in provoking the strikes of spring, 1991 which started in Donbass.

In workers' committees those who were adopting the position of reforming the existing trade unions and other institutions were dropped from committees paving the way for strengthening neo-liberal tendencies. Within the newo-liberals there were two opinions regarding the role of these committees. First, overriding trade union concern and primary to workers' interest and second group favoured to dismantle the state first and workers' interest to be achieved and protected later on.

Miners were not going to put their faith into discredited institutions of official representations. The Regional Committee insisted that strike was only suspended, and would not end untill miners demands were met. The miners strike committees were not dissolved, but became permanent bodies, playing an increasing role at the city, regional and national level. The law on strikes (October 1989) proved ineffective in containing the political mobilization of workers as the court held that it applied only to industrial disputes, not to political strikes.

The political priorities of workers' Committees at local and regional level meant that activists played little attention to the development of work place organisations, or to the everyday grievances of the workers, and the weakness of independent organizations at

enterprise level underlay the gap which soon emerged between miners committees and the rank and file workers. The formers were preoccupied with political priorities while the later were more concerned with their economic and day to day life demands. Many of the members of these committees were involved with mafia while some others (due to distribution responsibility) got corrupting influences and were caught red handed.

Further the electoral successes of many workers' committee members in election of local Soviets in 1990 further diluted the movement. An attempt to form wider workers' organization, the confederation of labour, was made at the end of April, 1990 at a Conference in Kuzbass, but it never got of the ground. Meanwhile the official trade unions also tried to reform themselves with cosmetic changes in operational ways but without success. The leaders of workers' committees decided that it was essential to pre-empt the attempts of official unions to take back the initiative and established a independent miners' union. But it made little attempt to develop an effective primary organizations, and many saw it as having no more role than to issue strike calls to its members at the instigation of the workers' committees. So it had little effective trade union presence at enterprise level.

Now worker's committees having cut off from their base had no other option than to fall into the arm of one or another faction of ruling

stratum. They are disallusioned with Gorbachev and transferred their hopes to Yeltsin, not because of their love to him but they had no where else to go.

### **Miners' Strikes of 1991:**

By the end of 1990 the economic environment changed fundamentally, free market prices were rising rapidly, shortages were getting progressively worse, and the production difficulties cutting workers' bonuses and threatening the solvency at self financing enterprises. In this situation workers' interests focussed increasingly on the demand for increased wages to match price increases and for wage indexation. The economic demands of rank and file and political demands of workers' committee came together once again in massive strike wave of 1991 which eventually brought down the whole system.<sup>31</sup> In 1991 the strike leaders were insistent that strikes were primarily political. The leaders of Kuzbass and Vorkuta committees took the position that there could be no purely economic demands, since miners' economic aspirations could only be realised on the basis of fundamental political change.<sup>32</sup> The Donbass and Karaganda Committees, while concentrating on political issues, linked political to economic demands, without substituting one for another. In general, miners' only responded to strike calls when latter expressed their immediate economic demands and were prepared to retire to work once those demands have been met.<sup>33</sup> In the very same way



we can see Belorussian Popular Front (BPF) getting the workers support or its strike programme in April-May 1991 only after linking its political platform to economic demand of 'Market wages for Market prices.'

The simmering discontent in Ukraine Mines 'due to the transferred republican sovereignty which consequently led to financial crisis, the Donbass workers committee called for a strike on March I, 1991 with the demand of 100% to 150% increases in wages. Ukraine government said it could not afford the claim, strike went ahead but with patchy response.

On March 10, 1991 Yelstin met the Kuzbass strike leaders in Moscow, and effectively gave them his endorsement, as a result of which they declared an unlimited political strike in Kuzbass, backing was also received from AFL/CIO in response to the appeal of the NPG.<sup>34</sup>

In middle of March the various regional committees put forward different and varying sets of economic and political demands, with little sign of coordination among one another. (The Ukraine and Kazak mines now under republican Sovereignty directed their demands against their government) Many mines come out in strike while others seen going back to work leaves the impression of spontaneity.

Although miners had political support from Yeltsin, but the collection of food and money for strikers particularly in Moscow and Baltics by workers demonstrated solidarity. But overall strike wave

lacked organization, momentum and direction. From the middle of March strike escalated but not due to the politicization of workers, but because on March 10, Pavlov the Prime Minister of U.S.S.R. spoke of impending price increase. The proposed prices were confirmed by Gorbachev order of 19th March and which were implemented on 2nd April. It was only when the issue of prices moved to the top of the agenda, that the moods in coal fields changed, and strikes spread rapidly, within ten days the half the coal mines in U.S.S.R. were out and strikes was spreading to other branches of production.<sup>35</sup> The workers in oil and Gas sector, Gold Mining, Metalurgy and social services also held or threatened strikes, escalating their earlier demands oil and Gas workers insisted that the prices for their output be raised to world level and they be given expanded marketing rights and large pay increases.<sup>36</sup>

The miners' worker committees and NPG leaders had met in Moscow to establish an inter-regional co-ordination committee and Deputy Chairman of official Federation of independent trade unions of Russia, threatened a general strike if Gorbachev did not meet with miners representatives.

