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THE INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE SOVIET TRADE UNIONS

by

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A recent issue of a US journal specializing in American labor history featured an essay by two Soviet scholars that surveyed current Russian studies on American labor affairs. While conceding the importance of the international activities of American trade unions and, consequently, the necessity for appropriate treatment in any comprehensive coverage of the US labor scene, they observed, nonetheless, that this area "remains one that has not been sufficiently elucidated in Soviet literature."¹

Compared with this state of "insufficient elucidation" on the Soviet side, the corollary status of American research on the international operations of the All Union Central Council of Trade Unions (AUCCTU) is in much worse condition, in fact it is practically non-existent. No lack exists of polemical material, particularly in a number of American labor publications, but none of the specialists, to this writer's knowledge, have thus far undertaken a study of this area.

The reasons for this lacuna are fairly clear. Soviet-American relations continue to be difficult and frequently contentious. Above all, a climate of intense hostility has long prevailed between the leaderships of the labor organizations of the two countries. Furthermore, under normal circumstances, Russian officialdom exhibits an extraordinary sensitivity when confronted by anything even remotely related to matters of security. In the field of international activities which occasionally does involve matters of a confidential and even conspiratorial nature, AUCCTU personnel have gone to extraordinary lengths to shield their operations from prying eyes.

1. N. V. Sivachev and I.M. Savel'eva "American Labor in Recent Soviet Historiography," Labor History, Summer 1977, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 407-432.

Western researchers who go to Russia with the intention of conducting first-hand observations of the Russian labor scene have encountered formidable obstacles. It is not uncommon upon arriving in the Soviet Union for researchers in this field to find themselves limited to a study of merely marginal aspects of a given labor subject. One can easily imagine the fate of anyone intent upon scrutinizing the AUCCTU's international operations.

The International Role of the AUCCTU

It is a generally applicable postulate that the international activities of trade unions tend to mirror developments in the larger sphere of regional and world affairs. The tradition of international labor solidarity notwithstanding, it is first and foremost the perceived national interests that primarily shape the outlooks of most labor organizations. A crucial delineator must be added--the degree to which trade unions in a given society or political system act primarily in their own interest--the workers' interest--or that of the government.

Since the USSR is structured along monolithic, highly centralized lines, the trade unions must necessarily function as an organic part of the social fabric of the state. Possessing little significant collective bargaining functions, labor organizations tend to serve as overseers, taskmasters and administrators for the government in the field of labor affairs. To an appreciably lesser extent they also accomplish a labor representational role. We have sought during the course of this conference to weigh and assess this dual aspect of Soviet trade unionism. But with respect to the international activities of the AUCCTU no such problem arises

for this is an area that involves, first and foremost, national foreign policy interests as well as intra-communist relations. In this area the Soviet trade unions have always acted as a functional instrumentality to carry out the foreign policy objectives of the government and as an auxiliary arm for the Communist Party (CPSU) in the conduct of its relations with sister parties throughout the world. Over the years the nature of this function has remained unaltered but the scale of its activities has undergone an impressive expansion since the fifties.

The international affairs department of the AUCCTU possesses a large staff including numerous country "desk officers," regional specialists as well as those who closely follow the affairs of the World Federation of Trade Unions, relations with the Council for Economic Mutual Assistance (CEMA), the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions, the Organization of African Trade Union Unity, the International Labor Organization, etc. A research institute headed by Timofei Timofeyev, the son of Eugene Dennis, the late General Secretary of the American Communist Party, provides research back-up and assessments of foreign labor developments. The international operations of the AUCCTU are closely meshed with those of other government and party organs with foreign policy responsibilities. Vsevolod Mozhayev, the present director of the international affairs department, is a career foreign service officer and apparently on loan from the Foreign Ministry. Mozhayev's superior is Piotr Pimenov, a veteran senior labor functionary, a first secretary, and a member of the AUCCTU Presidium. Pimenov apparently is responsible for executive level direction of international policies and activities.

Close liaison is maintained between the AUCCTU, the Foreign Ministry, intelligence agencies, as well as Soviet embassies in many foreign countries, the latter actively seek to establish or further relations between the AUCCTU and local labor organizations.

