

„Workers of the world, unite!“

The All-Russian Trade Union of Civil Servants, Shop Assistants and Clerks.

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The All-Russian Trade Union of Civil Servants, Shop Assistants and Clerks.

At the present moment our Trade Union includes all clerks, independent of their profession, working in the distributive and supplying organs (food distribution organs, cooperatives &c.) and in all Soviet institutions (commissariats, soviets, councils of national economy, "Centres" &c.), with the exception of the Commissariat of the Means of Communication and of Posts and of Telegraphs, the employees of which form part of the corresponding industrial unions.

Before the October revolution of 1917 there existed in all the Russian towns unions of shop assistants and clerks organised after the overthrow of czarism. The fusion of these single unions into one big union on an All-Russian scale was very weak, though there existed a Council of the trade unions of shop assistants which had been elected on the fifth All-Russian Congress and which tried to unite all similar unions, of the unions of factory clerks (which at that period were organised apart from the workmen), of the workers of the restaurant trade and of the commercial fleet (at that time there was no general union of the workers of the water transport). The former societies of mutual help created among the shop assistants and clerks, which had not reorganised themselves in time and the functions of which, before the revolution of 1905 and after the same up to the liquidation after the revolution of 1917, were limited with the distribution of small subsidies in case of illness or death, with the organisation of medical

help, of clubs and libraries, also formed part of the above mentioned council. Some of these societies of mutual help numbered among their members also merchants, the latter often being the initiators of the organisation of the said societies before 1905. Neither before the revolution nor after the same did these societies fight for the increase of salary or the improvement of general conditions of labour; before 1905 they carried on the campaign for obtaining weekly day's rest for clerks, but their efforts generally remained without result. Beyond this the societies of mutual help did not display any other activity. It is, therefore, quite natural, that when in 1905 there arose the possibility of organising themselves, shop assistants, clerks and warehouse men, similar to factory workers, at once organised themselves in all the Russian towns into Trade Unions and started the struggle against the employers for the ten hours working day and for the full weekly day's rest and holiday's rest, this struggle being conducted by means of strikes, local demonstrations which sometimes ended with breaking of window panes in the shops of some of the most obstinate tradesmen. This struggle lasted until the decreeing of the provisional law about the normal rest of the employees which in principle fixed the ten hours day and the weekly day's rest; in Petersburg this struggle was being carried on also after the police authorities had closed the union of shop assistants, in the place of which an illegal organisation had been created under the name of „Council of Delegates“ which united chiefly the employees of the big enterprises represented through delegates of the single undertakings; this council of delegates used to assemble at Terioki, beyond the Finnish frontier, and existed until spring 1907, when again the trade union of shop assistants and clerks was created. From that moment also in other Russian towns trade unions of shop assistants, clerks and warehousemen were being formed, the acti-

vity of which was, however, strongly limited by police measures, frequent arrests of the members of the Board, their expulsion, the closing of the unions themselves. In some towns the respective departments refused to register these trade unions and in order to elude the orders of the administration the clerks had to limit their activity with the seizing of the old societies of mutual help and the organising of new unions, directing their activity according the general course of the professional movement, (for example in the Ural and Siberia). With the beginning of the war in 1914 in all the towns,—with very few exceptions—the above trade unions were closed by the authorities and until the revolution of 1917 one could not even think of a trade union movement.

The year 1917 is marked in the history of the professional movement by universal strikes aiming at the increase of wages, the eight hours working day and other improvements of conditions of labour, and after every single strike collective treaties were being signed with single merchants, as well as with groups or trusts of the same. After the October revolution conflicts between employees and employers were being settled peacefully, because the unions rested already upon the power and authority of the proletariat, and the employers were no longer in a position to apply to the police, as they did before.