In the end of March, 1991 the Supreme Soviet of Soviet Union called upon the workers not to strike for the end of year in lieu of grave economic situation and issued a decree for the suspension of the strike. It also instructed cabinet and republican government to look at the

demands of workers and improve working conditions.

The Kuzbass and Vorkuta Committees did not participate in Cabinet Conference on miners in early April on the ground that their demands were political in nature. In this conference miners' were offered doubling of wages in 1992 but on the condition of meeting impossible production targets. This did not satisfy the miners and strike continued, although it did not grow. The Donbass committee called for general strike on April 16th the opening day of supreme soviet. The ukrainian government accepted some of the demands and strike was called off. The Kuzbass called an All-union general strike for April 17th to force Gorbachev and Union government from power but it met with negligible response.<sup>37</sup>

Although Yeltsin had ridden the strike wave by Mid April, there was a danger that it would prove counter productive in pushing political polarization to the point of decisive confrontation, and the devastating impact it would have on Russian economy if it continued much longer. And there is little doubt that these considerations, alongwith the division among miner and non-miner workers, between striking and non-striking miners, and between striking miners themselves, played their part in forcing a 9+1 agreement between Yeltsin and Gorbachev, which passed the jurisdiction of mines to Russian Republic under which mines would be granted financial autonomy, which would then allow them to respond

to the miners' economic demands.<sup>38</sup>

The agreement was price increase and compensation, transfer of mines to republican jurisdiction and call for an end to strike. Yeltsin went to Kuzbass to sell the deal, bypassing inter-republican committee, but miners rejected it until it was amended and enshrined in joint resolution of U.S.S.R. Cabinet and the Russian Council of Ministers. But Transfer of Mines to Russian Jurisdiction provided enormous pay rises to miners. For Yeltsin, strike was bonanza. In Presidential election in June, 1991 he secured 60% of popular 70% polled votes, but in Kuzbass he could not get an overall majority, where Tuleev, who opposed the strikes got 42% of vote. This brings the point at home that government had been successful in isolating the miners from rest of the working class.<sup>39</sup>

The "9+1" agreement was a symbol of radical realignment of forces within ruling stratum in which the balance of power shifted decisively in favour of reformist faction as Gorbachev ended his vacillation, and Yeltsin showed a willingness to compromise. There was a clear split between Prime Minister Pavlov and Gorbachev as former supported the military industrial complex and the Ministerial system of administration, while the later was in favour of priority to consumer goods industry. This led to the process of August Coup and counter coup, which led to the end of Party Monopoly on power and consequently the disintegration of U.S.S.R.

## NOTES

1. Simon Clarke and Peter Fairbrother eds. What about workers (verso London 1993), page 122.
2. Ibid., p.22.
3. Ibid., p.147.
4. This can be seen in Simon Clarke (1993), David Mandel (1989-91), Marples (1991) etc.
5. Anna A. Temkina, 'Workers Movement in Leningrad' Soviet Studies, Vol.44, No.2, 1992, page 209.
6. Ibid., p.213.
7. Leningrad ki Literator 7, 1990.
8. Leaflet No date, quoted from Anna A. Tenkina, op.cit., page 221.
9. Vechernii Leningrada, 18 Jan. 1991.
10. Smena. Vechernii, Leningrada, Ist May, 1990.
11. Simon Clark and Peterfair brother; op.cit., page 152.
12. Boris, Kagarlitsky, referred by Simon Clark & Peter Fair brother, Op.Cit. p.153.
13. Ibid., p.154.
14. Ibid., p.154.
15. T.Friedgut and L. siegelbaum. "Perestroika from below; Soviet Miner's Strike and Aftermath," New Left Review March April 1990 No.183 p.6.
16. Bolshaya Sovetskya Entsiklopedia, 3rd ed. Vol.26, 1977 p.464.

17. T.Friedgut & L. Seiglebaum Op.Cit. p.8.
18. Vechernii Donestek, 16 Aug., 1989, report of V.G.Ignator to Planum of Donestek Gorkem.
19. L.S.Butor in Vechernni Donestek, 31st July 1989.
20. Dr.G.Shalygin Conducted Survey quoted from T.Friedgut, L. Seigelbaun, NLR No.183.
21. Marples, David, "New revelation underline seriousness of problems in Ukrain coalmines" RFE/RL Report U.S.S.R., April, 7, 1989.
22. Ironically, on the very same day 'Trud' Published five demands' addressed by official miners union to newly appointed Coal Minister Schadav.
23. Simon Clarke & Peter Fairbrother Op.Cit., p.130.
24. T.Friedgut and L.Seigulbaum Op.Cit., p.20.
25. Ibid. p.25.
26. Simon Clarke & Peter Fairbrother Op.Cit., p.131.
27. Ibid. p.131.
28. Note that the official TU's were a party of the government negotiating team, sitting across the table from the workers whom they supposed to represent.
29. Result that in Kuzbass Regional Committee dominant figures Avaliani, and Kislyuk were managers, first chair of Varkuta worker committee was an engineer, even those who were workers like Golikov & Boldyrev had higher education.

