

STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF WORKERS AND THEIR TRADE UNIONS - RUSSIA

N. N. Gritsenko

Professor, Rector of the Academy of Labor and Social Relations, Moscow, Russia

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Contents

1. Introduction
 2. A Short History of Development of Labor and Trade Union Movement in Russia
 3. Trade Unions and Labor Movement in Present Public and State System of Russia
 - 3.1. Legal Basis of Trade Unions Activity
 - 3.2. Trade Unions' Functions in Social and Economic Life of the Country
 - 3.3. About the Role of International Labor Standards in Lawmaking and Law Protecting Activity of Trade Unions
 - 3.4. Rules and Mechanisms of Trade Unions' Regulation of their External Relations
 - 3.5. Problems Facing Trade Unions
 4. Perspectives of Development of Labor and Trade Union Movement in the Twenty-first Century
 5. Conclusion
- Glossary
Bibliography
Biographical Sketch

Summary

Russian labor and trade union movement was molded in a turbulence of Russian revolutions at the beginning of the twentieth century and always had strong ties with political developments in the country. Presently an important element of institutional change is creation of solid and just legal frameworks for trade unions to enable them represent and protect workers rights and interests. At the initial stage of Russian reforms it was a serious mistake of liberal reformers to edge trade unions and workers out of programming and control of market transformations. Nevertheless, trade unions managed to persuade legislators to include the conception of “social state” in Russian Constitution and approve some laws forming a solid base for further development of trade unionism, tripartism, and social partnership. A wide application of international labor standards and active co-operation with the world trade union and labor movement opens for Russian trade unions a perspective of contributing to promotion of principles and practice of sustainable development nationally and internationally.

1. Introduction

Sustainable and peaceful world development in the presence of growing rate of globalization, openness of national economies, acceleration of the processes of civilized solution of the problems which emerge due to the global-scale utilization of material,

human and other resources are possible only on condition that popular support of these processes are provided. This latter depends, in its turn, on harmonious combination of socio-economic and other interests of “elite” and “masses,” labor and capital, state and society—all subjects forming the system of tripartism (governments, trade unions, and employers) operating on the international as well as on the national levels.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that a search for ways and means of harmonization of human communities’ interests, of just and legitimate creation and concerted distribution of collectively produced goods for the benefits of all its members—is presently the main task for achievement of the world sustainable development. Russia is a country with a population of 145 million, with a large production, intellectual capacities, and natural resources. Its stability and impact on the world development to a larger extent depends on the role of working people and their trade unions in transformation processes within Russian society.

2. A Short History of Development of Labor and Trade Union Movement in Russia

The formation of a capitalist mode of production at the beginning of twentieth century in Russia drastically aggravated contradictions between labor and capital. By 1905 there were about 20 millions of employed workers in the country. The length of their working day was 10 hours and in many cases it was as long as 14–16 hours. Their wages were very low and often were depleted by many penalties which took off up to 30% out of their earnings. Absence of adequate labor conditions and safety measures, lack of social and health insurance and poor living facilities provoked massive workers unrest and pushed them to active resistance to government policy and inspired organized industrial actions against their employers.

The war against Japan made social tension in the country more acute. Public authorities and employers did not make radical steps towards softening this tension and on January 3, 1905 a strike was launched by workers of the Putilov factory in Petersburg, which took in about 90% of working people in the capital city. The waves of strikes rolled over Russia. The revolution of 1905–1907 was unleashed and during this period strike committees and trade unions were created to consolidate workers’ efforts in their economic struggle to force administration to sign collective agreements providing appropriate labor conditions and better standards of life for workers.

Later, when in emigration in France, the ex- Chairman of the Council Of Ministers of Russia, S. Yu. Vitte wrote in his memoirs that there would not be any revolutionary actions if the Tsarist government and nationalist parties were more attentive to demands of workers and their families. “It is a common rule”—argued S. Vitte—“that people demand economic and social reforms. When Government systematically refuses it, then people come to a conclusion that their aspirations could not be satisfied by this regime hence they put aside these economic and social demands and turn to political ones as instruments of realization of their economic and social goals.” Unfortunately, these lessons given by the History were not mastered by Russian ruling elite and by 1917 socioeconomic contradictions accumulated within Russian society again. They were not timely resolved and then triggered a second revolution, which shook the whole world.