Labor Dimensions of East-West Detente

The expansion of the AUCCTU international role since the end of the second world war is a direct consequence of the rise of the Soviet Union to world power status and its increasing involvement in far-flung diplomatic and trade relations. Following the end of the cold war era and the ensuing East-West rapprochement, a resumption of contacts in the cultural and scientific fields took place, and by the early sixties relations between the two regions were increasingly extended to the trade union field as well. The national labor centers of Western Europe and the lesser developed regions increasingly established bilateral relations in the form of exchange visits by delegations from their respective organizations. The practice has now developed to a point where it has become an accepted component of overall diplomatic and trade relations between the USSR and most non-Communist nations.

As East-West tensions eased, a general disposition developed within the non-Communist Western European labor community to conduct relations with its Eastern European counterparts in step with the evolving climate of detente. Trade union exchanges with the Communist East are presently viewed as an expression of Western European labor's support for East-West detente, and the belief that it has a role to play in promoting a general relaxation of tensions.

The Russian quest for influence in Western European and Third World labor affairs has its source in both ideological and strategic considerations. It is, of course, axiomatic in Soviet thinking to view the industrial proletariat everywhere as the true source of political and economic power. Influence in this strategic sector is not only crucial for domestic political forces, it is also regarded as indispensable for the fulfillment of many Soviet political and economic objectives including those in the area of detente.

A major tool in carrying out this objective has been the development and expansion of the trade union exchange program. To induce visits to the USSR by foreign labor leaders, free transportation and facilities are provided by the AUCCTU. Exchange programs of this kind are also conducted by the US and other Western governments and labor organizations, but the Russians accord them greater importance and are willing to disburse considerable funds on their behalf. This is evidenced by the fact that the scale of labor exchange programs has grown impressively. In 1961 over 275 foreign trade union delegations visited the USSR while 185 Soviet delegations visited foreign countries. At the 16th Congress of the AUCCTU held in March of this year, the organization's Chairman, Aleksei Shibayev reported that over 4,500 labor delegations had visited the Soviet Union during the past five years and approximately 4,000 AUCCTU delegations made trips abroad during the same period. An increasing number of international conferences are also being sponsored on such themes as labor safety and vocational training. Moreover, scholarships are regularly provided to labor activists from Third World countries to attend the AUCCTU International Trade Union College.

Soviet Labor and Western Europe

Western Europe has been the primary focus of Soviet labor interest in recent years. The influencing of the powerful trade union movements of this region is regarded as indispensable to the fulfillment of many Soviet political and economic objectives in Western Europe.

With the advent of a better political climate, the Soviets have striven intensively, through the medium of the AUCCTU, to largely influence the course of East-West trade union detente and to exploit it for their own ends. Thus, for example, following the launching in the late sixties of the Soviet proposal for the convening of a European Conference on Security and Cooperation (CSCE)--an initiative which resulted in the holding of the Helsinki Conference--a parallel one was floated by the AUCCTU in mid-1969 for the holding of an all-European trade union meeting to discuss "peace and European security problems."

Despite the growing climate of rapprochement, this Soviet initiative smacked overly of a political gambit to corral the West Europeans and therefore was unacceptable to them. Realizing that the West Europeans would not accept a conference on Soviet terms, the Russians shifted ground and showed themselves ready to compromise on the agenda of the prospective conference as well as on its sponsorship. Following a summit conference in 1972 of leading labor figures of West and East Europe, including the then Soviet labor chief, Aleksandr Shelepin, an agreement was reached to limit discussions at the conference to functional, trade union subjects. Subsequently Shelepin tried once more to inject issues such as the trade union struggle against multinational corporations which were susceptible

to political exploitation, but finally acquiesced in the Western European insistence on avoiding subjects that obviously lent themselves to political manipulation. To emphasize this resolve the Western Europeans also obtained an agreement to hold the East-West trade union meeting under the nebulous formula of convening it "within the framework of the International Labor Organization (ILO)."

The initial meeting of East-West labor organizations took place in Geneva during January 1974, concurrent with the holding of the European regional ILO conference. Leading East and West European labor figures attended and a bland communique, replete with the customary homilies, was adopted. Everyone seemed to have been on their best behavior, intent upon avoiding controversial issues. A second conference was also held in Geneva on February 28, 1975, along with the meeting of the ILO's Governing Body, on the politically innocuous theme of "Humanization of the Working Environment." An equally benign communique was produced, with a call for the holding of additional East-West gatherings of this kind. For a variety of reasons, among them the fact that no replacement had yet been selected for the deposed AUCCTU head, Shelepin, no meeting was held during 1976. By 1977, however, it had again become possible to hold pan-European trade union gatherings and a conference was held on March 5-6th of this year to give further consideration to problems concerned with "Humanization of the Work Environment."