The strikes of civil servants during the October revolution directed against the latter very soon called forth the reaction on the part of the lower employees which were not interested in the maintenance of the power of the bourgeoisie, and these latter, reinforced with groups of civil servants devoted or sympathising with the proletarian revolution, organised the All-Russian Union of Civil Servants (later called the union of Soviet employees) as a counterpoise to the illegal committee which was leading

the strike of the sabotaging officials Our Trade Union in the shape in which it appears at present was formed from the fusion of this union of Civil servants with the union of clerks and cooperative workers which existed since May 1919. The complete fusion of our trade union on an All-Russian scale was proclaimed in May 1919 at the second All-Russian Special Congress of all trade unions making part of our federation. The First All-Russian Congress took place in July 1918 but without the result of a lasting fusion because of the dissidence between the communists and the independent group of the trade-union movement, and only at the November conference of this year an agreement between these groups was reached, ratified at the Second Special Congress, when the Communists had the majority of votes.

Besides the above mentioned two congresses, from the year 1898 to 1917 including, five congresses had been organised: the first two congresses were held before 1905 and represented only the societies of mutual aid. The third Congress took place in 1906; 90% of the delegates to this congress represented the societies of mutual aid the remaining 10% the trade unions (for several reasons the majority of the trade unions including the Petersburg union of shop assistants and clerks, did not participate in this congress). The fourth Congress took place in 1913 under the pressure of the awakening movement of the shop assistants in connection with the general awakening of labour movement and the deterioration of the law about normal rest; at this congress, which attracted the attention of large circles of society, a fierce struggle was carried on between the representatives of the old societies of mutual help and the representatives of the trade unions marching under the flag of social democracy; by order of the minister of the interior the congress was closed before having ended its work.

In 1917, in the Kerensky epoch, the fifth congress took place, which was represented by 146 delegates from 105 trade unions and 64 delegates from 36 societies of mutual help. It was then decided to reorganise the societies of mutual help into trade unions and where the latter already existed to fuse these societies with the same. The first congress of the trade unions of shop assistants and clerks was then fixed for the year 1918, at which date no societies of mutual help were to exist any more. In the quality of a temporary federation and for preparing the first congress the Council of trade unions of shop assistants and clerks was then elected.

After the October revolution the activity of our trade union took quite a different shape. The strike movement was completely eliminated, because the employers easily agreed with the demands put before them in the name of the union, and besides, since industry had been nationalised and the whole apparatus of supplying and distributing products and goods had passed into the hands of the proletarian state, the economic struggle in general had lost all meaning, there being no necessity for same.

The change in the functions of the union consisted in the fact that after the seizure of the power by the workers, the trade unions of clerks, especially in the big commercial centres, and also in the Ural, directed their utmost attention towards the correct organisation of the question of supply and distribution. Before the nationalisation of the trade was proclaimed in the private warehouses and stores the employees control commissions were formed which undertook the task of controlling the commercial and financial activity of the concern. These control commissions played an important part in the preparation for the nationalisation of trade in those towns where they existed. At the same time the unions of clerks took an active part in the councils of national economy, the latter having special

commercial sections composed of representatives of these unions of clerks. These commercial sections or departments in the big centres prepared and carried through the nationalisation in close collaboration with the above unions. For example, in Petersburg, the union effected the registration of all the employees of the nationalised trade, drew up the lists of the staff for each distributor and appointed managers for the distributive organs and the warehouses. Stock-taking was also being effected under the control of these commissions. It must be mentioned, that the nationalisation of trade passed comparatively well only in those towns, where it was being effected with the immediate participation of the unions of clerks and shop assistants, like for example, Petrograd, Ivanovo-Vosnesensk, Vladimir, Voronesh, and other towns, and in some towns of the Ural.

It must also be expressly noted, that if, in some towns, the unions of employees did not take any part in the nationalisation of the trade, this was the fault of their leaders who declared themselves in principle against nationalisation. The Council of the trade unions of shop assistants and clerks, elected at the first Congress in which the communists refused to make part, conducted a policy of boycott against nationalisation and changed its standpoint in this question when it was already too late—after the nationalisation of trade had been effected. The subsequent participation of the union in the distributive and supplying organs was mostly limited to the selection of experienced managers and specialists, which were being directed to the work in food and other similar organisations.