3. Trade Unions and Labor Movement in Present Public and State System of Russia

Historically rooted in revolution of 1905, Russian trade unions formed in 1990 their Federation of Independent Trade Unions which presently is a largest trade union association in Russia embracing 121 member-organizations including 42 all-Russian interregional trade unions and 79 territorial trade associations. Moreover, six trade unions cooperate with the FITUR under formal agreement. The Federation has contacts with trade unions in 80 countries and with 30 international organizations. It is a member of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. Apart of the FITUR and its associates there are some other organizations forming since end of 1980s so called “alternative trade unions” with much smaller membership. Their appearance in transitional Russia was quite predictable under conditions of emerging democracy and ideological chaos when new concepts of trade unionism and its role within society were grown up locally and imported from abroad.

Most known of them are: Association of Trade Unions of Russia (SocProf of Russia) founded in May 1989; Independent Trade Union of Coal Miners—in 1990; Russian Confederation of Free Trade Unions—in February 1991; Federation of Trade Unions of Air Traffic Controllers and some others.

Most of them initially emerged as an alternative to “communist” trade unions forming the AUCCTU of the Soviet time but later their confrontation was re-oriented towards the FITUR. Typically, this was a case of SocProf of Russia, which forms an umbrella for small and medium-sized trade unions operating on enterprise, industry and regional levels.

Quite independently and without any alternative or confrontation intentions new type of Russian trade unions appeared as a result of emergence of enterprises in the non-state sector in Russian economy. Four of these unions amalgamated and formed in 1992 a new all-Russia trade union center—the Congress of Russian Trade Unions, which claim a membership of 2.5 million people. As a rule, trade unions of the non-state sector actively promote entrepreneurship, protect new forms of ownership from state intervention but put the task of protection of interests of employees on the second place in their activity. There are trade unions formed by members of co-operative societies, by individual businessmen, military servicemen.

There are evidences that by the end of 1990s excessive fragmentation and even confrontation within Russian trade union movement is gradually replaced by tendency of consolidation and cooperation supported by growing pressure of unresolved problems of unemployment, standards of life deterioration, violation of workers’ rights etc. which stimulates better understanding of traditional trade union motto: “United we stand, divided we fall!”

3.1. Legal Basis of Trade Unions Activity

Trade unions’ rights in their relations with state bodies, local governments, employers, and public associations are stipulated by the Constitution of the Russian Federation and

by some laws. The Russian Constitution was adopted in 1993 and its Article 30 says: “Everybody has right on association including right to form trade union to protect his interests. Freedom of public associations’ activity is guaranteed.” Trade Unions together with scholars from the Academy of Labor and Social Relations took direct and active part in preparation of this Article of the Basic Law as well as Article 7 proclaiming Russia a social state.

The decision in favor of this model of state system was based on assumption that it corresponds to the previous historical experience of socialization in Russia, mentality of our citizens, most complete consolidation of state and public efforts to provide necessary conditions for decent life of our people. Here we relied upon positive experience of many European nations, such as Germany and France, which are social states by their constitutions.

The Trade Unions’ position in favor of selection for Russia social state model was motivated additionally by considerations that social state carries out its social and economic politics in accordance with principles of tariff autonomy, social responsibility, solidarity and justice, social dialog with working people and their trade unions—all these providing for stability in the development of society. Later, in 1996, our Trade Unions took an active part in adoption of the Federal Law “On trade unions, their rights and constitutional guarantees of their activity.”

Previously, legal questions of trade unions’ activity was regulated by the USSR Law “On trade unions, their rights and constitutional guarantees of their activity,” as well as by some others laws. The subject matter of regulation by 1996 Law on trade unions were public relations emerging as a result of exercising by our citizens their constitutional right on association, creation and running, reorganization or liquidation of their trade unions. This Law set up legal basis for creation of trade unions, their rights and guarantees of their activity as well as a mechanism of regulation of trade unions’ relations with state bodies, local authorities, employers and their associations, other public associations, juridical persons, and citizens.

