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ECONOMICS OF ENTERPRISES AND SOCIAL AND LABOR SITUATION AT ENTERPRISES AND ORGANIZATIONS IN THE INITIAL PERIOD OF THE RUSSIAN ARMED FORCES SPECIAL MILITARY OPERATION IN UKRAINE

The theme of the traditional Likhachov Conference in 2022 could not ignore the radical change in the situation on a global and national scale that occurred after the start of the special military operation of the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine on February 24. Notably, this situation has a significant impact on the social and labor environment in the country.

It is natural that a powerful flow of rapidly changing information makes it difficult for a regular citizen to single out significant information relating to his key interests: maintaining the level of wages, ensuring the stability of the workplace and workload. It is much easier to discuss generalities about geopolitics and the military art. This is what happens when ordinary people and even some experts are confronted with shocking phenomena that lie beyond their everyday interests and knowledge. We have witnessed a dramatic change in the sphere of public interest and information field – reorientation of a sprawling cohort of virologists and epidemiologists into military observers and analysts.

Accessibility and intuitive use of modern means of mass communication generates a torrent of information that descends on the heads of passive consumers. As the pandemic has shown, if the mass reader/viewer/consumer does not have information hygiene skills, he will face hard times. It is extremely difficult to critically study the continuous flow of information and select credible information when the situation is aggravated by harsh propaganda pressure. Virtualization of reality, creation of fictional images and information objects noticeably reduces the ability of an average person to remain in the real world.

Most of us are well aware that because of the multifaceted, dramatic, profound and dynamic nature of the ongoing changes, the consciousness of an individual, even a very well-informed one, is unable to embrace the whole picture of what is happening, critically study it and give a forecast for the short and medium term, not to mention a long-term forecast. Therefore, it is extremely important to discard the emotional component and, having armed oneself with verified data, to put together a complete picture of the current and near-term events out of separate qualitative parts.

Why did I begin my presentation with this premise? Before analyzing data on social and labor conflicts, it is necessary to take into account the peculiarities of communication bearing the features of military propaganda, in order to

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protect our minds from manipulative technologies and prevent blurring and changing the meaning of the terms used to describe the conflicts.

Are such concerns and cautions sufficiently justified? Let's try to understand it together.

First of all, let me remind that in this case I speak as the scientific director of the Center for Monitoring and Analysis of Social and Labor Conflicts of St. Petersburg University of the Humanities and Social Sciences. The purpose of my presentation is to analyze the social and labor situation in the first part of 2022, divided into two periods: before and after the start of the Russian Armed Forces' SMO in Ukraine.

The first observation is a drastic quantitative and qualitative change in the conflict-related information field, including the sphere of social and labor relations.

It should be explained that our Center collects information about conflicts from approximately two hundred relevant sources, which are carefully selected from many others on the basis of reliability, originality, and relevance of the published information on conflict topics. The information is collected and processed using an automated system on a daily basis. A one-week interval has been selected for detection of trends. Based on the ten years of practice, we know that weekly intervals are best for detecting the trends in the emergence, development or resolution of social and labor conflicts.

Analyzing and summarizing the weekly indicators before and after the 9th week of 2022 (February 28 – March 6 – data from the beginning of SMO), we find clear signs of informational chaos. While in week 5 we received 447 new reports of conflicts related to labor and associated relations, in week 12 we received 984 (an increase of 220%). In other words, we can observe more than a twofold increase in the flow of reports on social conflicts in just one week after the start of SMO. However, further analysis and verification of incoming information reveals a paradoxical picture: the number of useful messages, i.e. those that actually contain information about social and labor conflicts, has more than halved (from 28 in week 9 to 11 in week 12). From this we can conclude that the amount of information that can disorient the consumer who is not always capable of professionally verifying it and filtering the noise, has increased by several times. This phenomenon can certainly cause negative social and psychological consequences and frustration in a significant number of citizens, and this is actually happening now.

From a qualitative point of view, in the described flow of messages there is a large number of texts in which the meaning of the terms used for describing conflicts is distorted. In many cases, the authors of reports and texts seem to be still in search of the vocabulary and adequate terminology needed to describe the occurring events, and this search takes place under time pressure, which impacts the quality of their thinking and presentation of information.

So what is the reliable information from useful information sources that we can attend to?