30. David, Mandel. *Prestroika and the Soviet People* (1991). (Montreal: Black Rose Press), p.396.
31. While, L.J.Cook simply see it a matter of lack of unified leadership. See Workers' in Russian Federation' Communist and Post Communist Studies, Vol.28, No.1, 1995, p.22.
32. Simon Clarke, eds, 1993 Op.Cit. Page 161-162.
33. This can be seen from Vorgashorskaya strike in November 1989 which was settled with full economic Independence of mines, They did not join 1991 strikes. Similarly Kuzbass Committee got only a feeble response in January 1991 to its call for political strikes in which merely 300 workers participated.
34. In April B.Yeltsin Sent 4l Million Rubles of Russian government money to NPG in Vorkutu which at that time had a very low level of organization and Membership - a delegation of the 'Democratic worker's Movement' signed an agreement with AFL/CIO in Washington on Ist February, 1991.
35. Simon Clarke, eds, 1993. Op.Cit. p.164.
36. L.J.Cook; Op.Cit. p.23.
37. Simon Clarke, eds. 1993, Op.Cit. p.165.
38. Ibid., p.166-67.
39. Ibid., p.67.

**CHAPTER-IV**  
**END OF PARTY MONOPOLY OVER POWER**  
**AND DISINTEGRATION OF U.S.S.R.:**  
**Eclipse Of The Official Trade Unions**

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Given the transient and murky correlation of forces in Soviet Union after the April strikes of miners and consequently rapprochement between Gorbachev and Yeltsin, Pavlov the Prime Minister of U.S.S.R in June, 1991 tried to launch his 'Palace Coup', demanding that the Supreme Soviet give him extra-powers. He was caught on the wrist by Gorbachev, who proceeded to erode the power of his own cabinet. At the end of July, 1991 Gorbachev held a secret meeting with Nazarbayev and Yeltsin, about which Kryuchkov was informed by KGB. In this meeting it was agreed that Nazarbayev would replace Pavlov, and defence minister Yazov and KGB chief Kryachkov would be removed from the government, immediately after the signing of the union treaty. On August 3 Gorbachev issued a decree which gave priority to consumer goods production, against the Pavlov government's insistence that priority should remain with the 'basic' industrial branches. On August 5 Planning for the Coup began. On August 10 Gorbachev issued a decree creating the state property fund, which would be accountable only to the President and the supreme Soviet, and so would bypass the cabinet and take control of all state property out of the hands of the ministries."<sup>1</sup>

"When on August 23, 1991, the world heard the news of the failure of the attempted Coup d'etat, millions of people across the globe



rejoiced at the victory of democracy in Russia. The inhabitants of the country, however, were in a rather less euphoric frame of mind.<sup>2</sup>" When Yeltsin gave a strike call against coup "in Kuzbass only 41 mines struck against almost 200 which had spent up to two months on strike earlier in the year, supposedly in the support of Yeltsin... immediate response of the workers was not substantial."<sup>3</sup> Many of those who went in for strike were following the instruction of their mine directors, who explained to their workers that the independence of mines and their hard-won prosperity was at stake."<sup>4</sup>

Although the official propaganda of Russian government spoke of universal love for the President's reforms, there developed wide spread doubt about the sincerity and democratic credentials of the authorities. Events after August only reinforced peoples' worst misgivings. The removal of Gorbachev from power as the Soviet president by the Russian government in the de facto manner in the last days of August and then formally at the end of December - did not provoke any protest, despite the fact that the intention of former Soviet Prime Minister Pavlov and Vice-President Yanaev to edge Gorbachev out and take his place in August qualified as treason. No one felt sorry for Gorbachev and the collapse of the President's power automatically entailed the liquidation of the union as well.<sup>5</sup>

Making an assessment of Gorbachev as general secretary of the CPSU after his collapse in December 1991 Roy Medvedev, a Soviet historian said, "when Gorbachev took power, our country was in a perilous condition. And when we look around us now, six years after Gorbachev began his reforms, what do we see? We are producing less in quantitative terms, and the quality of our output has not improved... The performance of our agriculture has deteriorated... the union has fallen apart, split into a series of separate republics. ...Monetary system is disintegrating, and the rate of inflation is growing... now there is at least a certain democracy, freedom of speech and opinion, and of course this is good. But to a significant degree this occurred independently of Gorbachev; the situation in the country became so bad that people simply spoke out, and could not be stopped... there was talk of a new concept of socialism, as new approach, but this was not followed up... anti-alcoholism campaign helped bring about the collapse of financial system, because government drew a great deal of its revenue from the sale of alcohol, which is a state monopoly... the struggle against unearned incomes did not last long about two months. There was supposed to be a campaign against speculators, but a person who purchased goods from countryside and sold those goods in the towns - an economic agent - was regarded as speculator - this simply stopped market working, and the links between the countryside and towns suffered... the law on cooperation was adopted, along with legislation on the independence of

enterprises. But these moves were not properly thought through. For this reason the cooperatives, right from the beginning, took on a speculative character and not a productive one; they failed to put significant new quantities of goods on the market. The law on the enterprises broke the links between them... in the countryside, Gorbachev sought initially to solve the problems through changes to the system of administration of agriculture, without understanding that the critical thing was initiative from below, from the peasants themselves. Huge, unwieldy new administrative apparatuses were set up - Agropromsoyz, Agroprom of Russian Federation. These colossal administrative structures subsequently collapsed; today nothing remains of them... the 'programme of five hundred days' to shift to market economy was not well thought out. So in the Soviet Union today no one lives better than they did ten years ago, if we discount the 2 or 3 percent of the population who are growing rich on speculation. The workers and peasants, the intelligentsia, army officers, are all much worse off. .. at earlier stages in the process I was very impressed by Gorbachev, but now I can see that his main role has been to destroy rather than to construct."

