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1953

A Pocket Encyclopaedia

Answers to Questions put by British Trade Unionists

★ A BSFS Booklet ★

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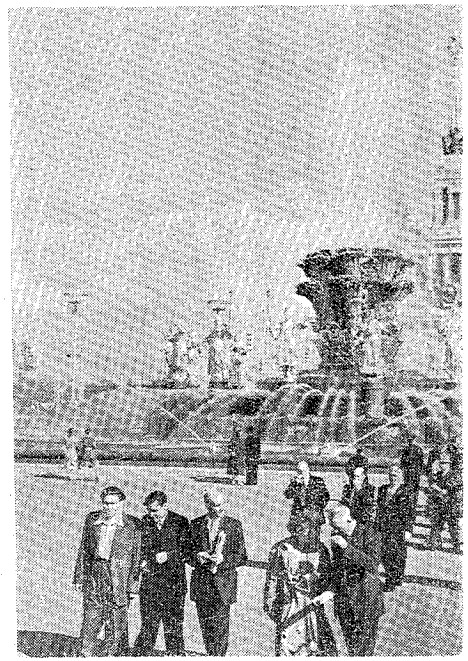

INTRODUCTION

In this booklet the reader will find answers to most of the questions commonly asked about the Soviet trade unions. The majority have been sent in by workers in various trade union branches and factories. A few have been taken from anti-Soviet propaganda pamphlets.

The answers are based mainly on the observations of numerous British delegations who have seen Soviet trade unions and factory organizations at work. In some cases the figures and facts have been taken from practical handbooks and periodicals published for the guidance of Soviet active trade unionists and law students.

Within the framework of this short 'encyclopaedia' a number of essential points are dealt with. Others which may occur to the reader should be sent to the British Soviet Friendship Society, 36 Spencer Street, London, E.C.1. They may be used in a later edition.

It is hoped that the present booklet, nevertheless, will help trade unionists to see in its true light the importance of friendly relations between the British and Soviet trade unions.

First published in November, 1955

Published by the British Soviet Friendship Society, 36 Spencer St. E.C.1. and Printed by Kenion Press Ltd., 216 High Street, Slough, Bucks.

I. The function of trade unions in the USSR.

1 *What advantages have Soviet trade unionists that we haven't got?*

(*SHARDLOWS, SHEFFIELD.*)

In the USSR the system advocated over sixty years ago by the English Socialist pioneer, Robert Blatchford, in his famous book, *Merrie England,* has been put into effect. 'The land, mines, mills, ships, shops, canals, railways, houses, docks, harbours and machinery' have been made 'the common property of the people, used and governed by the people for the people'. As a result (an official TUC General Council Delegation reported in 1925) 'in Russia the workers are the ruling class', and are 'the ultimate owners and rulers of industry'. In other words, in dealing with managements Soviet trade unionists are faced, not with members of a class whose interests are opposed to theirs—private owners—but with their own direct nominees, 'expert governors and managers', as the TUC Report stated. In fact, no factory manager is appointed without the agreement of the union.

2 *What are the benefits of trade union membership?*

(*NUFTO, LONDON WEST END NO. 2.*)

The TUC General Council report of 1925 put it broadly: 'Being largely freed from their main function elsewhere of protecting the workers against exploitation by the wealthy, and of preventing the public service of the workers from being prejudiced for private profit, the trade unions have been able to engage in educating the workers as citizens and rulers'. A delegation from the Durham Miners' Association, in a report signed by Mr. Sam Watson and others, stated in February, 1937: 'The Trade Union Movement in Russia is a great training ground for the future worker citizen, a citizen versed in the manifold aspects of a full and free life under Socialism'.

In 1947 Jack Tanner, President of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, and its general secretary, Ben Gardner, signed (with others) a report stating: 'The Soviet Trade Unions play a very decisive part in the economic and social life of the nation. Industry is controlled by the workers themselves through their Trade Union organizations working in conjunction with the appropriate Government Ministries. . . . It

is obviously vital that the workers should be politically educated and that they should be in very close touch with their unions. Great care is taken to keep the workers informed of all matters of trade union interest.' How this works out in practice, we shall see below; but it is important to note the essentially identical opinions of British trade union leaders at such long intervals.

II. Organization and Structure

3 *Do Soviet workers join craft or industrial unions?*
(ASW, LIVERPOOL CENTRAL.)

All unions are industrial unions: 'It is the industry you work in rather than the trade you follow which determines the Union to which you belong' (AEU Report, 1947). Hence all working in one factory or shop—from manager to cleaner, from clerk to canteen staff—are in the same union, members of the same 'collective' (branch).

4 *Is there a closed shop?*
(POEU EL AND P, BIRMINGHAM BRANCH.)