At the time of the holding of the 1977 conference, the atmosphere had perceptibly changed for it took place in the midst of the persecution by the Czech government of the Charter 77 supporters, increased repression

of dissidents in the USSR and East Germany, and the persecution of labor protestors in Poland. As a consequence, the staunchly anti-Communist French Force Ouvriere and the Danish Labor Confederations refused to attend. The principal officers of the three Italian labor confederations also refrained from attending, including the pro-Communist Italian General Confederation of Labor (CGIL), which deferred to the insistence of its two non-Communist counterparts. Other West European labor leaders also decided to demonstrate their "coolness" over human rights violations in the Communist countries; for example, for the first time the unions of the Benelux countries were represented by second-stringers.

To what extent have the Russians gained political advantage through the holding of such encounters? To a modest extent, possibly, for they have successfully induced the Western European trade union community to advance trade union relations to the multilateral level. By so doing there is the corollary effect it has had of further lowering inhibitions among some Western European labor organizations to participation in Moscow's politically motivated ventures. This is underscored by the fact that the great diversity of trade union and political outlooks represented in the Western European trade union community makes it difficult to establish common policies in dealing with the Communist East. On the other hand, although most of the Western European labor leadership is disposed to participate in periodic pan-European gatherings, they continue to oppose Moscow's long-sought establishment of a more structured relationship with Western European labor, a goal that is made even more difficult to achieve by the rising influence of Euro-Communism. The AUCCTU, therefore, is constrained

to mark time in the hope that future gatherings eventually will create the appropriate climate to attain its ultimate objectives.

The World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU)

Among the plenitude of international front organizations, Moscow rightfully regards the Prague-based World Federation of Trade Unions as the most useful and strategically placed. A leading authority describes the organization in the following terms:

"The World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) is an international organization whose core membership consists of national labor federations in countries governed by Marxist-Leninist parties, thus mainly the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Cuba and a few others. It also counts among its adherents a number of labor organizations in non-Communist countries. In terms of mere numbers the WFTU is the largest international labor federation with a claimed 160 million individual members as of 1975. By far the biggest contingent is represented by the central labor body of the Soviet Union (AUCCTU) which by itself accounts for about two-thirds of the total. The weight and influence of that one organization, taken in conjunction with the dominant position of the Soviet Union in the political community of Communist countries, have tied the WFTU closely to the pursuit of Soviet policy objectives in the various parts of the world."²

The WFTU has been particularly active among the labor organizations of the third world countries where it has benefitted from the non-aligned outlook of many governments which, as in other areas, often encourage their labor organizations to maintain a balance in their relations with both

2. John Windmuller, from an unpublished manuscript on the international trade union movement.

Western- and Eastern-oriented international trade union bodies. It has also sought to exploit the spirit of anti-Westernism that colors the outlooks of militant nationalist regimes in Africa and the Middle East. Numerous solidarity campaigns have been promoted, as well as support for national liberation movements, anti-racist or anti-colonialist initiatives, etc.

Prior to the 1967 Arab-Israeli War WFTU/AUCCTU influence in the Middle East was negligible. Shortly thereafter, however, as Soviet influence expanded rapidly in the region, the AUCCTU was able to establish extensive labor exchange programs with many Arab national labor centers and the Egyptian-dominated International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICATU) agreed to the establishment of a special commission with the WFTU to undertake various collaborative projects. Moreover, the WFTU structure was modified so as to encourage the affiliation of non-Communist labor organizations with the result that the unions of a number of countries with which the USSR had established military and economic assistance programs became WFTU affiliates, including the national labor centers of Iraq, Syria, and South Yemen, as well as the PLO labor adjunct.

This represented a new development in WFTU affairs. Membership till then consisted almost exclusively of trade union organizations dominated or controlled by Communist Parties throughout the world. Since the late sixties, however, an effort has been underway to attract the collaboration or affiliation of non-Communist third world labor organizations, especially of countries benefitting from the diplomatic or military support of the USSR. A most recent example is the affiliation of a puppet labor organization created by the military government of Ethiopia.

The WFTU is also active in Western Europe where it seeks to promote collaborative initiatives with the predominantly non-Communist trade unions of the region in the name of labor unity. But few among them are willing to engage in such ventures with the WFTU and the East-West trade union relationship is therefore conducted largely through bilateral and other forms of contacts between the AUCCTU and other Eastern European labor organizations with the various national labor centers of Western Europe.