After the August coup Gorbachev never convened the meeting of Central Committee of CPSU. Gorbachev, at the same time renouncing his powers as a member of the central committee, issued a decree temporarily suspending the committee's activity. Yeltsin similarly issued a decree suspending the activity of the central committee and of

the Supreme Soviet of U.S.S.R. This was an unlawful and unjustified decision, and incomprehensible from any reasonable point of view. The Prosecutor's office was entrusted with making thorough investigations in order to establish the degree of participation by the party in the coup, and the matter was to be handed over to the supreme court. The goal had in fact been to dissolve the party.

The triumph of August counter coup resulted in the dissolution of the Communist Party of Soviet Union, whose fate was sealed and its death spelled in national elections of 1989 and local elections in 1990.<sup>6</sup> The party property was appropriated by the new authorities and their hangers-on. Although, the misappropriation of party property by the nomenklatura started from restructuring process itself.<sup>7</sup> The expropriation of party property went ahead as Russian Government ministries moved into the buildings of the party central committee. This was of course quite illegal. The regional peoples' courts were asked by Moscow mayor to move into the buildings of regional party committees, as in the past they had to put up with very poor premises- they were badly funded and lacked the money for anything better. But most of the people's courts refused to do so, since they were the organs of law enforcement. The communist newspapers were closed and then allowed to reopen, but in the conditions that left them vulnerable to pressure, both political and commercial. The editorial collectives, in fact, had taken over the newspapers as their own property, though the printing works and other

production facilities were the property of the party. The pravda staffers calculated how many hundreds of million of roubles the paper had contributed to the party, and on this basis they demanded that all the buildings and equipment be declared the property of the paper. The closing the party papers turned out to be very unpopular step by the Yeltsin and the democrats. It was met with outrage even by the people who had no love for these publications, by the people who were opponents of the party but who maintained that the freedom of press had to be general. They were saying: 'we do not like these papers, but they should still be allowed to come out, as opposition newspapers'. So Yeltsin was forced to allow all the party papers to resume publications.

The leading representatives of the CPSU in the Congress of People's Soviets tamely assented to these measures, only putting up struggle when their salary was threatened with stoppage. The CPSU was not the only casualty of August events. The Russian Government blatantly flouted its own promises and democratic laws. The freely elected local soviets were deprived of power and their authority was transferred to the representatives of the President. By the end of the year representative and judicial organs had largely lost the struggle to control the executive power... Yeltsin himself occupied the post of President, Prime Minister and Defence Minister. Indeed, Yeltsin's arbitrary use of power alarmed even those like Anatoly Sobchak, the Mayor of St. Petersburg, who otherwise endorsed neo-liberal line.<sup>8</sup>

## **The Eclipse of Official Unions**

The Soviet totalitarian system directed the macro and micro economy as well as politics, ideology, education, the press and other elements of the superstructure. The central committee of CPSU controlled appointments to all important party and political posts in the republics and regions. It also supervised all important administrative and economic appointments. Factory, mine, enterprise, institute directors, chairman of regional and town executive committees, and so on, were always party members, their appointment confirmed in Moscow. Any leader of any republic could be removed by a decision of the politburo. The interests of the centre always prevailed over local interests.

During the Soviet period virtually all workers and employees (including managers) belonged to the official All Union Central Council of trade unions (AUCCTU) which controlled considerable property as well as the distribution of social security and other crucial benefits to its members. Initially the AUCCTU responded to Gorbachev's reform programme with long conditioned, reflective acceptance of changes in party line, promising vaguely to "shield workers from negative consequences."<sup>9</sup> Simon Clark and Peter Fairbrother observed that the All Union Central Council of Trade Unions (VTs SPs/AUCCTU) asserted its 'independence' from the party and government as early as 1987, not as a

progressive but as a conservative force. The VTsSPS increasingly stood out against Government's plans to introduce market reforms, insisting on very substantial social guarantees, high level of unemployment pay etc. as precondition for any agreement on new legislation. This rearguard action was extremely ineffective, and simply meant that the trade unions lost what little impact on policy they had once enjoyed."<sup>10</sup>

The tensions over layoffs and productive pressures in the early reform period posed some challenges to the union officials, who were well entrenched in most enterprises and generally had a close subordinate working relationship with management and a highly bureaucratic work style with rank and file. Meanwhile glasnost was exposing the lack of mass confidence in and loyalty to the old unions. A survey conducted in March, 1989 demonstrated that more than 75% of urban respondents gave a negative evaluation of trade unions role in "protecting the rights of workers in our country" with 52% assessing the unions' performance "fairly low" or "very low".<sup>11</sup>

The 1989 miners' strike proved a watershed in the AUCCTU reform. Strike organizers completely bypassed union officials, rank and file miners showed their deep contempt, and central officials used them as scapegoat for poor conditions in the coal basin. Local unions in all affected areas were completely discredited. Most significantly, the rise of

independent miners' committees, threatened the AUCCTU's monopoly, raising the spectre of its repudiation and replacement by a democratic labour movement organised from below.<sup>12</sup>

The union's leadership responded to the strikes with trenchant self-criticism, openly acknowledging its loss of authority and trust among workers, failure to defend their interests, and transformation into an "appendage" of the state structure. At its sixth plenum in September 1989, the union declared its commitment to the "defense of workers' interests and other functions" and threw its weight against economic reforms, demanding a price freeze, return to stringent price control, and severe restrictions on cooperatives and privatization. It also began to engage in more activist politics, organising rallies, aggressively lobbying the Supreme Soviet, and trying unsuccessfully to mobilise anti-reform workers for electoral competition through the united front of working people. This period of obstructionism was, however, short lived.