Membership of a trade union is not compulsory. Hence there is no closed shop. 'We did find a very small number of non-members in some of the plants visited. On the other hand, inducement to join is strong, since trade union membership whilst having its obligations also has its privileges, including larger insurance benefits, passes to trade union rest homes and to health and holiday resorts; grants from union funds in cases of hardship; and full use of trade union cultural and sports facilities'. (Amalgamated Union of Foundry Workers' Delegation report, 1950). To this list should be added legal aid. 'The non-unionist in a capitalist country is a menace, in so far as he can be used by his employer to under-cut the wage and other standards of his fellow-workmen. In Soviet Russia, on the other hand, there is no possibility of collusion between the non-unionist and his employer in such nefarious work, inasmuch as the workers themselves are the employers. The non-member merely deprives himself of the opportunity of directly participating in the work of the Union which caters for so much of his needs' (report by delegation of South Wales Area, National Union of Mineworkers, 1952).

5 *How many Soviet trade unions are there, and what is their membership?*
(NUFTO, LONDON WEST END NO. 2.)

In June, 1954, there were forty-three trade unions, with a total membership at that time of 40,400,000. The total number of wage earners was about 46,000,000. Thus about 88 per cent of Soviet workers were organized.

Some of the unions are very large. Thus the Agricultural Workers (employed in State farms, tractor depots and produce purchasing organizations) number over 6,000,000: Railwaymen over 3,000,000: Consumer Goods Industries Union over 2,500,000: Miners over 2,000,000: Electrical and Power Station Workers about 1,250,000: Woodworkers about 500,000, etc.

6 *How are lines of demarcation settled?*
(ETU, BRADFORD.)

The factory basis of organization prevents any serious demarcation disputes. Thus, power workers employed at collieries are members of the Miners' Union; foundry workers in iron and steel plant are in the Metallurgical Workers, while those at engineering factories are in the Engineering Workers, etc. In case of differences over which industry an establishment belongs to, the Central Council of Trade Unions (TUC) adjudicates. A worker transferring from one industry to another changes his Union; but carries with him his rights to benefit and period of membership.

7 *What is the amount of contributions and how collected?*
(NUFTO, LONDON WEST END NO. 2.)

The amount varies from ½ per cent of wages for those earning 500 roubles per month (e.g. cleaners, factory apprentices in their first year, etc.) to 1 per cent when earnings exceed 700 roubles. Average earnings are over 1,000 roubles per month.

Contributions are collected by the trade union group organizers (see below) who affix a stamp to the member's card for each contribution collected.

8 *Are funds managed by the members?*
(ASW, LIVERPOOL.)

Yes. The trade union committee in the works, factory, mine, office, depot, etc., where the members pay their contributions, retains 50 per cent or more of the sums collected, and accounts for expenditure to the AGM of the members in their establishment. The balance, remitted to head office, is accounted for by the union EC (and by the Republic or regional committees, to which part of the funds are allocated by the EC) in their annual financial report.

In addition, the members through their elected representatives manage the big social insurance funds (see below).

9 *How are officials elected—by ballot or show of hands?*
(NUFTO, LONDON WEST END NO. 2.)

All shop, factory, pit, etc., committees, all delegates to trade union conferences or congresses, all district, regional, Republic or USSR Executive Committees of trade unions, and the Central Council of Trade Unions itself, are elected by secret ballot.

Nominations are made by any member at the members' meeting (for the factory committees) and by delegates at conferences or congresses (for the higher bodies). Prior to the vote, the workers (or delegates, as the case may be) discuss the merits of the candidates proposed. In extreme cases the workers may decide that a particular candidate is unworthy to go to the ballot.

It must be emphasized that this is not a dodge, as has been suggested, 'to ensure that only Party-approved candidates appear on the ballot paper'. Anyone who has been inside a Soviet factory, or reads the Soviet factory or trade union papers, knows that Communist trade union officials, committeemen, etc., are just as liable to public criticism and to be voted down at meetings as non-Communists. The Soviet workers are no respecters of persons.

Only shop stewards (see below) are elected by show of hands, among their immediate workmates.

10 *What is the position of trade union officers and their responsibility to their members?*
(T & GWU, 1/819 WEST LONDON OIL.)

Elected trade union bodies (works, district, regional, Republic, executive committees) choose their own chairmen, secretaries and members of presidium (general purposes committee)—whom they may replace at any time. Some of these, subject to Union rules, may be full-time. There is no 'national ballot' for such officers.

Organizers (called in the USSR 'instructors') are appointed by the committees responsible for the particular area they serve.

Wages of national, regional, etc., officers are equivalent to those of highly skilled workers, with an allowance for travelling expenses.

In every factory or works committee, from one to six of its members (according to size of the establishment) may be put on full time, retaining their average previous earnings paid out of union funds, if the committee so desires. In this case the full-time workers retain by law the right to take up their previous job when their term of office expires.

New elections to any trade union body may be held before expiry of its term of office, on the demand of at least one-third of the members represented (or of a higher union body). The Soviet trade union press shows that this method is occasionally used by the members to sack unsatisfactory officers. It is frequent to find leading union officials criticized by members in their own journals.