Russian hegemony in the WFTU is exercised through the dominant role of the AUCCTU in the organization's affairs. Financial sustenance is derived almost exclusively from the AUCCTU and its Eastern European allies. Nonetheless, for political as well as practical reasons, the posts of Chairman and Secretary General were, until the 1968 Warsaw Pact intervention in Czechoslovakia, customarily occupied by labor leaders from the ranks of the Italian and French affiliated organizations. A similar practice was followed in filling numerous other key posts as well. This was done to counterbalance the overpowering disproportion of Eastern European influence and the fact that approximately 95 percent of AFTU membership derives from affiliated organizations of that region. It was, therefore, conceived as a cosmetic overlay to support the WFTU claim to representativity of both Eastern and Western labor.

The physical Russian presence at WFTU headquarters appears to be modest--Boris Averianov, who serves as the AUCCTU member of the Secretariat, plus a number of staff personnel.³ But the Russians are recognized as

3. Prior to his transfer to Prague, Averianov served for a number of years as Director of the AUCCTU international affairs department, and prior to that he was Labor Attache with the Russian Embassy in London.

primus inter pares. Moreover, a reorganization has been effected since the 1968 controversy over the Czech intervention to assure that Russian hegemony will not again be subject to challenge. Total control is once more firmly in the hands of the AUCCTU.

In Latin America, it has been found expedient to operate through a surrogate, the Permanent Commission for Latin American Labor Unity (CPUSTAL) which professes to be an independent regional labor organization. Prior to the reconciliation of the Russians and Castro, the former prevented the Cubans from playing a substantive role in regional Communist labor affairs. But now that Castro has declared his unvarying fealty to Moscow, plus the fact that since the downfall of the Allende regime in Chile, CPUSTAL has been unable to relocate elsewhere in continental Latin America, Cuba is increasingly becoming the WFTU/CPUSTAL base of operations.

Despite unremitting efforts Soviet labor influence continues to be relatively weak in Asia. Various factors have contributed to this debility; many of the Asian Communist parties are either pro-Peking or maintain an equi-distant posture between the two rival Communist powers. Furthermore, the Japanese Communist Party has adopted a Euro-Communist outlook and relations with Moscow on both political and trade union levels have deteriorated. Finally, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and its Asian regional body encompass most of the area's important national labor centers.

Since the 1968 Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, the WFTU has become an increasingly troubled organization. Following the invasion the Chairman (Renato Bitossi of the Italian CGIL), the Secretary General (Louis Saillant of the French CGT), and the entire Secretariat with the exception

of the AUCCTU representative, for the first time in its existence, contradicted Soviet policies by siding with the embattled Dubcek regime and denouncing the intervention.⁴ It took several years for the then Soviet labor chief Aleksandr Shelepin and his Warsaw Pact allies to undo this stunning challenge to Soviet control of the WFTU.

By the time the dissidence has been overcome, it turned out to some degree as a pyrrhic victory for the Russians. The organization now stood revealed more than ever to be a supine Soviet mouthpiece and the Italian CGIL was, therefore, persuaded to embark upon a gradual withdrawal from participation in the direction and policies of the Prague-based world labor body. When Chairman Bitossi died shortly after the Czech intervention, he was replaced not by another Italian labor leader as had been the custom till then, but rather by an Uruguayan Communist labor leader whose principal qualification was his record of unwavering Soviet allegiance.

The CGIL since then has decided that its interests dictate inclusion into the non-Communist European Trade Union Confederation, the spokesman for Western European labor, which required a further loosening of its ties with the WFTU. The CGIL has indeed become the first Communist-dominated labor organization to be admitted to the ETUC and has modified its standing in the WFTU from that of regular member to an "associate member," a status which relieves it of policy responsibilities or commitments. To further implement the changed relationship the CGIL has since then directed its members to relinquish senior policy positions within the WFTU structure.

4. Ironically, the year before, as a token for his many years of faithful allegiance, Saillant was awarded a Lenin Peace prize.

As a result, for all practical purposes the CGIL has now withdrawn from any active participation but so as not to unduly provoke the Russians, the Italians continue to maintain a nominal presence in WFTU affairs.

In spite of the Italian disengagement, the French CGT/PCF at that time continued a high degree of participation in WFTU affairs, exemplified by the fact that Pierre Gensous of the CGT was continued as the organization's General Secretary. Thus the French "connection" had in effect become the principal remaining link between the WFTU and the Western European labor scene.