The VTsSPS (AUCCTU) in October 1990 transformed its structure, moderated its policyline, and sought a 'constructive dialogue' with government as labour representative in the reform process. The leadership replaced the old union centralized structure with the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) and affiliated Republic level Federation of Independent Trade Unions (FNPR). The reformed union



retained, for the most part, the old union leadership, apparatus, property, functions and membership list (140 million workers), but its politics and tactics were now driven by the need to survive in a democratizing polity.<sup>13</sup>

The GCTU (VKP) now recognised the need for economic reform and declared its "conditional" support for a market economy with a diversity of ownership forms, but demanded that transition programme should include social guarantees. GCTU also insisted that the state should maintain living standards through regular indexation of wages, pensions and transfer payments to meet inflation, guarantee of a subsistence minimum, and increase in the minimum wage.

By the autumn of 1990 both the union and Russian Republican government had in fact begun holding regular consultation with the reformed official unions over employment, income and other labour and social policies. In October Ryzkhov declared his government's readiness for a "social partnership" with the GCTU, which he acknowledged as representing 140 million workforce. Russian Republican leader Yeltsin and Silayev also met with FNPR chair Klochkov, confirmed the need for close collaboration between unions and new Republican level Government and began a dialogue with it.<sup>14</sup>

Negotiations between GCTU and Gorbachev Government proved tense. By the spring of 1991 the Confederation was frustrated with

Government's foot-dragging over an agreement on employment and income protection. The GCTU and its Republican affiliates threatened more than once to call strikes, but never actually did so.<sup>15</sup>

In response to the 1991 miners' strike the GCTU (VKP) coordinated its activity closely with the Pavlov Government stressing the need for a new system of collective bargaining within a corporatist tripartite framework, and reaching an agreement with the Government in April, which included a no strike pledge. However, the agreement was not worth the paper it was written up on, because the programme presupposed the existence of a system which had already disappeared and the authority of a body which was entirely discredited. The unions themselves were disintegrating *pari-passu* with the system itself, as union bodies at every level asserted their independence from higher levels. Following the disintegration of the Soviet union the GCTU (VKP) was reduced to the empty shell, although it still had an ambition to create an international trade unions federation.<sup>16</sup>

The formation of FNPR itself marked the attempt of the branch unions to distance themselves from the party and the union government, and to weaken the grip of former trade unions centre, and was thus really another expression of the attempt of the enterprises, associations and concerns, with which the official unions identified themselves, to establish their economic independence.

Soon, there was a struggle between FNPR and GCTU as a result of which FNPR allied with Yeltsin in his struggle with Gorbachev on the basis of common interests in undermining the central powers and establishing republican sovereignty while GCTU backed Gorbachev in resisting the miners, the FNPR threatened a general strike if Gorbachev did not back down.

The August Coup and Counter Coup precipitated the crisis within labour camp. During the August Coup attempt GCTU called for "Calm and No Work Stoppages" and while FNPR claimed to have supported Yeltsin, only coal miners answered his call for a general strike.<sup>17</sup> Yeltsin who consolidated his power in the summer of 1991, called for a 'social partnership' between state and labour prominently including the FNPR, the All Union GCTU having all but collapsed in the autumn of 1991 along with the Soviet union. Thus in Russia FNPR remained intact, with its membership, property, apparatus, and virtually monopolitic role as distributor of social security funds and social services, and retained its dominant position as labour representative in the newly independent Russian Federation.

## NOTES

1. CDSP, 43, 25; 43, 32; 44,32;
2. Boris, Kagarlistsy. "Russia on the Brink of New Battles" New Left Review, Summer 1992, p.85.
3. Simon, Clark. Eds. What about workers, (Verso London, 1993), page 173-74.
4. Ibid., page 173.
5. Boris, Kagarlistsy. above cit., page 85.
6. Ronald, Suny. "Incomplete Revolution: National Movements and Collpase of the Soviet Empire", New Left Review, 1992, p.155.
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8. Boris, Kagarlistsy, above cited, page 86.
9. L.J. Cook, "Workers in the Russian Federation", Communist and Post Communist Studies, Vol.28, No.I, p.27.
10. Simon Clark and Peter Fanbrother eds. What about workers. (Verso London), 1993, p.181.
11. Trud, Oct.26, 1990, page 2.
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14. L.J. Cook, Russia's Labour Relations; Consolidation or disintegration in Douglas. W.Blum's 'Russia's Future': Integration or disintegration (Wetview Press, Oxford, 1994), p.75.
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16. Simon Clarke, opp. cit., page 181-82.
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## **CHAPTER-V CONCLUSION :**

### **The Emerging Trends In The Trade Union Movement In Russia**

Desperate to demonstrate to the world bank and IMF that the reforms were proceeding according to plan and to his erstwhile supporters that there were some benefits to be obtained from such reforms, Yeltsin began issuing privatization decrees, culminating in the August 1992 distribution of privatization vouchers. Designed as a popular move, privatization where it has taken place, has in practice most usually enriched directors and managers rather than workers, while failing to provide incentives for transforming production. As before, the Russian government and its western advisors assumed that the withering away of the party-state had cleared the ground for market economy to be built by decree, as though it were a target for a five year plan.