11 *What is the role of shop stewards or their equivalent?*
(T & GWU, 1/819, WEST LONDON OIL.)

In every place of employment, as stated, the workers elect a works, factory or office trade union committee. This has very wide powers. The management must periodically report to it, and to general meetings of the workers, on progress and problems of production. It negotiates annual collective agreements with the management, covering questions not provided for in the very extensive Labour Code—including new safety pro-

visions, welfare expenditure, new housing, etc. Over 1,500,000 workers spoke in the discussions on these agreements in 1954, at works meetings attended by over 80 per cent of all trade unionists. Through its sub-committees it *controls* all social insurance and labour protection (factory inspection), and *supervises* correct wage payments, observance of laws governing overtime, remuneration of workers for inventions and suggestions, etc. Its delegates constitute one half of the works Rates and Disputes Committee (see below).

Every one of its sub-committeees—wages, labour protection, housing and welfare, social insurance, cultural, inventions and rationalization, production, child welfare, etc.—has a number of volunteer co-opted members from among the workers.

In large shops or departments there is a shop committee elected, working on the same lines under the jurisdiction of the works committee.

Finally, every group of workers engaged in the same section, or on the same unit or group of machines, etc., elect their own (i) trade union group organizer (steward), who is also dues collector; (ii) social insurance steward; (iii) voluntary factory inspector; (iv) often also a cultural organizer.

The result of this system is that a very high proportion of the membership—over 12,000,000 out of 40,000,000—are involved in the everyday work of the unions. Thus there are over 1,250,000 members of works, pit, depot, etc., committees, and as many trade union group organizers: over 1,500,000 members of housing and welfare committees and canteen supervision committees: over 1,500,000 social insurance committee members and stewards: about 1,250,000 voluntary factory inspectors and members of labour protection committees, etc. Great numbers of these manage, on behalf of the unions, matters which are the concern of paid Government officials in other countries (insurance, factory inspection, etc.). The Miners have 500 full-time and over 60,000 volunteer pit inspectors; the Woodworkers 40,000 voluntary factory inspectors, etc. Union paid officials are a small proportion of the whole.

In this way the Soviet trade unions 'educate the workers as citizens and rulers'.

III. Wages

12 *How are wages fixed?*
(NUFTO, HACKNEY NO. 60.)
Do the unions negotiate wages, and if so how?
(NUFTO, WEST END NO. 2.)

A 'wages fund' (the total sum of wages) is fixed every year, and for a five-year period, for every industry and for industry as a whole.

This fund is calculated on the basis of (a) existing earnings; (b) increases in production planned for the coming period, requiring workers of various skills; (c) reserve funds to cover all contingencies, such as unplanned increases in output through Socialist emulation.

The trade unions play the most intimate part in deciding what the wages funds are to be. In the first place, it is the Wages Department in each Union Executive which, jointly with the Ministry concerned, compiles the figure involved. Then the Wages Department of the Central Council of Trade Unions co-ordinates these figures, and submits them to the State Planning Commission. The latter incorporates them in the general State Economic Plan for submission to the Cabinet. In any subsequent discussion the Central Council of Trade Unions is called in.

Thus, so far from wages being 'of course determined by the Government' and the trade unions not having 'any say in the determination of wages'—as alleged by anti-Soviet propagandists—the opposite is the case.

Of course, since *all* industry and *all* socially-produced wealth belong to the nation, the amount set aside for wages—i.e. for individual consumption—has to be socially planned. It has to be enough to ensure a rising standard of living, but not so much as to impair steady expansion of production for social needs through new investment. This involves in turn changing priorities from time to time for wage rises in different industries. Over these priorities the different unions negotiate, and may differ: but they accept the decision of their general organization—the Central Council of Trade Unions, or TUC—as final.

This is possible just because the Soviet workers know that all the wealth created by society belongs to society.

It should be remembered that (i) constantly falling prices

more than doubled *real wages* between 1947 and 1954; (ii) non-contributory social insurance, the minimum fortnight's annual holiday with pay, free or below-cost passes to State or Union holiday homes, rents varying from 4 to 10 per cent of wages, etc., add 38 per cent. to average wages.

13 *Are there numerous grades in each industry?*
(*ETU, BRADFORD.*)

Who are the highest paid?
(*NUFTO, HACKNEY NO. 60.*)

A basic rate (per hour or per day) is fixed by agreement between Union and Ministry for the least-skilled worker in every branch of the national economy—e.g. mining, railways, engineering—and in every section of that branch. The amount of the rate varies according to the national importance of the industry at the particular moment. Thus the mining, oil, iron and steel and chemical industries have higher basic rates than others at present.

All other workers in each particular section are grouped in *grades*, according to the degree of skill required. The basic rate of the highest grade at present represents two-and-a-half times the lowest. The grouping of jobs in grades is also by agreement.

