

# Awakening USSR Unions

By GEORGE MORRIS

MOST world attention is currently drawn to the east European socialist democracies where popular pressure is forcing speedier democratization and other departures from Stalin-era practices. But there are also some very significant developments in that direction within the Soviet Union itself, although less spectacularly. My interest at the moment is a 10,000-word editorial that feature the September (No. 13) issue of "Kommunist" the theoretical magazine of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the most authoritative guide to Soviet policy. It is on "Building of Communism and the Trade Unions."



The editorial is almost revolutionary in the scope of its examination and the tasks it sets for the Soviet labor organizations. I say almost revolutionary because it implies tremendous changes for the unions from the life they led for decades. The unions are looked upon as the means for a needed awakening of mass activity and initiative from below.

We are not dealing here with some minor aspect of Soviet life. The editorial discloses there are 45 million members in the USSR's unions. This is more membership than in all the unions of West Europe and United States combined.

The statistics of "Kommunist" disclose there are 1,300,000 delegates in the vast trade union apparatus for administration of insurance and welfare funds; 1,100,000 union inspectors on safety and labor protection; 1,

100,000 organizers and activities in union cultural activity; 442,000 more are involved in controls of supply of workers' needs, feeding provisions, etc. Numerous other fields, including wage scale committees and consumer affairs occupy some 5,000,000 trade unionists. In all, says the "Kommunist" there are a total of 16 million who represent the "live personal participation of the working masses in social and government functions through their unions."

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BUT, "Kommunist" finds, the work of the unions very weak and the initiative of their members has been stifled in many respects. Many unions are sharply criticized for lack of "militancy."

"Kommunist" goes back to the post-revolutionary days when Lenin fought some in the Communist Party who minimized or entirely eliminated the role of unions in the period of socialism. Lenin stressed that the role of the unions, far from diminishing, increases as the people progress through socialism to Communism.

But while under capitalism the struggles of the unions have a class character, after the workers take power, they continue a "classless economic" struggle against bureaucracy, perversion of the Soviet government machinery, in defense of the material and spiritual interests of the workers, etc. And "Kommunist" adds that the Soviet apparatus has "far from outlived manifestations of bureaucracy and there is still a great deal of hardness and an inhuman attitude towards workers."

"Kommunist" observes that now, 39 years after the revolution, there are still some who minimize the role of unions and challenge the Leninist position on the question and continues:

"One reason for the appear-

ance of such views—is the cult of the individual—the inescapable result of which has been the limitation of the activity of the masses, belittling of the role of mass organizations of the working people, among them the unions."

The magazine observes that this trend (developed under Stalin's leadership—G.M.) was also reflected in the weak theoretical work of unions on their role after the revolution, so that "in the past 15-20 years not one significant theoretical work has appeared on the role of unions from a Marxist viewpoint." The CPSU proceeds from the Leninist view, says the editorial, that the role of unions "does not diminish but, to the contrary, increases" as the people come closer to Communism. It follows, therefore, that their activity must not drop but rise."

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"WHY?" asks the paper. "Because with the spread and strengthening of Communism all the greater becomes the activity of the masses, their creative energy and initiative and their ability to attract new millions of working people for a conscious planned struggle for Communism."

Preceding from the decision of the 20th Congress of the CPSU for a program to "decisively lift the role of the unions" and Khrushchev's criticism of the unions for lack of militancy, "Kommunist" leveled some very sharp criticism. We can only give a few samples of it from the very lengthy document:

"It must be plainly said that many of the union organizations do not carry on this struggle with sufficient perseverance. Because some of the unions themselves underestimate their functions in defense of the interests

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of the working people.

"It is that very militancy that is absent in many of the union organizations. As had been noted in the main report of the 20th Congress 'the unions have ceased to dispute with management among them everything is smooth.'"

"Kommunist" says that some make the claim there are no ways to settle grievances because the unions do not have the authority to remove a manager. The problem, however, continues "Kommunist" is not to be able to remove a manager but that some unions don't know how to "make use of the most effective power under Soviet conditions—the power of popular opinion."

An example is given of a grievance struggle in a truck plant in Lvov, Ukraine, where the management seemed unmoved. The trade union committee in the plant then brought the workers into action in plant meetings that stretched for two days at which the issues were taken up with spirit and vigor and finally a settlement came through. "Kommunist" followed:

"As we see, the trade unions have rights, and those rights are real. But to realize those rights—means to struggle, to wage a fight, to show 'big teeth' and to be able to stand up for the interests of the workers. And many of the trade union organs have lost that quality."

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SHARP criticism is leveled at

"Trud," daily paper of the Central Council of the Soviet trade unions, for only "rarely criticizing" the carriers of bureaucracy into the trade unions.

The editorial is equally critical for both bureaucracy within the unions and a bureaucratic attitude of Communist Party organizations and leaders towards the unions.

"Trade unions, free, independent, popular organizations, have their own constitutions, their own norms and rules on internal life: these norms and rules must be observed," says "Kommunist."

A long period of stifled life during the Stalin era has left much of the vast union apparatus lifeless. The task of arousing the unions to a realization of their historic role is not easy as we can see. But once that giant of 45,000,000 with 16,000,000 activists gets really moving, we will witness tremendous strides towards improvement in living standards in the USSR and greater substance to the concept of socialism in that country.

It also appears to me that there is new emphasis on first principles — those elementary concepts Marxists always stressed in their appeal, that socialism means working people running things through a new and a much enervated democracy.

As "Kommunist" says the unions are "the most important organizational forms for the conscious participation of the masses in the building of Communism" and it is impossible to make them such a force and secure a confidence without that needed militancy and fighting form as defends of the workers' economic and other material interests.