Thus, due to the neo-liberal policies of the regime in the post Soviet Russia the official trade unions (FNPR and some enterprise level unions of earlier AUCCTU) functioned in a very vulnerable position. There remained only four major trade union formations in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The FNPR inheritor of official TU property and functions; the independent Miners' Union (NPG); An independent union of civil aviation pilots, and SOTSPROF. The leaders of the independent trade union/movement saw Yeltsin's victory as their opportunity to challenge the power and prosperity of the official unions

in three important ways. First, they demanded a re-registration of unions, which would give workers the opportunity to choose which body would represent them, in the hope that workers would throw out the official unions in favour of new bodies. Second, they pressed for a redistribution of union property on the basis of membership following re-registration. Third, they insisted upon the removal of the administration of social security funds from the hands of the official unions, and their replacement by a system of state and/or private social insurance.

The leaders of the FNPR and of the official branch unions were only too aware of their vulnerability, and were finding themselves in increasing financial difficulty as branch unions at enterprises and regional level reduced their affiliation fees to the centre. However the Yeltsin government was also aware of the danger that the official unions could present if they were to provide the focus of an effective campaign of mass opposition to the 'reform programme'. The result a compromise between the government and the official unions, in which the unions confined themselves to rhetorical attacks on the government, and the government confined itself to rhetorical attacks on the unions.<sup>1</sup>

The regional and Republican union bodies had become essentially political organizations, which rhetorically espoused the cause of working class in an attempt to defend themselves and their property

from political and legislative attack. Like the central organization, the regional federations had considerable property at their disposal, and faced financial difficulties with sharp fall in affiliation fees. They therefore tended to be even more concerned than the FNPR was at the national level with consolidating their political position and defending their property.

In many regions many local executive bodies remained under the control of old nomenclatura and worked hand in glove with the official union federation in the attempt to create a regional power base in apposition to Yeltsin Government and Yeltsin appointed chiefs of administration.

In January 1992, Yeltsin government established a tripartite Commission for the regulation of social and labour relations. The Commission included equal number of representatives of labour, management and government in a three sided negotiating structure. Of the labour, 14 seats 9 were allocated to FNPR, one each to the independent miner's union and the independent union of civil aviation pilots, and three to Sotsprof. The commission was to review the wage levels, monitor working conditions, mediate industrial disputes, and negotiate annual socio-economic agreement. In exchange for their role in Commission, unions took a no strike pledge.<sup>2</sup>

Although FNPR adopted its agenda to the Yeltsin-Gaidar reform it also demanded that privatization process should transfer ownership and control of enterprises predominantly to the workers, condemning other variants as "Nomenklatura" privatization.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in tripartite commission the unions and industrialists often cooperated in efforts to maintain real wage levels, subsidies, and continued high employment levels against the Government programme of austerity and fiscal restraint.<sup>4</sup> In general, commission worked poorly. Its meeting were marked by dissension and the frequent absence of government officials. The efforts at the policy making were conflictual and generally ineffective. FNPR generally protested against the arbitrary decisions of the government.<sup>5</sup>

In June 1992, the "Social Partnership" began to break down. FNPR threatened to call a nationwide strike unless the government paid overdue wages in all regions and demanded that solvency of the enterprise be guaranteed.

Frustrated with workers' declining living standards, the FNPR made a formal agreement on cooperation with the Civic Union, and in the autumn the Federation joined an alliance of anti-reforms elite, including much of the Congress of People's Deputies, in a successful campaign to dismiss the Gaidar Government.



Again a Tripartite Commission was set up in 1993 with FNPR again the dominant representative of labour. A second general agreement was concluded (1993) in spring with some specific provisions and many vague intentions<sup>6</sup> within weeks Khochkov was alleging violation of the agreement, and the 1992 pattern of alienation and growing acrimony between the federation and Yeltsin's govt. was repeated. By August the FNPR was threatening to organise an All Russia General strike, giving central place to the issue of wage arrears (which reached 13 trillion rubles mainly owed to the coal, grain, health and defence sector) and claiming support among defence, agriculture, industrial and cultural workers. But no general strike materialised in 1993. In fact, most significant strike that did take place, among coal miners, was led by NPG.

Vast majority of Russian workers at the end of 1993 remained with the FNPR (50 million out of 73) in almost all branches of economy (except civil Aviation) not because the FNPR represented their interests but because of crucial social security benefits associated with its membership. The Federation remained hierarchical and bureaucratic in its style of functioning. The union leadership is more comfortable and capable at negotiating with government officials and forming alliances with managerial elites than at grassroot organization. It defended the workers' interest with limited success under Yeltsin, but largely without genuine participation or consent of its members.