Thus in one branch of the engineering industry there are eight agreed grades, with the eighth grade having a basic rate 2.6 times that of the first. In the iron and steel industry there are ten grades in the ore-mining section and twelve grades in the blastfurnace and steel-smelting and rolling sections.

The basic rate is taken as the starting point in calculating both time wages and piece prices. In the latter case, the 'norm' or number of articles which can be produced per hour (or day) —*under normal working conditions*—is fixed by agreement between the Union and the management and the price of each article, or unit of output, ascertained accordingly.

14 *Who decides piece-rates, prices of jobs, etc.? Are the workers consulted?*
(*SHARDLOWS, SHEFFIELD.*)

The 'norm' (amount of output per hour or day) for main types of job is fixed by Union and Ministry jointly. No

Ministry can change it without discussion with the Union. Norms are changed rarely, and only when improved mechanization and technical training facilities have made possible big increases in output without any increase in physical exertion. The new norms are fixed so as to enable the average worker to *overfulfil* them by slightly increasing his skill.

On the workshop floor the same principle is applied for new jobs. The rate fixer has first to do them himself, *working under normal conditions and under union supervision.* If the works committee, or individual worker, is nevertheless dissatisfied, the matter is referred to the Rates and Disputes Committee and, from there, to *higher trade union bodies.*

15 *Is there a pooled system of piecework where men work in gangs, in view of an aged worker's difficulty in producing as much as he did in his youth?*
(*NUVB, DERBY.*)

About 80 per cent of all Soviet piece-workers are on individual piece-work. Some collective piece-work systems are practised in docks, some building jobs, etc.

The aged worker is catered for otherwise—by giving him annual bonuses for length of service, a pension at sixty (fifty-five for women, fifty for miners, iron and steel workers, etc.), and the right to receive it even if he stays at work (often at some physically less exacting job).

16 *What types of production bonus or incentives are allowed by the trade unions in the USSR? Do they tolerate the Bedaux system?*
(*NUFTO, WEST END NO. 2.*)

Nothing like the Bedaux system is tolerated in the USSR. All visiting delegations have been struck by the lack of strain or speed-up in the factories. A typical remark is: 'Our general impression was that the speed of the conveyor belt was much slower than that operating in similar systems in this country'. (ETU Report on the Tractor Factory, Kharkov, employing 16,000 workers: *Electron*, July, 1955). The belt system at the Molotov Auto Works, employing 35,000 workers (recorded the

Woodworkers delegation in 1953) 'was not geared to move at the pace which operates in this country'.

Types of production bonus and incentives are (i) progressive piecework, under which the price paid per unit progressively *increases*—10 per cent above standard price, 15 per cent above, etc.—once the 'norm' (or quota of output) is reached; (ii) bonuses for economizing raw material, fuel, power, lowering costs per unit, improving quality, reducing waste, reducing breakdowns or repairs, mileage and cleanliness on the railways, etc. An NUR delegation (November, 1951) found signal-women earning up to 26 per cent extra over a substantial wage in this way, and shunting bank workers up to 30 per cent. A Tobacco Workers' delegation (April, 1954) found that, with the agreed 'norm' earning a minimum of 700 roubles per month, 'the chances of a worker being unable to surpass the minimum were very remote', and 'many workers were actually earning 1,750 roubles'.

IV. Working Conditions

17 *What are working hours?*
(*SHARDLOWS, SHEFFIELD.*)

The standard working day is eight hours, six days a week: night shift is seven hours, paid as eight. In arduous trades the working day is shorter: miners underground, blastfurnace workers, chemical workers, oxyacetylene and electric welders, etc., work seven, six or even four hours.

Overtime is only permitted in exceptional cases and must be sanctioned by the district or regional committee of the union. It must not in any case exceed four hours in any two consecutive days, and 120 hours in twelve months. It is paid at time-and-a-half for the first two hours, and double time thereafter.

18 *Are Stakhanovites regarded as pace-makers by the workers?*
(*SHARDLOWS, SHEFFIELD.*)

No, because a Stakhanovite is not an individual who does his job more *quickly*, but one of a team who have rearranged their collective work more *efficiently*, taking account of improved machinery and processes. The AEU delegation report of 1947 states:

'The popular view of the Stakhanovite is of a herculean brute, rippling with muscles, polished by sweat, lording it over his fellow workers. That is not our experience. We invariably found them modest people. . . . But perhaps more important is that the other workers generally felt no resentment but were proud of being able to number them among their company'.

19 *If a worker is dismissed, and it is final, how does he get another job?*
(*SHARDLOWS, SHEFFIELD.*)

There is a constant shortage of labour in the USSR, despite a yearly increase of one or two millions in the number of wage earners. Hence there is no difficulty in getting another job:

(i) He sees notices in the press, on hoardings or in public transport, and writes to or visits the establishment concerned; or

(ii) He writes to the Personnel Dept. in the Ministry catering for the industry in which he wishes to work; or

(iii) He applies to the trade union concerned.