Apart from this the union undertook the task of introducing labour discipline among the employees of the institutions and concerns forming part of it; the Central Committee of the Union worked out a „Regulation“ on labour discipline

confirmed by the Central Council of Trade Unions and Peoples Commissariat of Labour. This regulation is being applied at present in all the institutions of Soviet Russia under the direction of the gubernia departments and district (uyesd) sections of our federation.

The Structure of the Federation.

The fundamental nucleus of the union is the committee of clerks, elected at the general assembly of the employees of a given institution or concern. In large combined institutions, divided into big departments, each of which has a strictly determined circle of functions, and situated sometimes in various parts of the city, the committees are being elected separately in every department or enterprise depending from the said institution. To the functions of these committees belongs the representation of the interests of the clerks at the administration, the recruiting of new members for the union, the collection of members contributions, the maintaining of a permanent contact with the local administration of the union, the application of the decisions and resolutions of the union among the clerks of the given institution, the execution of all the tasks of the union in the way of tariffs, protection of labour, culture and educational work and the raising of labour productivity through application of labour discipline in the single institutions.

All committees of a said town or district are united in the local branch of the union (district branch, branch of the city in government towns). The chief administrator of the local branch is the conference of committees, forming part of the branch; the running work of the section is being executed by its administration, elected at the Conference of Committees.

All district branches of a given government or region form the government branches of the union administrated by the government conference and the government administration; the government conference is composed of representatives elected at the district conferences of committees at a fixed proportion, and in the government town at the city conference of committees; the government administration and the revision committee are being elected by the government department.

The number of branches of the union is 416, they are united into 41 government departments. In this way each government department on the average includes ten branches. At the present moment the federation unites 646,040 members on the Russian territory excepting Siberia, the Ukraina and Turkestan, where the process of organisation of the union is not yet terminated,—while at the moment of the Second Special Congress in May 1919 the union counted only 350,000 members, i. e. in the course of one year the number of members increased by about 300,000 or 100%. Each district branch on the average includes 800 members and all 375 branch about 300,000 members. Each city branch of a government town counts on the average 8,440 members, and 41 government towns together count 346,000 members.

To these we must add 25,000 members in the Turkestan, where the branches of the unions are being united by the regional committee which only in the end of March of this year got into touch with the central committee of the union—it could not do it before, this region being cut off from Soviet Russia.

As regards the borders—Siberia, Ukraina (the Ural is included in the above figures), no exact information could be obtained up to now neither regarding the restoration of the union organisations destroyed or more or less damaged during the domination of Denikin and Koltchak,

nor regarding the number of members of the organisations which have already been called into life again, with the exception of the Kharkoff, Kieff and Ekaterinoslaff sections counting together about 35,000 members.

The chief organ of the union is the All-Russian Congress convoked once a year. The same elects the central committee and its Board for the management of the activity of the union, which is executing the daily running work and representing the union.

The plenum of the central committee is convoked every two months. The delegates to the All-Russian Conference are elected at the government conferences according to a determined proportion. At the 2nd Special Congress in 1919 the central committee elected was composed as follows: 21 members out of which 12 communists, 6 partisans of the independence of the trade union movement 3 internationalists; the Board of the central committee was composed of 11 members,—6 communists, 3 partisans of the independence of the trade union movement and 2 internationalists; after the fusion of the internationalist with the communist party the internationalist members of the central committee and of the Board fused with the communists, thus increasing the number of votes of the latter.

The Classification of Wages.

The wage-classification of our union on an All-Russian scale began to be applied only since February 1919. The entire tariff work of the union is concentrated in the Tariff Department of the Central Committee. At present all the branches of the union have central tariff taxation commissions which have the task of applying the tariffs in the precincts of their branch.

Every institution or enterprise together with the committee of employees, organises a tariff commission composed of representatives in equal number of the clerks and the administration.

These commissions divide the clerks into groups and categories of the tariff net work, qualifying the work of every single person, and fix according to the tariff system the rate of pay, after which the lists are passed on to the Central Tariff Commission of the branch of the union. After having been confirmed by the latter Commission the tariffs become obligatory for the given institution. In case conflicts arise which cannot be settled in the Tariff Department of the Central Committee, the Higher Tariff Commission must be applied to, the decisions of which are considered definite in all questions practical and of principle.