In 1992 the five most established independent organizations together organised fewer than half a million members Sotsprof, 250000, the pilot union 30000, the air traffic controller 5000, the independent miners union 70000, and railroad workers 2000.<sup>7</sup>

The independents trade union organizations have been generally pro-reforms, with Sotsprof and NPG especially supporting Yeltsin and governmental economic policies. Sotsprof was closely linked to the liberal, pro-reform, social democratic party and to top officials in Yeltsin's earlier labour ministry. Yeltsin did little for the independent unions. In 1993 tripartite commission it was excluded entirely. Independent unions continued to support Yeltsin on critical issues like April 1993 referendum and on Yeltsin's action in dissolving the Parliament in September 1993.<sup>8</sup>

The challenges to the FNPR dominance continued in 1992-93. Oil and gas workers split from it by supporting reforms. In coal industry many FNPR members looked to the NPG for leadership, the trade union of mining and metallurgical industry with its 2 million members formally split first trade unions from FNPR. So the progressive loss of workers in energy and advanced manufacturing with atleast some expert potential were weakening the FNPR.

Finally Yeltsin gave a blow to the FNPR by proposing nationalization of Federation's property and Sotsprof asserted its rights to a portion of it, proposing that administrative offices and other facilities

be divided among existing unions. When Federation condemned Yeltsin's dissolution of Supreme Soviet as an illegal usurpation of power, it called a general strike against dissolution. Under de facto President's rule Yeltsin government undertook measures to undercut the Federation: enterprise financial organs were prohibited from collecting trade unions dues, Pension Funds were placed under control of the government and finance ministry; management of social security fund was transferred to the government.

In the autumn crisis Klochkov resigned and was replaced by Maikhail Shmakov former head of Moscow Trade Unions Federation. In December 1993 elections the Federation claimed a very 'apolitical' stance its popularity rating declined sharply among its member, 90% of whom were dissatisfied with the union. Its chairman proposed forming a left/centrist/laborite block, uniting social democratic and socialist parties and the unions and committed itself to the political representation and social protection of workers.<sup>9</sup>

After the Coup and Counter Coup of August 1991 a common pattern of development of workers' movement can be discerned in general and trade union movement in particular. The plight of Russian workers is intensely increasing with 'shock therapy'. Since his second coup in October 1993, the Yeltsin regime has abolished virtually all fundamental economic, social and legal achievements of the October revolution. In

November 1996 about 12 million people were without work in Russia and, those who were lucky enough to be employed, their wages were merely 25 to 30% of 1990 wages.<sup>10</sup> The vast state and enterprise- owned Soviet network of creches, kindergartens summer camps, vacation homes, cultural centres for children and adults has been abolished by privatization, becoming inaccessible to workers. Recently it was reported that a quarter of Russian workforce receive its wage late, in kind, or not at all.<sup>11</sup> In October 1996 wages worth of \$ 7.5 billion were unpaid.<sup>12</sup> It has a high moral and psychologically depressing impact upon the consciousness of the Russian working class. In December 1995 when workers were striking in Tractor plant for the non-payment of wages at Cheboksary, three workers committed suicide in protest against their hunger.<sup>13</sup> Russian working class is helplessly watching while the bureaucratic cliques, the criminal bourgeoisie, and foreign capitalists loot and destroy the productive forces of the country created by blood and sweat of generations of Soviet workers.

The social Darwinism in Russian life has hit very hard some sections of Russian workers along with the general populace. The IMF/IBRD recommended development (with their politics of deindustrialisation of third world) has led to the closure of many unprofitable enterprises. It has rendered jobless the vast mass of people particularly the unskilled, women and aged workers. The overall job situation faced by women summed up by the head of the Moscow Centre

for gender studies. "Typical view of the lower level manager was that they had to sack women because, under the new self-accounting system, each brigade had to earn more; and men in the brigade said that women did not work as hard as men and were legally protected from some kinds of work. Therefore, they should be the first to go."<sup>14</sup> "Abandoned by the bourgeois state, working class women have been exposed to the worst abuses of market. First to be laid off, last to be hired, they make up about 80% of all unemployed and get the least skilled and less paying jobs. Sexual harassment in the work place is rampant and goes unprosecuted. Many women are forced into prostitution as their only means to feed their children."<sup>15</sup>

One of the major reason for rise of independent trade unions was the branch principle of organization of unions which was ill-adapted to articulating and expressing the diverse interests of a membership spread over the wide range of occupations and industries. Hence organizations of unions along professional lines gathered momentum. It has raised the possibility of the emergence of sectional unions, representing particular categories of workers. In liberalization of economy presumed common interest of progressive management and workers in the restructuring of production. In this context such perspectives are at best divisive, representing an alliance between management and younger skilled male workers and technicians at the expense of older, unskilled and women workers.<sup>16</sup>

But such sectionalism can not be successful in the long run as such unions have no control over access to their occupation, the skills of workers in question are by no means in short supply, there is no secure basis on which to constitute the "Aristocracy of Labour", and solidaristic and egalitarian ideology of Russian working class.<sup>17</sup>

Both sectional and divisive tendencies can be seen as well as solidaristic orientations of the Russian working class. The first of these tendencies can be seen during 1991-92 teachers' strike call for wage increase. The independent miners' union, and workers' committees did not respond to their strike call. Again in 1995 the miners' displayed a token solidarity with the strike of teachers and health workers in Kuzbass, but again, in January 1996 when both the organizations of miners as well as of teachers were on strike simultaneously, no need was felt to coordinate the movement.