20 *Is there direction of labour?*
(*SHARDLOWS, SHEFFIELD.*)

No. A worker is free to take whatever job he wishes and can do. The only exception to this rule is that young people trained at public expense in the State technical schools are expected to work at least two years wherever their services are required, and in the Universities and other higher educational establishments at least three years.

In this connection it has been asserted that it is 'virtually impossible' for a worker to leave his factory for another, without consent of the management. The basis of this falsehood (for it is one) is the regulations adopted in 1940 to prevent a small percentage—3 to 4 per cent—of idlers and irresponsibles from taking advantage of the permanent shortage and *constantly disorganizing socially-owned industry*, by flitting from job to job to the detriment of their fellow-workers. But the anti-Soviet propagandists never mention that

(i) a number of cases are specified by law, covering all normal eventualities (particularly lack of a suitable job) when the management is obliged to give the worker his discharge if he requires it; and that

(ii) he *must* be released in any case if the district committee of his union supports him.

Experience shows that in practice the ordinary Soviet worker enjoys full freedom to change his job, giving a fortnight's notice. The Woodworkers' delegation report (1953) noted that this applied to all industries except rail and air transport.

V. Disputes

21 *How are disputes settled?*
(NUFTO, HACKNEY NO. 60, WEST END NO. 2, ABFSW, WOOLWICH NO. 60.)

It must be remembered that, owing to social ownership and national planning: (i) prices have been steadily falling and real wages rising in recent years; (ii) there is no unemployment, shortage of markets or redundancy; (iii) piece prices and workshop conditions are determined, as described, by agreement with the unions; (iv) collective agreements have to be approved by the workers they cover before entering into force; (v) members of factory committees cannot be dismissed without agreement of the union, or members of shop/department committees without agreement of the Factory Committee.

This means that many fertile sources of disputes do not exist in the USSR.

Disputes over (i) transfer to other work; (ii) quality of work; (iii) wrongful dismissal; (iv) amounts of bonus due; (v) piece prices for new jobs; (vi) grading of a worker; (vii) overtime payments, and many other questions, of course, often occur. If unsettled on the workshop floor, they are referred to the factory (or department) Rates and Disputes Committee, to be settled within three days.

The RDC is composed of equal numbers representing union and management. Agreed decisions are binding on the management, and enforceable by law. A worker disagreeing with the decision can appeal to higher *union* bodies (regional, Republic and executive committees). The decision of the union EC is final.

The effect is to weight the procedure heavily in favour of the workers. But they may also take their grievance to the courts.

22 *Are there arbitration courts in the Soviet Union?*
(BIRMINGHAM EL & P. POEU.)

No, there is no arbitration system in Soviet industry (only in certain commercial matters).

23 *What happens if workers go on strike?*
(ASW, LIVERPOOL CENTRAL.)

For the reasons indicated at the beginning of No. 21, strikes are highly improbable in the USSR. They are *not* prohibited, and strikes have occurred; but the workers have such extensive rights, guaranteed by law, to enforce their wishes, that only some hopeless bureaucrat or pigheaded martinet in a managerial position ever finds himself faced with a strike.

Far from such action being 'suppressed with the utmost brutality', as asserted by anti-Soviet propagandists, the effect is that, while the workers' grievances are speedily redressed, it is the factory director who loses his job!

In view of the nonsense often talked about the Soviet trade unions being merely 'instruments of the State' because they do not organize strikes (not that their accusers are such enthusiasts for strikes either), it is worth emphasizing that the Soviet trade unions don't need to strike against objectionable managements to obtain redress of grievances: they can even get the directors sacked. Here are three recent cases, reported in the Soviet TUC paper *Trud*.

30th July, 1955. Following a letter to the press by miners of Pit 2-2a of the Bokovo Anthracite Colliery, Donbas, exposing systematic breaches of the collective agreements, the Ukrainian Ministry for Coal Mines dismissed the pit manager.

2nd August, 1955. On the request of the EC of the Non-Ferrous Metal Workers Union, the Ministry for this industry dismissed the manager of the Chegarniki Mine, Nikitovka (Stalin Region) for practising systematic overtime, underpayment of the workers and other breaches of collective agreement.

24th August, 1955. On the demand of the regional committee of the Food Workers Union and the general purposes committee of the Moscow Regional Trades Council, the director of the Voskresensk Mineral Spigot Factory was dismissed by the board governing the industry for non-fulfilment of the collec-

tive agreement (particularly as regards safety measures), and rudely walking out of the workers' meeting at which the matter was being discussed.

Moreover, the Union has the right to close down a shop without a strike, with the workers continuing to receive their full average daily earnings, if its full-time Technical Inspector reports that safety or health regulations are not being observed. Alexandra Novikova, secretary of the Consumer Goods Industries Union (known to thousands of British trade unionists whom she addressed while visiting this country in November, 1954) reported in *Trud* (18th October, 1955) that her EC had ordered the closing down of some departments in a Rostov leather factory for this reason.