Now that the French Communist Party has also moved to emphasize its national character and loosen its ties with the Russians, relations with Moscow have increasingly worsened with a corollary adverse effect on AUCCTU-CGT relations. In view of the changing relationship it is likely, therefore, that the CGT will in the foreseeable future, substantially reduce its present high degree of identification with the pro-Soviet policies of the WFTU. It is also probable that Pierre Gensous, the present Secretary General, will not be a candidate to succeed himself at the forthcoming WFTU World Congress that is to be held during the Spring of 1978, nor is it likely that any other CGT representative will be available to fill the post.

The prospects for AUCCTU/WFTU influence in the Iberian peninsula offer mixed blessings. The Workers Commissions Confederation under the control of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) maintains relations with the WFTU which provides some assistance, but the PCE is the most outspoken among the Euro-Communist parties of Western Europe in its criticism of Soviet policies. AUCCTU relations with the Workers Commissions for some

time have been rather frigid. In fact it is not the AUCCTU but the CGIL, the CGT, and probably the Yugoslavs and Romanians as well that provide the bulk of financial and technical support for the Workers Commissions and the PCE. An entirely different situation exists in Portugal where the country's principal labor body, the Intersindical Confederation, is dominated by the staunchly pro-Soviet Communist Party, representing the best ally the AUCCTU/WFTU possess among the Communist-dominated labor organizations of Western Europe.

On balance, therefore, Soviet prospects for influencing the Western European labor community do not seem very promising. Relations with the two largest and most important Communist-controlled trade union centers, the CGT and CGIL, will continue to be more or less strained and may even deteriorate further. This is equally true for relations with the Spanish Communist labor sector. In any event they will probably be of decreasing political utility to Soviet labor objectives. Either for reasons of expediency, genuine political evolution or both, the CGIL and CGT are now committed to a course that emphasizes greater identification with national and regional trade union concerns, one that also renders them less and less disposed to act as catspaws for Soviet labor interests, particularly in areas which impinge upon perceived national interests.

The disengagement process is particularly damaging to the standing of the WFTU, especially in Western European labor circles. Already deprived of an active participation by the CGIL, Western Europe's largest pro-Communist trade union center, and with a similar pull-back by the CGT in the offing; these adverse developments coupled with the recent splits

in the Communist Parties of Great Britain, Norway, and Sweden largely over the issue of Euro-Communism, confronts the WFTU with bleak prospects indeed.

For a number of reasons the WFTU has not served as the principal channel for the AUCCTU in promoting its version of East-West trade union detente. But on occasion it has served as a useful, albeit marginal, auxiliary. Confronted with the prospect of its lessened utility, the Soviet trade unions, to a greater extent than before, will have to rely on its bilateral relations with organized labor of Western Europe. The outcome of these relations, whether they prosper, decline, or remain at present levels will largely depend upon the course of overall East-West relations of which they have become a barometer and a component.

Eastern Europe and the AUCCTU

A "special relationship" characterizes existing ties between Eastern Europe and the USSR and the trade union nexus possesses certain distinctive features. With the exception of Yugoslavia and Romania, the AUCCTU has been able to count on the support of the Eastern European labor centers for its international labor initiatives and policies. To strengthen existing ties, the number of exchange visits of trade union delegations and consultations since the Czech intervention have perceptibly increased. Hardly a day passes without an account in Trud, the AUCCTU daily newspaper, of the visit to the USSR by one or another such delegation. Furthermore, additional institutional links have been forged with the Eastern Europeans in the form of various labor collaborative projects within the framework of the Council For Economic Mutual Assistance (CEMA).

An arrangement of sorts seems to have evolved in the Eastern European-Soviet trade union relationship in which the labor centers of most CEMA countries provide unstinting support for the international activities of their AUCCTU big brother. In return a certain latitude has been permitted some of the Eastern Europeans to depart from the Soviet trade union model at the domestic level. The outstanding example is that of Hungary which for some time, has been engaged in a decentralization of its economy with the result that workers and trade unions are given a greater say than in the USSR in plant wage bargaining and in overall policy-making and direction. Moreover, aside from the Yugoslavs, the Hungarians appear to have moved farthest away from the Soviet trade union model and are evolving in the direction of a quasi independent trade union function.