First of all, we can see that the number of social and labor conflicts has decreased since SMO began, and this trend persists. Compared to the beginning of the year (January 2022), when 30 conflicts were identified, which is quite a lot because the first week and a half of January are days off, 20 conflicts were registered in March. That is, there was a decrease in their number by one-third. And if we take into account the parameter of territorial spread, the decrease occurred in the local and regional conflicts. The number of conflicts in the healthcare industry has drastically decreased, understandably due to the continued decline in COVID-19 incidence. If we exclude this important component from the analysis, then we can conclude that in other sectors of the economy, the quantitative picture has not significantly changed (versus same parameters in the previous periods). We still see an increase in conflicts in the manufacturing, transport and construction industries.

At the same time, the causes of conflicts and their legal status have noticeably changed. Among the causes, conflicts arising from complete non-payment of salary ranked first by a wide margin. The number of conflicts arising against the backdrop of the threat of bankruptcy of enterprises has noticeably increased. At the same time, the number of conflicts caused by layoffs and lack of indexation of wages decreased. It is most likely that the decrease in the causes related to job cuts and, consequently, the decrease in the weight of this cause was influenced by the decisions of several foreign companies (with tens of thousands of employees) to suspend operations with temporary retention of jobs and payment of 2/3 of wages. According to the statements of these companies, such decisions were made due to the logistical problems and sanctions pressure, which suggests temporary nature of the introduced measures and the likelihood of a return to normal economic activity of these enterprises. Based on explanations of such decisions, the employees can hope to preserve their income level. Taking into account the fact that regional labor markets cannot momentarily absorb large cohorts of workers of enterprises with foreign participation, who have a fairly high level of wages and a substantial social package, the current situation poses a noticeable threat of increased tension in social and labor relations this autumn, as will be discussed below.

With regard to the legal status, a direct link can be made to the cause of most conflicts – complete non-payment of wages. Due to this link, these confrontations can be classified as legal conflicts, which, in turn, implies special conditions for their development, consisting in the mandatory involvement of the Federal Labor Inspectorate and the Prosecutor's Office in their settlement. The involvement of supervisory authorities, in turn, determines the transience of such conflicts, which are usually resolved within a month.

The obtained data provides much more food for thought, but my presentation has a time limit, so I will proceed to the conclusions.

First, tensions in the social and labor situation and conflicts in enterprises have noticeably decreased since the be-

ginning of SMO in Ukraine and are at their historical minimum for the preceding ten years.

Second, there has been a gradual change in the attitudes of protesters, in which concerns about keeping one's job have come to the fore, especially in the context of possible mass job cuts at enterprises with foreign participation and where imported technology and components have a significant impact on the production process, pushing aside the concerns about increasing wages and their indexation as well as questions of labor protection.

Third, the time for resolving the emerging conflicts has markedly decreased (to 22 days) due to the prevalence of legal conflicts and active intervention of government agencies and supervisory bodies.

Fourth, 54% of all social and labor conflicts that began and ended in the first quarter of 2022 completed to full satisfaction of workers' demands, and in 38% of cases their demands were satisfied partially. In only 8% of cases, workers' claims were not satisfied. This ratio of success in resolving social and labor conflicts with prevailing resolution in favor of workers is unprecedented over the past 10 years and may indicate effective work of supervisory bodies that protect the labor rights of workers, as well as fairly successful actions of the workers themselves and the trade unions that represent their interests.

Fifth, there is currently no reason to expect drastic changes in the dynamics of social and labor conflicts toward growth or decline. Noticeable fluctuations may occur only when the escalating problems of foreign owners no longer allow them to retain their idling employees or they will not be able to find buyers for their assets. In case of such an outcome, it would no longer be possible to continue their work in the current status. Based on the statements of these companies, the end of the current status may occur at different times, probably during September-November 2022. At this time, the traditional seasonal increase in conflicts at Russian enterprises takes place, as can also be expected this year. Therefore, it is advisable for HR services of idling enterprises and regional labor and employment services to initiate professional reorientation of employees and communication about employment to potentially displaced workers, e.g. at enterprises of the defence industry, which by now have switched to a six-day two-shift working week.

I'll finish where I have started. Emergence of a significant flow of information, outwardly related to the description of conflicts, on closer professional examination does not indicate an increase in conflict moods or events. In a "non-virtual reality" stripped of hysterical perception, the number of conflicts is decreasing, and social and labor processes are changing toward ensuring the key interests of workers, which consist in maintaining their only source of income – salary – and purchasing power at the achieved level. As the events of the recent months have shown, this has been the focus of the efforts of trade unions, state institutions, and partly employers, bringing forth the generally positive outcomes described above.