3.2. Trade Unions’ Functions in Social and Economic Life of the Country

All aspects of social and moral climate in the nation, social consent, rate of social and economic development etc. depend on scale and depth of insertion of trade unions as organizations of working people into the system of state governance, their involvement in economic and social management. It was a serious mistake of liberal reformers at an initial stage of Russian reforms to edge trade unions out of development of a strategy and tactics of market transformations, depriving them of many former functions of social protection, enterprise management, and privatization activities etc. Immediately it brought about an aggravation of the economic and social situation in the country.

By doing so, liberal reformers lost public trust and workers’ support of reforms. They lost a system of constructive opposition and a sort of feedback and as a result many irreparable mistakes were made provoking heavy economic and social crisis, destabilization of society and losses of hopes for economic growth and sustainable development.

During the last few years' signs of correction of ways and means of systemic transformation clearly appeared. Amending legislation restored some basic trade unions rights, i.e. right on representation and protection of workers' social and labor rights and interests. At the same time, it was provided that any draft legislation concerning social and labor rights of working people should be considered by federal authorities with due regard to propositions made by all-Russian trade unions. Drafts of normative legislation acts prepared by executive authorities should be adopted only when respective trade unions' position is taken into account.

Trade unions have the right to initiate laws and other legislative acts concerning social and labor matters to be adopted by appropriate state bodies. Trade unions protect rights of their members to dispose freely of their labor ability, to choose their trade and profession. Also, they protect a right on adequate remuneration of labor without any discrimination and earnings at no less than minimal wage level established by federal law. Wage systems, forms of material incentives, tariff rates and work norms are established by employers after coming to an agreement with appropriate trade union bodies and are fixed in collective agreements.

Trade unions play an important role in decision-making concerning problems of employment and development of state programs of employment. They propose measures of social protection of workers dismissed as a result of restructuring or liquidation of enterprises, implement employment monitoring and control on laws observation in this field.

Trade unions also control legal proceedings in dissolution of labor contracts with their members when initiative of this action comes from employers. Trade unions are entitled also to negotiate and to conclude collective agreements and to control their observation; they have right on information; on participation in professional training of trade union activists; on exercising control on labor safety and nature environment.

In case of exposure of labor safety violations endangering lives and health of workers, trade union bodies and inspectors have rights to demand from administration to eradicate these violations and to appeal to Federal Labor Inspection to undertake urgently necessary measures.

The heaviest economic, social and moral losses were caused by non-participation of trade unions in the voucher privatization of state federal and municipal property. By different ways workers of many enterprises were deprived of their vouchers. At the end of voucher privatization share of stocks belonging to individual workers was about 50% but by the end of 2000 it dropped to 20–35% and in some cases to 2–10%.

Nowadays, belatedly, the State by law admitted trade unions to take part in privatization and included their representatives in committees managing privatization of state and municipal property including objects of social infrastructure. Trade unions are accomplishing social protection of workers by participating in the work of social insurance and health protection organizations, welfare system etc. They play an important role protecting working people's interests during labor arbitration when labor law is violated.

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Biographical Sketch

Nicolai Nicolaevich Gritsenko, Rector of Academy of Labor and Social Relations since 1986. Doctor of Science in Economy, professor, Honored Scientist of the Russian Federation, full member of Academy of Social Sciences and International Academy of Informatization. President of section of social-labor relations of International Academy of Informatization. Member of Presidium of the Council of Rectors of Moscow and Moscow Region. Born in June 11, 1929 in Voronezh of the Sumsk Region in Ukraine. In 1958 graduated from Chelyabinsk Polytechnic Institute. Worked at the enterprises of Donbass and Ural. Was elected Chairman of the Commission of Council of the Union of Supreme Soviet of the USSR for labor, prices and social policy. Famous scientist in social-labor relations. An author of more than 200 scientific papers. Made a great contribution to the scientific development of social protection, employment, educational right of citizens, social partnership. Awarded with orders of Labor Red Banner, Friendship of Nations, "Badge of Honor," "For the Merits before Motherland," of IV degree, with six medals and honored marks of many scientific associations.