The desire for closer links with the Eastern European labor centers initially was intended to assure the continued backing of the Russians in their effort to overcome challenges to Soviet policies following the intervention in Czechoslovakia. An added factor was the establishment in 1969 of a broad-based Western European regional labor body, the European trade Union Confederation, that showed promise of becoming the principal spokesman for that region's organized workers. This development caused the AUCCTU to cast about for some means to influence the structure and policies of the nascent ETUC.

Soviet labor chief Aleksandr Shelepin then launched the idea of a Pan-European labor body that would encompass both Eastern and Western European trade organizations. But the proposal was badly conceived and did not

prosper. The Western European labor leadership was disposed to the continuance of bilateral and other forms of contacts with the Eastern Europeans but nobody, at that juncture or since, has seriously entertained any notion of advancing the East-West trade union relationship to that point. Aside from the sensitive political problems involved, what do the two sides really have in common in terms of the functional problems they respectively face? The Western Europeans conceived of the ETUC as an urgently needed body to deal with the complex issues that confront them in coping with regional integration and the Common Market, the establishment of a common approach to the problems of the multinational corporation, the foreign worker problem, etc. The inclusion of the Eastern Europeans, therefore, was simply an irrelevancy in this context.

Another important reason for the failure of the Pan-European initiative was the fact that the two principal Western European pro-Communist labor confederations, the Italian CGIL and the French CGT, showed little or no enthusiasm for the idea. The CGIL felt that it was much more advantageous both politically and from a trade union point of view to seek integration within the Western European trade union community by inclusion in a ETUC that preserved its original concept as spokesman for organized labor in Western European affairs. Moreover, following a period of ambivalence, the CGT finally came down on the side of the Italians. Shortly following, the Pan-European idea was quietly dropped by the Russians.

The Russian experience in seeking to relate to realignments in Western European labor affairs is instructive in what it reveals of the difficulties encountered by Moscow in its unremitting effort to maintain influence

and leverage among that region's powerful trade union movements. Not having succeeded in promoting the idea of a Pan-European structure, the AUCCTU has managed to induce the Western Europeans to engage in multi-lateral annual East-West trade union meetings. By no means is it a substitute for the desired Pan-European proposal, but from the Russian point of view it keeps some sort of modest intra-regional contact operative.

With the growing independence of the Western European Communist Parties and their trade union adjuncts, the Russians will have to place increasing reliance in the period ahead on their Eastern European counterparts for support in the achievement of their trade union foreign policy objectives. Elsewhere we have pointed to the declining interest of the CGIL and CGT in providing support to the WFTU and the priority they have accorded to achieving full inclusion in the Western European trade union community. Should this process continue, effective participation in the WFTU before long may be reduced to the Eastern Europeans and a scattering of Third World labor organizations.

Soviet Labor and the International Labor Organization (ILO)

The International Labor Organization (ILO) occupies a special position among the specialized agencies of the United Nations. It is the doyen among them since its origins go back to the Versailles Treaty, and it has elaborated a unique system of international labor conventions and industrial standards. It is, nonetheless, currently in the throes of what may turn out to be the most severe crisis in more than a half century of its existence.

A major cause for the ILO's plight is the dissatisfaction of the US government, employers and labor with certain trends that are viewed as undermining the very principles and practices on which the organization is presumably based. Concern over this evolution is particularly strong within the leadership of the AFL-CIO which is alarmed over what it perceives to be the increasing politicization of the agency and the steady growth of Soviet influence.

Since its return to membership during the fifties, the Soviet role in the ILO has undergone an evolutionary process broadly reflective of the progressive weight exercised by the Soviet Union in the arena of international affairs. In all likelihood the AUCCTU initially viewed participation in the Agency's activities as a useful means of facilitating its emergence from the political ghetto to which it had been consigned during the Cold War era and emblematic of the coming of age of the USSR as a world power. Doubtless, it also imparted a greater aura of legitimacy to the AUCCTU as a labor organization and provided an invaluable source for contacts with representatives of trade unions throughout the world.

The political influence of the USSR in ILO affairs at the present time generally corresponds to that of a major power but its physical presence in the agency's structure, especially when compared in terms of Soviet nationals occupying staff positions to that in other UN bodies, is quite modest. The workers group of the Governing Body remains under the control of the non-communist unions affiliated with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions which often work in close harmony with the AFL-CIO representative. The Russians have succeeded in electing only

one supporter to the Workers Group, Piotr Pimenov, a senior secretary of the AUCCTU.