Why don't the champions of the Soviet workers' 'right to strike' quote such examples as these, and try introducing such powers for the workers in their own countries?

24 *What is the position regarding holidays in the Soviet Union?*
(*NUFTO HACKNEY NO. 60.*)
Are there statutory holidays like our Bank holidays?
(*SHARDLOWS, SHEFFIELD.*)

All workers have a minimum fortnight's annual holiday, with full pay based on their average earnings over the previous twelve months.

Workers in the mining, metallurgical, metalworking, chemical, textile and building materials industries, on railway, water and road transport and big building jobs have an additional three days, after two years on the same job.

Irrespective of this, workers in arduous industries have additionally from six to thirty-six *working* days, i.e. not counting Sundays. Thus in the timber industry they get a month: so do miners, iron and steel workers, railwaymen, textile workers, firemen, printers and some others. Telephonists have three weeks.

Educational and research workers have two months.

There are six statutory paid holidays—New Year's Day, 1st and 2nd May, 7th and 8th November, and Constitution Day (5th December). Work on these days, where unavoidable (public transport and communications, certain furnace and repair work, etc.) is paid at double time.

VI. Young workers

25 *What is the role of the trade unions regarding apprentices? What benefits do they offer the young trade unionist?*
(*ABFSW, WOOLWICH NO. 60.*)

There is, strictly speaking, no apprenticeship system in the USSR comparable with the British: but there is a widespread and thorough system of vocational training, through which the young workers are encouraged to pass.

In factories, 'technical minimum' courses for beginners and unskilled workers are organized, jointly by management and factory committee. Then there are advanced courses without any fees, in which the best skilled workmen and technicians of the factory concerned give instruction. Lastly there are fully-equipped technical schools (catering for day and evening shifts) in the larger factories. Young workers attending these schools get an extended annual holiday—one month instead of the statutory fortnight. No fees are charged.

These courses and schools are for youth already in industry. As they master their trade they are given the appropriate grade in the workshop, being paid the *full rate for the job they do.* The more skill they acquire, the higher the full rate they get. There is no 'apprentice pay' or 'under twenty-one rate' in Soviet industry: and no 'adult rate'.

In addition, many hundreds of thousands of young people on leaving school enter trade schools which give them one year's or two years' intensive training, combined with general education, to fit them as beginners in semi-skilled or skilled jobs respectively in the basic industries (including mechanized agriculture). They get free board and lodging, clothes, textbooks, pocket money, etc., and are guaranteed a post on passing out—again at the full rate for the job.

In 1954 alone some 700,000 young people passed out of these courses and schools, which are under trade union supervision throughout, although financed by managements under collective agreement.

Since 1954, owing to the progress made in raising the general school leaving age to seventeen (already effective in all large cities and due to cover the whole country by 1960), the Government has begun to open a new type of school—the 'technical school' intended for young people who have a

complete ten-year (secondary) education, and wish to become skilled workers in many different industries. These give a one-year or two-year course, with all found, and obviously produce workers still better equipped to master well-paid skilled jobs when they enter the workshop.

The Central Council of Trade Unions and individual unions publish numerous technical booklets, written by practical technicians and skilled workmen, to help in these studies.

26 *What safeguards do the trade unions provide to protect the craft and ensure high standards of workmanship?*
(ABFSW, WOOLWICH NO. 60.)

From the foregoing, and from the fact that in the USSR there are industrial and not craft unions, it will be seen that the answer to this question is: by raising the *general* level of skill and craftmanship, while encouraging all who wish to go still further, by every kind of incentive compatible with the general good.

In this connection it must be pointed out that increased production of better goods through higher workmanship, while bringing bigger earnings to the individual, is also of benefit to the community, *to which the products of his labour belong*. Hence such effort is in no way exclusive: the more that take part in it, the better for Socialist society.

One striking way in which progress in craftsmanship is promoted is to have fully staffed and equipped branches of University faculties and technological institutes *at the factories themselves*. Here many thousands of workers in their free time actually prepare for, and take, honours B.Sc. degrees in the various technical sciences. They are given full facilities for this, by transfer to suitable shifts, three weeks off at full pay yearly for their examinations (four months for finals), etc.

Many visiting British trade union delegations have paid tribute to the system described in this and the preceding section. Thus the NUR delegation (1951) wrote of the training system: 'We believe that efficiency is also coupled with opportunities for all workers to achieve the highest posts in the industry, a most commendable basis for the railways' future development'. The AEU delegation (1947 report) spoke equally highly of the intensive training opportunities for youth, adding:

'Already the skill of the Soviet engineer is to be compared with that of the British'.

Nevertheless, in many trades craftsmanship is still behind that of Great Britain.