Not only this, the more profitable open cast mines have no interest in supporting the movement of other miners, rather they even increased their output to get more commercial contracts and profit undermined the trade union solidarity. It not only undermine the unity but negated the impact of the strike as such. It has been particularly seen that whenever the miners are on strike (from 1989 to 1997) they have always been supported by people and other working class organizations in one way or another. This fact gives strength to the solidaristic concept.

This has given a sense of "Vanguardism" to the miners, as they themselves never sought the help of other workers', taking care of their demands. This exclusion of other groups of workers from participation in the movement deprived the later of the experience of struggle through which their leaders could emerge and develop their organizational and negotiating skills, and could build their own organizations. Their "vanguardism" has certainly played a role in reproducing and reinforcing the passivity of other groups of workers.

Miners themselves are divided into mainly two organizations, NPG and Rosugleprof, the former hold the management responsible for the ills of workers while the latter directs its attack on government as originator of policies and controller of economy. The miners go for spontaneous strike since last 4 years and secure the payment of wages. This is supported by the NPG, but Rosugleprof is not inclined to support such strikes as this simply tended to involve the diversion of payment from one group of workers to another.<sup>18</sup>

However, the success of the miners from 1991 onwards did not so much depend on their TU's strength as, on the one hand, on the support they received from their employees, who had an equal interest in beating the subsidy out of Moscow, and on the other, the political conjectures in which the miners pressed their case.

In the beginning it was Yeltsin versus Gorbachev, while the September 1993 strikes took place at the time when Yeltsin was confronting with the Supreme Soviet. The December 1993 strikes of Miners also took place when Yeltsin and his party were facing the election for Duma. Miners skillfully articulated their demand and went on strike when Yeltsin was fighting Chechen war in February 1995. Likewise, they went on strike in February 1996 when Yeltsin went ahead for presidential election. In this way miners never missed any opportunity to bargain with government as and when she was facing some serious troubles.

Under the IMF/IBRD deindustrialization plan the govt. had been attempting to reduce the scale of the subsidy year by year. This has great effect on the mining industry as many mines are on the verge of closure. It will not only reduce the employment in general but also make 'much needed' skilled workers redundant. Today only one million skilled workers are employed which is five percent of the industrial working class.<sup>19</sup>

The threat of unemployment, ban on political activity at the workplace, and, growing direct physical terror against worker activists by the so-called security services, or more simply by armed thugs hired by owners and administration. This psychological and physical intimidation is further enhanced by the wall of silence about the real



conditions of working class erected by the "democratic" mass media, while the army of former Soviet experts on the national and international labour movement now advise the regime on how best to divide workers and prevent their self-organization. In this they are assisted by the AFL/CIO international department with its Moscow based operation, the free trade union institute (FTUI).

Another weakness of the trade unions and working class movement is that workers resent trade unions discipline as a reaction against the centralism of Soviet era while the mentality of trade unions leadership is to look for patronage in aligning with the management. The former had not allowed the development of any strong trade union organization worth the name and the latter had given an opportunity to management to use the labour strikes in their own interests.

This weakness of workers' movement became apparent when on July 10, 1998 workers met defence minister to get their backlogue of wages. In Moscow these workers came on foot walking for three days from distant places. Their head of trade union organization after meeting the authorities said "we have achieved our goal" "we wanted to attract attention to the critical situation in our industry and we succeeded. Our problems have been heard and we will get the money." But when next day Dy. Defense Minister Nikoloi Mikhailov met the protesters the angry crowd dismissed him "It is just mere empty promise". Shouted one man

who clutched a sign reading "Yeltsin, the rails are waiting for you."<sup>20</sup> The government owes to the defense workers \$ 400 million as their backlog pay. Their next action according to declaration is expected in December 1998.

The politicization of economic demands is the only and last hope of working class movement in Russia. Since the very beginning the workers have fashioned their demands in terms of sophisticated political economy. It can be observed in 1989-91 miners' strike. In September 1993 workers raised their demands in defense of Duma, in 1995 at Vladivostok power station they demanded resignation of president and government along with their demands, in January 1995 Vorkuta mines in their regional conference approved the political declaration of citizens of Russia which condemned the war in Chechnya and demanded the resignation of president and government. This is reminiscent of the historical tradition of Russian working class without which Russian workers stand alone, disoriented and demoralised, isolated inside the country and internationally.<sup>21</sup>

**NOTES**

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8. Prarda, 3 June, 1993.
9. Robochaya Tribuna, Nov.6, 1993.
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16. Simon Clarke, eds. op.cit., page 191.
17. Ibid, page 189.
18. Vadim, Borisov and Simon, Clarke. "The Russian Miner's Strike of Feb., 1996" Capital and Class, No.59, Summer, 1996, p.27.
19. Vladimir, Bilenkin, above cit., page 3.
20. St. Petersburg Times, 10 July, 1998, Front Page Story.
21. Vladimir, Bilenkin, above cit., page 6.

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