Both Soviet authorities and the AUCCTU leadership have always viewed their role in the ILO almost exclusively in political terms. In common with the Soviet stance throughout the UN system, political advantage has been sought through active identification with issues of concern to Third World countries. These have included the successful expulsion of South Africa from the ILO for its racial practices, the censure of Israel for its alleged mistreatment of Arab workers in the occupied territories, the admission to the ILO of the Palestine Liberation Organization with observer status, denunciation of multinational corporations for their exploitation of the lesser developed nations, etc.

A major collaboration between the Soviets and many Third World countries has also taken place on the question of a restructuring of the ILO's Governing Body, an entity that performs a key policy-making ^{fn} function. The desired change, were it to be adopted in accordance with the desires of the Soviet/Third World bloc, would significantly reduce the role currently played by the advanced industrial nations in the setting of ILO policies and result in a corresponding enlargement of the Third World's voice, a shift that may also lead to an elevation of the Soviet role as well.

In common with most international bodies, much of the difficulties encountered in the ILO result from the incessant jockeying for influence and political vantage among the great number of national delegations that are represented. But the ILO is plagued by the even more serious

and possibly intractable problem of its representational system. The world labor body was originally established on the basis of tripartism which requires its own structure and each country delegation to be equally composed of government, labor and employer representatives. At the time of its inception, such a system of representation was consistent with practices in many democratic industrial societies and the Western industrial nations were at that time the dominant element.

Since the end of the second world war, however, the composition of ILO membership has undergone sweeping changes. Its ranks have been greatly enlarged through the entry of the Communist countries and a massive influx of the new nations of the lesser developed regions. Many of the new entrants do not possess pluralist political structures, they are one party systems with varying degrees of authoritarian rule. Moreover, trade unions frequently are under government control or must be highly responsive to official dictates. Outwardly, therefore, the delegations representing these countries are tripartite in composition but in reality the effective application for them of the tripartite principle is neither relevant nor feasible. Moreover, whenever these countries and the Eastern Europeans are able to arrive at a consensus on a given issue, they are capable of easily outvoting the Western nations.

To bridge the gap between doctrine and reality, the concept of "universality" was introduced. Since the problem did not lend itself to easy solutions, for some this offered a sort of structural half-way house. Moreover, in the interests of East-West coexistence, the Western Europeans have generally tended to avoid confrontations with the Russians over

this issue. But the AFL-CIO leadership was not prepared to accept a comparable degree of coexistence. It has long felt that the very presence of the Russians in a tripartite labor body is a contradiction in terms and they have vigorously opposed the practice of what they term the "double standard." By this is meant a tendency to censure some but not others for actions that violate accepted international labor standards; for example, to denounce the Chileans for suppression of trade union rights, but to avoid taking similar steps against the Russians.

The situation is made all the more difficult by the fact that the work of the ILO has limited relevance for many lesser developed nations which are consequently disposed to concern themselves with the politics rather than the substance of ILO activities. During the past June annual conference, for example, a number of Arab delegations demonstrated their willingness to convert the proceedings into a requisitory proceedings against the Israelis regardless of the damaging effect it would have on the ILO's continued viability.

Predictably the Russians not only supported the anti-Israeli actions of the Arabs and the initiatives of the Group of 77 for restructuring, they also tended to stoke the fires by encouraging aggressively militant stands, and to generally discourage moves toward compromise solutions.

Doubts have been raised in some quarters as to the wisdom of the US strategy in the submission of the two-year advance notice of withdrawal and the Kissinger letter to the ILO which sets out preconditions for continued US membership. The doubts pertain less to some of the legitimate grievances of the AFL-CIO such as the demand for a de-politicization of

ILO affairs. The question raised is whether the ills that afflict the ILO and the entire UN system as well, are realistically amenable to substantive amelioration within a relatively brief period of two years.

The events of recent months, particularly those of ILO's June annual conference in which the Western bloc including the US were soundly defeated on several crucial issues and which demonstrated a lamentable inability by both sides to compromise their differences, suggests that the Russians may have overplayed their hand.

In this connection it is interesting to note that the pro-Communist Italian Labor Confederation refused to support the Soviet position and instead aligned itself on the Western side. We do not as yet know the reaction of the French CGT to the tactics employed by the Russians since the post of worker delegate from that country is rotated annually among the three labor confederations and this year was not the turn of the CGT.