VII. Social Insurance

27 *What is the role of the trade unions in friendly society benefits, sickness, injury, welfare work, etc.?*
(ABFSW, WOOLWICH NO. 60.)

All social insurance in the USSR is provided by the community. There are no friendly societies. But the trade unions have mutual aid funds (for grants or loans in cases of hardship), while collective farmers—who, being not wage-earners but co-operative producers, are not members of trade unions—have their own mutual benefit funds (to provide maternity benefit, extra assistance for the aged, etc.).

There is a free health service (financed out of general State funds) which covers all forms of medical aid.

The social insurance fund is constituted by charges on the working funds of all industrial establishments, calculated as a percentage of the total wages bill (varying according to industry)—but *not* deducted from wages.

Social insurance covers:

1. Sickness benefit for the whole period of sickness, at rates varying from 50 per cent of previous earnings, if employed less than three years, to 90 per cent if over twelve years. Non-unionists get half the benefits. Mothers get benefit at full rate if they are off through sickness of children under two: three days off are allowed to care for any other sick member of the family. Youth get 60 per cent.
2. Maternity benefit (five weeks before and six weeks after confinement in normal cases) ranging from full wages, after two years' employment, down to two-thirds wages with less than twelve months' employment. Non-unionists get half-wages for the first thirty days and two-thirds wages thereafter.
3. Old Age pensions (see below, No. 29).
4. Disablement pensions (through ordinary disease), ranging from 33–35 per cent of previous earnings for workers in light industries (according to the degree of

disablement) to 67–69 per cent for workers in underground and other arduous occupations.

5. Accident or occupational disease pensions, ranging in the same way from 50 per cent of previous earnings to 100 per cent.
6. Pension for loss of breadwinner (based on the number of dependants) varying from 50 to 125 per cent of the amount which the breadwinner would have received for total disablement (earnings of adult survivors, widows, etc., are not taken into account).
7. Continuous employment (or long service) pensions payable to educational and medical workers and certain other professions, irrespective of earnings, after twenty-five years' service.

The whole of the funds for these purposes (and for maintenance of a large number of rest homes, sanatoria, children's camps, remedial therapy institutions, etc.) are controlled by the trade unions. The Central Council of Trade Unions, and the EC of each union, have special Social Insurance Departments for the purpose. In each factory, office, etc., social insurance councils to control and expend funds, in accordance with the regulations, are elected by general meetings of the 'insurance activists'—the social insurance delegates chosen by the trade union groups, shop social insurance sub-committees appointed by the works committee, and the latter's social insurance sub-committee.

28 *Is there any test against malingering in the social insurance system?*
(*SHARDLOWS, SHEFFIELD.*)

There are occasional cases of malingering, of course. But the very large numbers of doctors and nurses attached to the social insurance offices in the Soviet factories, whose certificate is necessary for insurance payments; and regular home visiting by the voluntary insurance delegates, keep this element down to the minimum.

29 *What is the retirement age and approximate percentage of pensions to earnings?*
(*ETU, BRADFORD.*)

For most workers, pension age is sixty for men (after

working twenty-five years), fifty-five for women (after working twenty years). Underground workers in coal mining, and the basic workers on the railways, in the iron and steel, oil and chemical industries, in the mercantile marine, posts and telegraphs and certain other industries qualify at fifty.

The amount of the pension ranges from 25 to 50 per cent of previous earnings, according to the industry concerned.

A worker remaining at his job after reaching pension age draws full earnings plus his pension.

VII. Women in industry

30 *What type of work do women do? How do their wages compare with men?*
(*ETU, BRADFORD.*)

All jobs and professions are open to women which are not physically injurious to them: certain jobs and trades, and lifting weights above a specified maximum, are prohibited by law for women for this reason.

All posts, either in management or trade unions, may be filled by women. The AEU delegation report (1947) found women in a toolmaking plant on the top-skilled rate. The NUR delegation (1951) found women working efficiently in a signal box, giving instructions in a shunting yard, stationmasters in the Moscow Metro, etc., Women get equal pay for equal work.

Women are still employed underground, at their own request, in a certain number of mines. But it is quite false and irresponsible to conjure up (as some do) pictures of half-naked beasts of burden, dragging or loading coal, etc., as in this country 150 years ago. In reality they are employed on technical jobs in the modern collieries where electrical transport, up-to-date ventilation, etc., have revolutionized conditions. The South Wales Miners' Delegation (1952) found them employed not at the coalface, but driving haulage engines, doing maintenance work on such engines, and in the ambulance stations below ground. The Scottish Miners delegation (1953) also found women in the Donetz coalfield employed as electrical transport drivers, engineers and health workers: one woman at Nikitovka 4/5 Colliery was chief engineer in charge of ventilation.

Some years ago (the last figures available) over 40 per cent

of the members of all works committees throughout the USSR were women, and over 36 per cent of members of union executive committees (*Trud*, the Soviet trade union daily, 7th March, 1951). At the Soviet TUC in June, 1954, 532 of the 1,364 delegates were women (39 per cent).