Recently the Central Committee drew up a project of normal terms of labour and the introduction of the premium system of wages. These questions are quite new and extremely difficult for our union, but the first steps in this direction have been taken already—the general scheme of the premium system of pay is worked out. This premium question is closely tied to the question of raising of productivity of labour and of labour discipline, therefore when speaking of this question, several points—besides the one fundamental point, that of strict regulation of the terms of labour—have to be considered, like: reduced staff, individual initiative, definite tasks (the execution of a determined work, at a determined period), the stage of service in an institution (this being introduced for the purpose of struggle against the frequent changes of service from one institution into another).

In the province the premium system of wages will be applied only after the schemes worked out by the Central Commission of the Union have been confirmed.

The distribution of special industrial clothing among the clerks also belongs to the circle of activity of the tariff commission. According to the lists presented for the first receipt 138,000 garments have been received (footwear, various upper clothing, warm clothing, overalls, gloves, half sleeves etc.), which is about 70% of all the things required. The lists to be presented for the second receipt are not yet drawn up.

Protection of Labour.

The work of protection of labour of clerks and shop assistants employed in the provinces is not yet properly established chiefly because of the lack of experienced workers, which up to now were kept back on the fronts of the civil war. Besides, this work can only be fully developed with the improvement of the economic situation of the country, because under the present conditions many measures concerning protection of labour cannot as yet be applied. Therefore, the activity of our union in this direction is limited, chiefly, to the settlement of conflicts and also to the elaboration of various materials and regulations connected with the question of labour protection. These latter are then put before the Central Council of Trade Unions and the Peoples Commissariat of Labour for confirmation, and among them are to be noted: 1) Reports addressed to the Council of Peoples Commissaries and the Peoples Commissaries of Labour about reduction of staff in the institutions and stores and the utilisation of available labour forces; 2) regulation about the „inspection“ for persons serving in small enterprises; 3) „regulation about labour discipline“ for employees; 4) materials in the question of the 6-hours working day for office and mental workers employed in institutions with 8 hours

working day; 5) regulations about overtime work for persons above 20th tariff category; 6) instructions for application of the „Regulation on disciplinary courts of honour“.

It is further to be noted that the Union has got the permission of instituting in seven of the biggest centres (Moscow, Tula, Petrograd, Nishnij Novgorod, Saratoff and Vitebsk).

In the big centres the union also succeeded in with drawing underaged children from work and placing them under the care of the Social Maintenance Board. The detailed examination of conditions of life of civil servants, which had been undertaken, could not be carried to the end because of the lack of experienced workers.

Cultural and Educational Work.

Notwithstanding the great possibilities offered, the activity of the union in this direction has not developed very much. Partly this fact can be explained with the foundation of a large number of governmental and general proletarian educational institutions, and such an activity on the part of the unions would therefore, in most of the towns, introduce a kind of parallelism in the work of the above organisations.

In a considerable measure the educational work of the union is so little developed because of the general reasons, i. e. of the impossibility of applying a sufficient number of experienced workers towards the same, these latter being needed for military purposes and for the reconstruction of the socialist state. There is as yet no complete data of all the educational institutions, training of the union-clubs, libraries, scientific and professional courses. In connection with the scarcity of skilled workers in

the institutions, many departments of our federation (especially in the Ural where the skilled workers had been evacuated by Koltchak, partly by force and partly on their own free will) started the organisation of courses for special professional training. The results of these courses have until now proved very satisfactory thus filling the ranks of the skilled workers.

At present steps are being taken for the centralisation of the activity of the union in the spheres of professional training and also in other spheres of educational work, following the example of other branches of the union's activity—the financial and tariff organisation,—the centralisation of which has been attained already in the most essential points.

*The Board of the Central Committee of the
All-Russian Trade Union of Civil Workers, Shop
Assistants, Clerks and Warehousemen.*

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