At this writing (early September) sentiment is growing in the US, Europe and elsewhere, to avoid the di^sastrous consequences of a possible US withdrawal from the ILO and to work toward a broadly acceptable formula of reconciliation. Thus far, at least, the Russians remain outside this process and assuming this effort prospers, it does not appear that they can emerge from this crisis with added laurels.

Concluding Observations

The international involvement of the Soviet trade unions has as its principal function the implementation in the field of trade union affairs of the foreign policy aims of the Soviet government. It also serves as the labor arm of the Communist Party and seeks to maintain a hegemonic

position among Communist-directed trade unions throughout the world and to obtain conformity with the policies of the USSR.

The efficacy with which it is able to perform its assigned role is heavily dependent upon the extent of success the USSR achieves maintaining in extending its power and influence in the world. The most notable gains in trade union influence registered in recent years have been as a consequence of a patron-client relationship established by the USSR in the economic or military sphere. This is exemplified by the affiliation to the WFTU of a number of labor organizations under the control of nationalist governments in Africa and the Middle East that are receiving assistance from the USSR.

The advent of East-West rapprochement and expanded trade relations has led to a substantial expansion of AUCCTU relations with the trade unions of Western Europe. The further development of these relations and their political exploitation have become a major aspiration of the AUCCTU. But detente has not been an unalloyed boon for the AUCCTU. The disintegration of the old monolithic Communist bloc which formerly served as an important source of Soviet labor influence in Western Europe, is also a by-product of detente. The growing independence of the Communist Parties of Western Europe has converted them into dubious allies and their increasing disinterest in continued identification with the Soviet-controlled World Federation of Trade Unions threatens to further weaken a key Russian instrument in the field of international labor affairs. Thus the growing trend toward Euro-Communism involves a loss of Soviet labor authority, one that probably is causing Soviet authorities to cast about for alternative sources of influence in Western European labor affairs.

In Asia the effects of the Sino-Soviet hostility since the onset of the Cultural Revolution have not extended to the trade union sector for the simple fact that the trade union reorganization commenced during the period of Chou En-lai's stewardship was halted as a result of the recrudescence of internal political conflict before a planned resumption of international trade union activities could take place.

Should the present evolution in the direction of a more pragmatic moderate orientation continue, the previously postponed return of China to the international labor arena can be anticipated in the foreseeable future. The recent warm reception given Tito on his visit to Peking and the evinced interest in the Yugoslav system of self-management may be portents of an imminent shift away from Maoist labor policies.

A Chinese return to international labor activism will probably focus initially on the security-sensitive Asian perimeter. Priority will be given to a re-establishment of PRC primacy in this region both among the local Communist Parties and the various trade union movements and to prevent the AUCCTU from exercising any significant influence there.

The rivalry between the two antagonistic powers that formerly was particularly acute in Asia and Africa may be resumed and will come to include the labor field as well. It would also not be surprising to see the PRC become an active participant in the International Labor Organization possibly within the next two or three years.

As long as one can remember, Soviet trade union representatives, have not been permitted, barring a few rare exceptions, to visit the United States. The policy of prohibition --- Russian citizens in all other capacities

have been free to visit--has been practiced by the State Department at the insistence of the AFL-CIO.

It is the strongly-held conviction of the AFL-CIO leadership that nothing good can result from permitting bureaucrats representing the labor agency of a brutal totalitarian government to visit this country. The US has been almost alone among major countries to enforce such a ban.

Legislation recently passed by the Congress and the decision by the Administration to abide by its provisions have resulted in a lifting of this ban and soon we will be invaded by increasing numbers of Soviet labor delegations intent upon refurbishing the Soviet image among American trade unionists. Earlier this month the first such delegation has been permitted entry.

It is not within the purview of this paper to discuss the pros and cons of this subject. In any event it has become an academic issue. But a paper devoted to the subject of the international involvement of the Soviet trade unions must necessarily take note of this development. The Russians have long sought access to the American labor movement, the largest in the Western world. Conditions permitting, they will now undertake a major effort to project a more benign image of Soviet labor. American labor leaders will become the recipients of tempting offers to visit the USSR, as guests of the AUCCTU, all expenses paid. The exchange visits may very well turn out to be advantageous for American labor just as exposure of our reality to Russians in other spheres has undoubtedly served to an important extent in undoing the malicious distortions of

Soviet propaganda. But one thing is certain, a new phase in Soviet-American labor relations is about to commence.