31 *Are there any special conditions for women workers? How do widows' pensions relate to earnings of late spouse, or her own?*
(*ETU, BRADFORD.*)

In addition to maternity leave mentioned earlier, an expectant mother is put on light work, without loss of earnings, after the fifth month: and for a year after confinement (if medically required). She must not be on night work after four months of pregnancy, or before the child is weaned: and has thirty minutes' off twice daily during working hours to nurse the baby.

Day nurseries (creches) and kindergartens in very large numbers make it possible for mothers to go to work sure of expert care for their babies (one–three) and young children (three–six) respectively. For every 100 women employed, the management must provide day nursery accommodation for twelve babies and kindergarten accommodation for fifteen children. (For widows' pensions, see No. 27.)

VIII. Cultural activities

32 *In what way do Soviet trade unions function to break down barriers between intellectual and manual workers?*
(*ABFSW, WOOLWICH NO. 60.*)

In addition to the wide network of technical training described in No. 25, the trade unions have a vast machinery of general and cultural education, in the shape of 10,000 factory clubs and Palaces of Culture, over 100,000 'red corners' (recreation and reading rooms) in the factories themselves, 17,000 libraries with over 100,000,000 volumes and 9,500 cinemas. (*Sovetskie Profsoyuzy*, monthly journal of the Central Council of Trade Unions, August, 1955). Through these

facilities a tremendous amount of general and technical educational work is carried on by lectures, classes, study groups, and recommended reading. Every conceivable amateur cultural activity, in the various arts and sciences, is carried on in scores of thousands of organized groups of 'circles'.

Millions of working men and women in this way are breaking the barriers referred to.

IX. Are they genuine trade unions?

33 *Is it true, as stated by anti-Soviet propagandists, that in the Soviet trade unions, from top to bottom, there is 'contempt for democratic methods'?*

After the preceding pages, the reader is doubtless in a position to judge for himself on this subject. But here is what responsible British—and American—trade union leaders themselves have said—*when the cold war was not on:*

1937: 'Our enquiries in connection with the trade unions, carried out with meticulous care, revealed that there was no justification whatsoever for the oft-repeated assumption that the unions were subject to a dictatorship' (AEU delegation, headed by Union President J. C. Little).

1945: 'We have definitely established that the Soviet trade unions are built upon democratic principles' (James B. Carey, Secretary-Treasurer of the American CIO and leader of its official delegation, at a press conference, 18th October, 1945). 'We must break down the propaganda that you have no democracy as we have' (Reid Robinson, President of the Mine, Metal and Smelter Workers and member of the same delegation, quoted in their official report).

1947: 'The trade unions operate on democratic lines' (AEU delegation of November-December, 1946, headed by Union President Jack Tanner).

Numerous delegations of other unions have brought back the same verdict.

34 *Is it true that, as the Soviet trade unions cooperate with the various Ministries administering their respective industries in improving produc-*

tion, they are 'instruments' of the Communist Party and Soviet Government—as anti-Soviet propagandists assert?

A little reflection on the fact that in the USSR the capitalist class has been eliminated, and all production is socially owned and controlled, is bound to lead honest people to the conclusion—as it did the TUC General Council delegation in 1925—that there is bound, on fundamentals, to be 'agreement between the workers and their own expert governors and managers to whom they have entrusted their institutions and their industries'. This does not prevent the unions doing their job as watchdogs for the workers' rights.

As the Durham Miners Delegates, in the report signed by Mr. Sam Watson, wrote in February, 1937: 'We are not prepared to accept the view that it (the Soviet trade union movement) is a puppet body which simply passes on instructions from above without coming to any independent decision itself. The ramifications of the trade unions are so wide that such a statement is unworthy of acceptance. We believe that in scores of matters affecting their members the trade unions are entirely independent, but that they are inter-dependent in matters of policy affecting the Socialist State as a whole. . . . The interests of the State under Socialism and the interests of the whole of the workers are identical. It would be political foolishness to assume that a section of the workers could act independently in their own interests if in so doing they injured the interests of the rest and *ipso facto* the interests of the State'.

With equal clarity Sir Walter Citrine, then General Secretary of the TUC, said at the 1945 Congress (Report, pp. 367–8): 'We know already that there are no private employers in Soviet Russia. We have known that since the Revolution of 1917. We know also that whilst there are no private employers, and whilst the State is the sole employer, the Russian unions must in their essential structure differ somewhat from unions and other organizations in other countries. They have different kinds of problems with which to deal. . . . Have we any sound reason to complain because the Russian trade unions are taken into full consideration at the highest level? I repeat, speaking for myself, I should feel that it was a good thing if in Great Britain the TUC could be brought in at the earlier stages and help with its advice and counsel in the planning of the economic structure and life of our country'.